

IMPRESS THEM ON YOUR CHILDREN

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (10-25)

Key verse: 7, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

I have a question: Why are we studying Deuteronomy 6? And why verse 7 rather than verse 5 one of the most important verses in the Bible? In 2009 the D6 Family and Church movement began—D6 stands for Deuteronomy 6:5-9. At the time Barna research group shared the shocking statistic that 59% of young adults with a Christian background were dropping out of church shortly after High School—this was widely disseminated through Barna president David Kinnaman's book "You Lost Me." This statistic actually had been around for some time but what kicked off the D6 movement was that Barna conducted research on the teens who remained in the faith, asking them to identify their primary source of spiritual influence that caused them to stay. They found parents had 2-3 times more influence than any church program. At the same time they found that only 10% of parents who regularly attend church with their kids read the Bible together, prayed together or participated in acts of service as a family.

Dr. Tim Kimmel in his book "Connecting Church and Home" traces the origin to the Industrial Revolution when both parents were pulled out of the home to work and children were left alone. Churches began Sunday Schools to reach these lost children and bring them to faith along with their families. However, parents began to believe that these church professionals were better equipped for the spiritual education of their children. In 1847 Pastor and theologian James W. Alexander observed, "Along with Sabbath observance and the catechizing of children, family worship has lost ground. There are many heads of families, communicants in our churches, some ruling elders and deacons, who maintain no stated daily service of God in their dwellings." (Thoughts on Family Worship, by James W. Alexander, 1847). This was a shocking turn of events to pastors of his day.

D6 was a movement of God inspiring many pastors, authors and family organizations to realize, that our way of doing child discipleship was not following God's plan in the Bible. Rather, Deuteronomy 6 clearly states that the primary discipleship of children happens in the home. From that time, we began, in our church, to emphasize family worship and integrated intergenerational corporate worship and have seen an amazing shift as parents began to focus on the discipleship of their children. Many Christian parents are asking: How in the world can we raise solid Bible-believing Christian kids in these crazy times? I believe that this return to Deuteronomy 6 is God's answer, a revolution in Christian parenting and spiritual formation, to win back the hearts of this generation.

The context of Deuteronomy is important. Deuteronomy means “second telling of the law”. The first generation of Israelites failed to obey God and believe in his promises and died in the desert over 40 years of wandering. Now on the edge of the Promised Land, Moses delivers a sermon to them on the plains of Moab, basically working out what it means to love God practically by obeying his commands. He does this so that they will not repeat the failure of their parents but that they may bear God’s blessing.

Moses states the danger he anticipates in verses 10-12. They were about to be basically handed this land and walk into houses with NO MORTGAGE! closets filled with clothes they didn’t buy, pantries stocked with food they didn’t grow, 71 inch 4k UHD TV’s on the wall, game systems, exciting shopping districts full of the latest trends and fashions. He anticipated their temptation to “go after other gods” or idols of the people around them. Imagine coming from the pure and simple desert tent common-life to suddenly be exposed to all the distractions and tempting entertainment of a wealthy society—of course they can just easily lose their head. They would go to worship god on the weekend but in reality the other 6 days of the week would be devoted to the trendy, flashy, fun things of the world. So, he warns them “when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (11b-12). When this generation, that had known nothing but want, suddenly became financially secure and comfortable, there was going to be a great temptation to not only forget God, but forget his grace, salvation and provision.

We also live in such dangerous times. We finish college and establish a family and suddenly we have a nice paycheck and a dual income, new car, a house and many good things. We can easily lose our heart to the idols of travel, career, and creating the picture perfect Instagram-worthy life—these things can consume us and become the true, more real, source of comfort, joy and meaning in our lives. Like the Israelite children our kids are born swimming in this sea of excess, hedonism, and individualism and they can easily lose their head and their heart.

So Moses having just recited the 10 commandments and yet anticipating all these dangers for the people, begins in verse 1, “Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey” (1-3, emphasis mine). He says it is possible to live and prosper in the land flowing with milk and honey, but what is the key? He

says 3 times throughout the passage that it is to “fear the Lord.” In fact, throughout the rest of Deuteronomy “fear the Lord” or its equivalent is found 21 times¹ and is prescribed as essential attitude if the children were to avoid the failures of their parents.

Teaching this basic fear of God is an integral part of our children’s spiritual education. Verse 2 says, “that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son” This is about legacy building, about imparting something so meaningfully to our children that it becomes the basis for how they raise their children and their children after them. 4:9-10 says, “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children... let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.”

What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? It is to have an awesome respect and reverence for God as the Creator who is far above creation and as the Judge who decide whether I go to heaven or hell (28:58-59). To the extent that we truly know God, we fear him and hesitate to sin. Christians used to be known as “God-fearing people” decent, good people who were different from the world around us. Synonymous with the word fear is the word “hear” repeated in verses 4-5. The word “shema” in Hebrew means to “hear and obey”. For example, when I tell my children to clean their rooms and I say “did you hear me?” I don’t want them to repeat it, I want them to DO it. 5 times throughout the passage Moses emphasizes that to hear and fear God is to “DO” what God has commanded (1,3,18,24,25).

Verses 4-5 say, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Jesus said that this is the greatest commandment, that we are to love the Lord our God with all our being, to surrender our heart to him out of love, to love him from deep in our spirit, and to love him through all that we do. Clearly embedded in the context of the passage, to love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling but to obey his commands. When we love like this, it doesn’t feel like a sacrifice to obey but it comes naturally.

This love for God is the basis for educating our children. If we teach our children to simply do and obey out of fear they only learn dead religion and legalism that they will eventually despise. More important is to teach them WHY we obey and fear. It is because we love God. God’s amazing love, grace and mercy upon us when we were still sinners captured our hearts and our life. Verses 20-25 say, that when their children ask—that’s what we call a teachable moment—“why all these

¹ 4:10, 5:29, 6:2, 6:13, 6:24, 8:6, 10:12, 10:20, 11:25, 13:4, 13:11, 14:23, 17:13, 17:19, 19:20, 21:21, 25:18, 28:58, 31:12, 31:13

rules, and commandments?” They were to tell them, that the Lord brought them out of slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand and commanded them to “fear the LORD our God, for our good always.” Fearing and obeying God is our response to the GRACE of God. God commands us to fear him “for our good always”! When we know God who sent his one and only Son to bring us out from the house of slavery to sin and Satan, we fear and obey God from our heart joyfully and willingly (Jer 32:40b).

Verse 6 says, “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (6). It implies that parents must have a deep devotional life and sincerely study the Bible to be equipped to teach their children. Children will see if it is real to us. Do our children see that worship is very important to us? or that we can’t wait to quickly get out of there to where we really want to go? Do they see that we easily skip worship when there is something “better to do?” Is family devotion, Bible reading and prayer, something that can easily get set aside when we’re too tired, or that we forget because we’re busy doing other things? Children will not believe you love God because you say it, they will believe if it matters to us.

Verse 7a says, “You shall teach them diligently to your children.” So much of education is the work of experts. If our children want to learn piano we get them a piano teacher, if dance we take them to a dance school, if soccer we sign them up with a coach. We send our kids for 8 hours a day to experts to learn the practical skills to be successful in this world. But who is responsible for the spiritual education of our children? Is it the church? Is it a Bible teacher we find for our kids? God is very clear, Parents “YOU” are to teach “YOUR children.” God commands parents to be the primary spiritual educators of our own children. The words “teach diligently” are not in the Hebrew, the word “shanan” means literally to repeat, sharpen, pierce, engrave. The words “teach diligently” are trying to get at this meaning of teaching over and over and over and over again and again like sharpening an arrowhead, like etching an engraving in a tablet. The NIV uses the word, “Impress them on your children.” Impress carries with it the meaning that we have not only told them but we have thoroughly explained why, until it makes a lasting impression on our children’s worldview. However, the deepest impressions we’re leaving on our children are not from our teaching but from what we are teaching by example. Children are going to have memories of us that are going to form the basis of how they teach their children—think about that. I want my children to have an image etched in their mind of me reading my Bible early in the morning, to clearly remember me praying to God, to recall the warm memories of singing songs to the Lord with all our heart, to think back upon a life of serving others as deeply meaningful when they are considering what kind of life they want to live.

At best kids between Sunday Worship and CBF get 104 hours of church a year but they have an average of 3,000 hours with their parents. Where is the real opportunity for discipleship going to

happen? However, too often that home time is not spent meaningfully or spent in front of a screen. We get it, after a crazy stressful day at work we just want to do something mindless to relieve stress. But then it means that we are only living to work, not working to live. Isn't our family the reason why we go to work? It took a while, but I had to learn to get myself in a frame of mind that when I come home, now I am Dad. My stress relief is spending time with my kids, just hearing about their day or playing a game or being silly, just embracing being a Dad. Whatever we do 9-5, is our second job. At home, that's our first most crucial job. Someone else can be whatever we do at work but only we can be Mom and Dad.

If we imagine engraving, impressing the love for God upon our child's heart, this engraving happens most easily when a child's heart is soft when they are young. After it hardens it is much more difficult. Many studies have been done over the years that showed that the majority of Christians accepted Jesus between the ages of 4-14 leading to the popular term in Children's Ministry, the 4-14 window. Particularly in the first 5 years of life much of the most important formation in a child's life happens which is why those pre-school years are so crucial. But between the ages of 4-14 children are impressionable and easily can believe in God and form a Christian worldview. The worldview that a child forms by the age of 14 is typically the worldview they will hold for the rest of their life. From the time that our children are born there is a clock counting down. We have the most chance of shepherding their heart up to 14 years old. Beyond that we have until they are 18 until they typically will leave or be set in their mind as an adult. Behind me here, I have 3 jars. In these jars are marbles. Each of these marbles represents a week in your child's life up to the age of 14. On the left this is your child when they are born 728 weeks. In the middle this is your child at 7 years old in 1st grade 1/2 way, 364 weeks left. On the right this is your child's first year of high school, 52 weeks left.

In his book, "Raising a Modern-Day Joseph" Larry Fowler recounts striking up a conversation on a plane trip with a dad who was a long range planner for his company. "What do you want to be able to say about your kids when they're 30?" Larry asked. After a very pregnant pause the man said, "well, to finish college, have a good career, be happily married" and a laundry list of such things. Then Larry asked him "What would really cause you grief if you had to say it about your kids when they are 30? The dad's answer came right away, "If they were lost." Since he now knew he was talking to a Christian dad, he asked, "You mean to tell me," Larry asked, "that you are a long range planner at work but you have never made any plans for the spiritual training of your kids at home?" "Oh, you're right" the man said. "I need to get home and talk to my wife." Many parents feel ill equipped, but this, this is finally where the role of the church community comes in. The role of the church, like Moses in this passage is to direct and inspire and equip. We're here for you, you are not alone, we're in this together. Children's ministry gives kids a primary friend group among other Christians, and is the chance for parents to share together. A the

beginning of October we want to have our first Family Devotion Workshop. There is Christian Parenting Workshop. And going forward we want to begin having Critical Conversation Nights to tackle hard issues to discuss with our kids and get you resources. Let's pray that together we may raise a strong generation of Christian children.

Verse 7b goes on, "You...shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." Here sitting at home means sitting at home. God commands you to sit at home with your kids, did you know that was in the Bible? God is saying we should be hanging out with our children at home. When? Daily. If we want to speak truth into the hearts of our children, the pipeline for speaking heart to heart is our relationship with them. Without a relationship our children will not listen to anything that we say and we form that relationship through quality time, just hanging out together. What should we do? Do whatever our kids want, and as we just play and talk about life, opportunities will come up to casually talk about God. We don't really walk along the road anymore, but we do drive. Redeem that driving time. Put the New City Catechism app on your phone from Tim Keller's church and talk about a question as you drive. Do daily bread, put on an audiobook, get Bible trivia cards. There are so many creative ways to redeem that time. Finally, talk to our children when we go to sleep and when we wake up, that is do Family Devotions at night and Daily Bread in the morning. You may think that Family Devotion is a recent American thing, but there is record of early Christians doing Family Devotions in their home from the time of Tertulian in the 2nd century. When my kids were young I would read a Bible passage at the breakfast table and we would pray before school. But as my kids got older I encouraged them to begin to read themselves and pray about their concerns with school. At night, there is more time so we read a children's Bible together talk about the story, answer questions, sing a praise song, and pray—it's not complicated, it's very easy. The trick is you have to do it every day no matter what. When it is ingrained, then even when you're too tired children will not go to bed without it.

But notice in this verse that what we've got to be doing is constantly talking to our kids, having just tons of meaningful conversations. The national average for parents to talk to their children a day is 20minutes or 121 hours a year. But students spend about 1270 hours a year in school. If we don't take the initiative to form our children's world view the schools and the world, I guarantee will never ever miss the opportunity to fill the vacuum.

Verse 8 says that our hands are to be a sign of God's word without even speaking, The word is to be on the forefront of our mind always, filtering all that we see. And we are to "write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (9). The Jews take this quite literally and where tefillin on their arms, phylacteries on the foreheads and mezuzah on their door frames, all filled with little scrolls with this Bible passage and other scriptures. Is that what God is telling us to do?

We can critique their literal interpretation but the fact is that the Jews have a beautiful pattern of teaching the Bible through many family traditions. Anyone who has been over at Indian Boundary Park and see the Jewish families publically reciting scripture about the creation from Genesis, cannot fail to be moved. Putting Bible vinyl decals on the wall is a lovely reminder but the real emphasis is that the Bible should be worked out into all the ordinary activities of our day to day life. We don't need to force it in every situation till children cannot even be human and all we ever talk about is the Bible. The focus of these verses is that it is our supreme command in life to love God so completely that talking about him comes very natural in the day to day patterns of life.

We are living in scary times to raise children. How can we help them to have a vibrant faith and grow to love God in this generation? May God help us to fear him, love him through our obedience and take every opportunity to impress our faith on our children. May God raise up a generation of parents who deeply engrave their faith upon their children to grow new generation of Christians who can take their faith out in to the world.