

FAMILIES WHO FOSTER FAITH

by

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Theme: Scripture reveals the paramount importance of the family in transmitting spiritual values from generation to generation.

Theme Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-25; Matthew 22:37-38

Presentation Notes: Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate items from the section called *Sermon Illumination* which may be used for illustration. The addition of your personal illustrations will enhance the presentation.

As Moses neared the close of his life, he longed to transfer to those who followed him the legacy of faith and trust in God which had become his. Inspired by God, the aging leader sought, like the runners of the Olympiad, to "pass on the torch" to a new generation in the messages set down in the book of Deuteronomy.

Writes Dr. John Youngberg, professor of Religious Education at Andrews University, "The Book of Deuteronomy . . . is the most comprehensive statement on religious education to be found in sacred scripture. This book defines the problem of religious educators, its context, and enumerates factors which contribute or even determine the successful transmission of a religious heritage from one generation to another. . . . The problem of Deuteronomy is how can a dying 'pioneer' bequeath his faith legacy to a new generation that did not witness the miracle of the Exodus or the majesty of Sinai."

What Moses faced is similar to what parents face as they ponder the need to convey to their children spiritual convictions and a religious heritage. Says Dr. Youngberg, "Great ideals don't live on just because they are great or because they are true. They live on only when they are enshrined in the hearts of the young. Our most treasured religious ideals are always only one generation from extinction!"

Deuteronomy 6:4-25 contains counsel from God that will help us today as we think about fostering faith in our families.

Worship God Supremely

Deut. 6:4, 5. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 has come to be known in the Jewish faith as the Shema, from the Hebrew word for "hear" in vs. 4. The Shema is the basic and essential creed of Judaism and is used to open every Jewish service. It's opening line is the first Scripture that every Jewish child commits to memory. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Amidst religions with many gods, this verse declares our God to be one. It also declares that our commitment to God must be single-minded.

It's as if Moses were saying, "Put your priorities in order. One thing is primary—your total love relationship with God. Everything else is secondary."

Jesus also said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will be added unto you" Matthew 6:33. Elsewhere He underscored the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:5, proclaiming it the first and great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" Matt. 22:37, 38.

Receive God's Word Inwardly

Deut. 6:6. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart." God desires each one to experience His love in a personal way and to take the word of God into his heart. *Heart* means thoughts, emotions, the very center of ones being as far as the Hebrew scriptures were concerned. Though the religion of Jehovah affects the behavior and outward actions of a person, it is concerned first of all with the condition of the heart, the inner spirit of the believer.

The highest level of motivation in life, in relationships and service occurs when God's Word has been accepted, appreciated and taken within the heart. (1) The heart is preeminent in the words of both Moses and Jesus (cf. Matt. 22:37, 38). External actions, such as talking, teaching and other behaviors, are not substitutes for the inner experience. Love of God's precepts in the heart is necessary before they can be effectively taught to others. (2)

Teach God's Word Diligently

Deut. 6:7. "You shall teach them diligently to your children."

A perpetual covenant. God's covenant with His people is intended to be a perpetual one (Gen. 9:12; Ex. 31:16). It was not intended for one generation only. Understanding of God's covenant with His people does not automatically transfer from one generation to another. The individuals within each succeeding generation must be taught the meaning of the covenant and invited to enter that covenant relationship with God personally.

Significance of home instruction. Deuteronomy attaches importance to teaching within the family (Deut. 4:9; 6:20-25; 11:19). The home is to be the center for conserving and propagating truth. Moses understood that the greatness of the nation depended upon the teaching of God's Word in the home. (3)

How to teach diligently. In the verses that follow the counsel to "teach diligently" is explained.

- Teach continually. Deut. 6:7. "You . . . shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Instruction from the parents is to be a continual way of life with spontaneous instruction mingled with more regular times for teaching. "Sitting," "walking," "lying down," and "rising up" describe typical, habitual activities of life. "Modern man may furnish the daily round of his life with devotional customs—grace at meals, regular Bible reading, family prayer, private prayer."—*The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 375.
- Teach practically. Deut. 6:8, 9. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Instruction was to be made real and practical in work, study, recreation, in family living and all aspects of life. (4), (5)

This verse eventually lost its meaning when the rabbis interpreted it literally, actually fixing small bits of written material from the books of Moses on their arms and foreheads and on the doorframes of their houses. (6)

The counsel, however, is couched in figurative language to express important principles. The truths of God's Word are to govern our *actions*, symbolized by the hands, and our *thinking*, symbolized by the forehead. Placing the Word of God on the doorframes of our homes indicates that God's truth is to be our identifying mark, just as blood on the doorframe of Israelite homes in Egypt provided an identifying mark so that the family within would be saved (cf. Ex. 12:7, 13). (7)

- Teach wisely. Deut. 6:20 ff. "When your son asks you in time to come . . . then you shall say" Here God presents two powerful factors in effective values teaching. A wise parent recognizes the value both of children's *questions* and of the *personal story*.

It is the nature of children to be inquisitive. Let us encourage this questioning spirit and thus help them to establish their own faith. Their questions may be difficult, but do not be afraid to try to answer them. To be afraid of questions and discourage asking may stifle the growth of a child's faith. We must answer the questions as they come up, providing answers adequate and appropriate to the developmental level of the child. Each time we answer truthfully, honestly and openly, we help build trust and prepare the way so that young people will be encouraged to ask the meaningful questions. (8)

In response to children's questions, God instructs parents to respond with their personal story of how He has been active in their lives. Stories teach and inspire imitation as well as entertain. Self-disclosure to children of one's personal spiritual pilgrimage has a mighty influence on the minds and hearts of the young. (9)

Live God's Word Faithfully

Deut. 6:12, 14, 18. "Beware, lest you forget . . . You shall not go after other gods . . . Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord."

Fidelity. The word of God is aware that individuals who are in need and in want require little incentive to turn to God and serve Him. What is needed are individuals who in the midst of abundance and plenty will continue to be faithful to Him, who will not be distracted by other gods, nor go after the gods of the people around them.

Consistent modeling. Children pick up the values that are lived consistently before them. Inconsistency creates confusion and doubt. (10)

The courage to be imperfect. A faithful Christian life as a parent does not mean a flawless life. God does not require us to be perfect parents, but in our brokenness and imperfection to direct our children to the perfect Savior we have found and to guide their feet along the path to find Him for themselves.

Conclusion

Our great purpose is to prepare the way for our children to make a covenant with their God as we have made a covenant with ours. We cannot coerce, we cannot force, but we can lovingly and patiently instruct them. We can live faithfully before them and we can invite them as did Moses who said, "Choose life, that both you and your children may live" Deut. 30:19. May we ourselves and our children after us respond as did Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" Josh. 24:15.

One (1): Processes affecting attitude change. Herbert Kelman once described three processes that affect attitude change: compliance, identification, and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Compliance results when one is in some way controlled by another. A child complies with a parent's values because the parent enforces behavior by spanking, or denying privileges. In the process of identification, a desire for a relationship with another person or group leads to adoption of values. Liking to be with someone, or belonging to a group leads to an acceptance of their values for one's own. With internalization, the value with accompanying behavior is adopted as meaningful for its own sake. Internalization of Godly values is the intention expressed in Deuteronomy 6:6.

Two (2): Love in the heart brings change in the life. Seventy-eight-year-old Aleida Huissen of Rotterdam in the Netherlands had been smoking for fifty years. For most of that time she had been trying unsuccessfully to give up the habit. Then something happened and she succeeded. The secret? She met seventy-nine-year-old Leo Jansen. The two fell in love and Leo proposed marriage. "I'll want you around for a long time," he said. "You must quit smoking before it kills you." Aleida said, "Will power never was enough to get me off the habit. Love made me do it."—Adapted from John C. Maxwell, *The Communicator's Commentary*, p. 127.

Three (3): Importance of the home as a center for teaching values. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation depend upon home influences.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.
The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

Four (4): Bread without salt. Allen and Mark liked to join in when Mother made bread. Once the salt was accidentally left out and the bread was not very tasty. Mother took the opportunity to talk to the children about what Jesus had said about Christians being the salt of the earth, to make the world a better place by their love. "You are the world's seasoning to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world?" (Matt. 5:13, LB).
The bread was well-formed and nice in texture, but it tasted "flat," like something important was missing. "Many people seem to be getting along quite well without Jesus as you look at them," Mother pointed out, "but without Jesus something very important will always be missing from the lives of human beings." They tried spreading the bread with butter and then sprinkling on the salt, but that didn't work too well either. Mother added, "Christians who don't make friends with their neighbors and mix with those around them who don't know Jesus don't do much to flavor the world either. Jesus needs us to be mixed in and to share His love in all the circles where we live."

Five (5): A lesson from weeds. A few years ago my son and I were working in the garden. "Did God make weeds, Daddy?" Dickie asked, puzzled. I started to give a quick answer so that I could go on with my work, but then I realized that this was an opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson. I laid down my weeding fork and said, "Dickie, you know about Adam and Eve. They were the first people who ever lived on earth. God put them in a beautiful garden without *any* weeds. Then one day the devil came along, and he looked like a snake. He told Adam and Eve to disobey God; he said they should eat some fruit God had told them not to eat. And you know what happened? They ate it. Then the world started having problems. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, weeds started growing and they had to go to work and leave their pretty garden." With a serious look Dickie replied, "Isn't that a shame!"

I relate this incident to illustrate an important biblical principle: Lessons arising out of real-life experiences are usually much more effective than formal learning.

This real-life instruction is what is spoken of in Deuteronomy 6. The Israelites were to weave child training into the fabric of their daily lives. In our culture we have a strong tendency to separate the sacred and the secular. We see to it that our children receive education (at school), training (at home), and spiritual instruction (at church, at family devotions, and, in some cases, at school). But this compartmentalizing creates problems. One of the reasons so many children and young adults from Christian homes find little meaning in their Christian experience is that their Christian faith was never integrated with daily living. Their parents failed to experience or failed to convey their joy at God's creative genius shown in nature. They failed to see and explain their business and family affairs from God's perspective—His children gaining dominion over the world for the glory of their Creator. As a result, their children failed to see that God is deeply interested and involved in every area of life.—Bruce Narramore, *Parenting With Love and Limits*, p. 61.

Six (6): Jews placed the law on "hands," "foreheads," and "doorposts". Interpreting literally the words of verse 8, the custom of Orthodox Jewish men has been to copy four sections from the law (Exod. 12:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21) and put these passages in leather cases on straps and bind them to their left arms and on their foreheads during morning prayers. They also put Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and 11:13-20 in a metal or glass case and affixed it to the right-hand doorpost of every entrance to their homes.—John C. Maxwell, *The Communicator's Commentary*, p. 128.

Seven (7): God's truth identifies our homes. On Foxly Lane, near Newbold College, the homes, like many throughout England, are designated by names rather than by street numbers. Pastor and Mrs. Ernest Marter, a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister and his wife, built a home on this street. To this residence they gave the name "Gratitude" and placed an attractive sign with the name inscribed at their curbside. How like the symbolism in the book of Deuteronomy! Just as the Israelite was admonished to write the words of the Lord "on the doorposts of your house and on your gates," so the home Gratitude proclaims to all who enter and pass by the thankfulness and love for Jesus which pervades the hearts of those who dwell within.

Eight (8): "I don't know" doesn't answer the question. One day a small boy was walking with his father. When they passed an unusual looking truck, he asked, "What's that, Daddy?" "I don't know," his father said. Then they came to a large, old-fashioned warehouse. "What's in there, Daddy?" the little boy asked. "I don't know," his father replied. Then they saw a man with a pneumatic drill breaking up the pavement. "What's that man doing, Daddy?" the boy asked. "I don't know," was again the father's answer. After they had walked on a short way in silence, the little boy turned to his father and said, "Daddy, do you mind my asking you so many questions?" "Of course not," replied the father. "How else are you going to learn anything?"—John C. Maxwell, *The Communicator's Commentary*, p. 134.

Nine (9): The power of stories. Another reason why everyone likes stories is that narrative is the easiest form of thinking. It does not take much mental effort to follow a story, and yet through the

story one may learn a great deal of truth in concrete form. . . . Children cannot reason so well as adults are supposed to, nor grasp abstract ideas as adults are expected to; so the story is the natural means of teaching them truth. The right story, adapted to their understanding, is a little bundle of truth in such form that their minds can digest it.—Arthur Spalding and Eric B. Hare, *Christian Storytelling*, p. 14.

Ten (10): Children Learn What They Live

If a child lives with criticism,
He learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility,
He learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule,
He learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame,
He learns to feel guilty.
If a child lives with tolerance,
He learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement,
He learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise,
He learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness,
He learns justice.
If a child lives with security,
He learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval,
He learns to like himself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
He learns to find love in the world.
—Dorothy Law Nolte

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