

God Gives Us Families To Teach Us About Life

It may come as somewhat of a surprise, but much of the material in the word of God is devoted to giving practical instructions on how best to live our lives. This really comes out when one begins studying the various roles God has established for the family. Even in the Gospels, we see great truths being taught by Jesus using the example of the family dynamic. **7. "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10. Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father Who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!** (Matthew 7:7-11 [RSV])

The first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, present to us the early development and experience of the nation of Israel as they discovered their history of what God had accomplished to bring about their creation through their ancestors, the great patriarchs of the Bible. So you see, even starting way back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, the first family, God has always had in mind the family unit, with its father, mother and children, to be the foundation of society. We see families depicted, some good, and some not so good, as God's plan was put into action whereby Israel came into existence at Mt. Sinai, a nation specially chosen by God in order to bring the Messiah, the Savior Jesus Christ, into the world to save all of fallen mankind from their sins. When God established His covenant with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, a nation newly born out of the bondage in Egypt, even this covenant was established with God as Father. And as the Father of the Israelites, God taught His people through His prophets, beginning with Moses. From its inception, we have God teaching His children the importance and responsibilities of parents and families. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 [RSV], although written some 3,500 years ago, is just as timely today as it ever was.

4. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; 5. and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; 7. and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and 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. 8. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Although this was part of the covenant between God and Israel, the church today is the Kingdom of God whereby all nations can flow into it. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Monarch, as its reigning King, declared in Mark 12:30 [RSV] that the greatest

commandment its adherents would follow was to “ . . . **love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.**” Love for the Father and for the Lord’s other servants would be paramount in God’s Kingdom. As Jesus said in Mark 12:31 [RSV], “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.**” In fact, love was to be such an all-powerful force in the Kingdom of God that it would be an identifiable characteristic of its members. Our Lord stated in John 13:34-35, **34. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**

Parents must not be hard to please, severe and overly harsh toward their children. Nurturing and training children is the most important job anyone could have. Fathers, in particular, are implored to raise their children correctly. “**Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord**” (Ephesians 6:1 [RSV]).

The entire future of the church and the world on every level rests upon the shoulders of our upcoming generations. Parents owe it to their children, to God and to society to take this responsibility seriously and produce responsible adults.

Whether a family is “good,” or whether it is “bad,” families have a phenomenal power over our lives. When children are raised in accordance with God’s will, they have a natural, engrained ability, a profound resilience, to respond in a positive manner, no matter what life throws against them. They learn to have trust and faith that they will survive and prosper, even thrive, because of the things that were built into them through the years. Those experiences and those relationships they learned from their godly parents and family taught them to trust in the Lord with the same assurance as the Apostle Paul had, who wrote in Philippians 4:6-7, **6. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

However, when a family and society are so far removed from the will of God, and have gotten so far off the beaten path, child after child, and generation after generation, becomes lost. Broken families are rampant, and the traditional family unit with a father at its head and a mother at his side to help in the raising of the children, is becoming a relic of the past. Study after study have all confirmed the debilitating and devastating effects fatherless homes have on the child and society at large, and yet the forces of Satan are hard at work doing what they can to perpetuate and glorify immoral and irresponsible behavior. The family is under attack. Society is paying a high price as more and more individuals become wards of the state either through impoverishment or through the exorbitant cost

of incarceration, as crimes committed by the fatherless and those who have little, if any, parental authority in their lives, far exceed those committed by individuals raised in traditional homes. So as you can see, it is extremely important for us to be serious about what it means to be parents.

Forming a healthy family is important work. There are some things that God only does through the family, so I think it is important that we recognize that there are some things that God wants to do through parents that He is not going to do by you dragging them to church. Now please do not misunderstand me! It is important for you to bring your children to services when the saints gather together, but what takes place here is to be a **supplement** for what you should already be doing as a parent at home with your children. We in the church are here to support the family in what it is doing. You can see from the verses we have read this morning that there is a central responsibility of the family for what God is doing in our lives. Families are incredibly important and God created it to be that way, and that is good. That is part of the special thing that God is doing through you. He is helping to shape your children, to give them skills, to teach them about relationships, and to temper who they are, and what they will become, as people in society. **Your** teaching them is a huge part of your role as caregiver and parent. And part of your role, too, is that every parent is an evangelist. You are to be the **primary** evangelist that God has given to the life of your children. Now the church can help. Great youth events can help. A good Sunday school or mid-week Bible study can help, but you are still God's primary spokesman or spokesperson to them. And so we need help. This is an important part of life.

In the *Book of Hebrews*, the writer compares the discipline we as children of God receive from Him with that which we received from our earthly fathers. **5. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?-- "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by Him. 6. For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives." 7. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8. If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10. For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.** (Hebrews 12:5-10 [RSV])

What parent has not experienced the same exasperation here displayed by God for a child who refuses to follow good advice and instruction? **"Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out My hand and no one has heeded,"** (Proverbs 1:24 [RSV]).

Parents and children also have responsibilities to each other. Paul writes in Colossians 3:20-21 [RSV] by saying, **20. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.**

Children are to be obedient to their parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the sight of the Lord. This is God's order and His plan for parents and children.

In the early years of life, children are dependent on their parents for all things. Parents give life and sustain the necessities and comforts of life for children. This is the same way in which God gives and sustains life and comfort for mankind. This is what we saw in the teaching of Jesus we read earlier from Matthew 7:7-11.

As we respect God as our giver of life, children are to respect and extend obedience to their parents. This does become difficult to do in a world wherein fewer people seem to be following the will of the Lord in their lives, and broken homes are rampant. All parents are not easy to respect and obey and all children are not respectful and obedient. However, this does **not** change the fact that God demands this of children.

As children grow and mature they must come to obey parents and parents must become worthy of obedience. Let us also remember that Acts 5:29 [RSV] also applies in regards to obedience to parents, "**We must obey God rather than man.**"

Ephesians 6:1 [RSV] is yet another reminder of the parent and child relationship God expects of us: "**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**" This is to be continual obedience, **not** occasional obedience. It is also an attitude which develops into a way of life.

The first responsibility in parenting is to model what it means to have a God-centered life; to model it even before we speak it. This is a reality check. You know, no amount of talking, no amount of bringing people to church, no amount of paying high tuition to send your kids to good school, is going to make up for the fact that you do not model what it means to be a Christian family if you do not model what it means to be a Christian family. Now, we can look at some obvious things, such as the parents who drive up to church and drop their kids off to go to Sunday school and to church while they go over to McDonald's. They are modeling something. They are modeling the fact that church and religious things are for kids, and when they grow up, this is what they will be doing. Now, I cannot preach to those people because they are at McDonald's or somewhere else right now.

But even those of us who are actually here at services with our children, we have got to think about what we are modeling, not right now, but what are we modeling

on Tuesday at 7:30 in the evening, about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to follow Him *always*. What do we do at 6:00 in the morning? What do they see of us when we encounter a difficulty? How do we handle that? What is our response? How do we approach God? How do we approach each other in those times of stress? We are modeling what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Do they see us pray? Do they hear us pray? Do we pray together? Do they see us study the word of God? Do they understand that we see our story and ourselves as disciples, as parents, as being inside of the big story of what God is doing in the world? What do we model for our kids? But this idea of modeling is important. We cannot be telling our kids, "Be a disciple of Jesus Christ, be serious about God," and then not be serious about it ourselves. So the first part of building a godly home is to be a godly person, to seek God and to seek God's faith. What was it again that Jesus said was the greatest commandment? **“ . . . love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”**

That is the first part. But it is important then to talk with our kids about what it means to be a Christian. We read earlier from the *Book of Deuteronomy* where God said regarding His ways that the parents were to **“ . . . teach them diligently to your children.”** To teach diligently is to impress upon. God desires that parents impress upon their children the importance of learning His ways, for His ways are good and righteous. Talk about God and His ways when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. It is absolutely essential and of paramount importance to share your faith with your kids. When you drive your kids to school, use that time as a time of devotion. Sing songs together, and pray together and for one another. Go fishing, take a hike, view a storm in the distance, or gaze at the sunset and watch the stars appear one by one, and talk about the wonders God has created in His universe. Watch a baseball game with your children. These are all natural moments, God-given, perfect moments, whereby you can share your faith with your children or grandchildren.

We also saw earlier from the *Book of Deuteronomy* that God said in reference to His commandments that we, as parents, **8. “shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”** This whole picture is that this is really important stuff. It has got to permeate all of your family. This is a high priority thing, this relationship with God and the things that grow out of this relationship to God, and so the way we set priorities in life are part of us establishing a godly home.

Now think about all the tensions that come into our families because we do not set priorities, because we pack too much in and so the good, or the kind of good, starts to crowd out the best and so we have these situations where we have got so many things packed into the afternoon that we are yelling at our kids, "Hurry up", "Do this", "Eat that", "Get off the phone", "We've got to go to this or we've got

to go to that," and at the end of the day we feel like glorified taxi drivers or slave drivers. Why? Because we did not say "no" to some things, in order to say, "yes" to others. It is so important to remember that how you spend your days is, of course, how we spend our lives. You can't imagine yourself spending your life in some kind of positive way that isn't reflected on the way you are living today and yesterday. This is the only life you are living. The one we are living today. What does your day look like in terms of the priorities that we see God giving us in Scripture?

Now there is one other thing that is in this passage we read from Deuteronomy, and it is in the same two final verses. It says this: **8. "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."**

This whole idea is that of having these **reminders** in life, these **symbols** in life, that remind of us what our story really is and how our story relates to God's big story. Where are we in relationship to God and to one another? We need symbols of that, and so for the Jewish family, one of those symbols was the one that they put on the doorpost, and they call it the Mezuzahs, and it is a little container, and inside it are the very verses we read today. **4. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; 5. and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."**

And so every time they would go in and out of the house they would have that reminder right there, "We are a covenant people. We are in relationship to the Creator of the world and the One Who has made an agreement with us and this means that we shape our lives certain ways and they had that reminder there."

Now a reminder is not enough. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why we have a new covenant. But even those of us who have experienced God and have committed our lives to Jesus Christ, we still need those symbols and reminders. That is why Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper. We need a symbol and a reminder of how we fit into God's story. That is why we have baptism. It not only puts us into Christ and the safety of His blood as our sins are remitted, it is a visible representation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we share in His death, burial, and resurrection. But we have symbols at home, too. One of the signs, one of the symbols, one of the practices that we have is that of saying grace. That is an easy one. That is one that we all know about. It reminds us every time we eat that we are dependent upon God and that God is the giver of every good thing. Having Bibles throughout your home and memory verses are other symbols you can have to remind you daily of your covenant relationship with God.

What symbolizes who you are? What do you want to symbolize who you are? What your story is and how you are inside of God's bigger story?