

Gospel Centered Parenting

Deuteronomy 6:1-12

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Sermon Bumper: Gumballs

Is it possible what happens at home is more important than what happens at church? This year, a child will actually attend church less than 40 weekends because of COVID. As we continue in our series called “Family Matters,” I want to propose that parenting is not only hard work, it is *heart* work because *parents must pass along the faith they possess*.

Whenever I preach on the topic of parenting, I like to start with some suppositions. I’ve added to this list over the years.

- 1. If you’re married and don’t have kids, or they are no longer in the home, you are still a family.** I’ve had to remember this now that our girls are grown and gone.
- 2. If you are a single parent, you are a family.**
- 3. If you are single, you are not second-class.** As we learned two weeks ago, Scripture celebrates singleness.
- 4. Blended families are beautiful.** Someone put it like this: *“Blending a family isn’t about making everything the same, it’s about mixing two things to make something new.”*
- 5. Children are intended to be a blessing from God, not a burden to bear.** Psalm 127:3: *“Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him.”* It’s a privilege and a responsibility to raise difference-makers for Christ.
- 6. Parents must aim to raise children to be life-long disciples.**
- 7. There is no fail-safe formula for parenting success.** George Barna reports one of every five parents of young children believe they are doing a good job training their children morally and spiritually. Before we jump into our text for today, I want to say a word to parents of prodigal children. My aim is not to pile on and make you feel guilty. Nor is it my intention to be trite and oversimplify what is one of the most challenging tasks ever given. Today, some of you have hurting hearts as you wonder where your child’s wandering heart is. Don’t beat yourself up because your child has a will that is separate from your own. He or she will make choices you don’t always agree with. God gives grace to the grieving. Don’t lose hope. Keep praying.
- 8. Every parent can learn how to be a gospel-centered parent.**

9. I'm a parent, and now a grandparent in process, not an authoritative expert. Just because I'm preaching this weekend doesn't mean that I have it all figured out – just ask our daughters.

10. God wants to synchronize the efforts of our faith community and the family to make disciples in the next generation. In his book called, "Think Orange," Reggie Joiner puts it like this: "*God has designed the church to shine a light to show every generation the glory of God's Son and God has designed the family to nurture the hearts of a generation to love God...*" I was reminded of this on Sunday when Edgewood Member Evelyn Skaggs celebrated her 100th Birthday with a drive-by celebration. She taught children at EBC for 50 years! When I thanked her for impacting so many lives, she smiled and said, "*I'd still be doing it if I could!*"

We're going to begin with the biblical foundation for parenting and then flesh it out with some practical pointers for parents.

Joiner lists five basic assumptions which are foundational to the faith development of families:

- **Nothing is more important than someone's relationship with God.**
- **No one has more potential to influence a child's relationship with God than a parent.**
- **No one has more potential to influence the parent than the church.**
- **The church's potential to influence a child dramatically increases when it partners with a parent.**
- **The parent's potential to influence a child dramatically increases when that parent partners with the church.**

Please turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 6 where we will see *parents must pass along the faith they possess.*

Let's set the scene. The people of God have been spinning their wheels in the wilderness for 40 years and are now on the verge of finally entering the Promised Land. The disobedient generation has died and now "generation next" is on the scene. Moses was unable to go with them because of his own disobedience, so he wanted to make sure parents knew their job description.

Notice Moses doesn't give them instructions on farming, shepherding, economics, construction, or even battle plans. What is first and foremost on his mind and on

God's heart is the family's role in faith formation. God's people were about to enter a pagan land, filled with over 40 different people groups and yet his focus was on the family. In that sense, isn't the setting similar to our own situation?

Our parental job description has five main responsibilities, summed up in five verbs.

1. **Learn** (1-2)
2. **Live** (3)
3. **Love** (4-6)
4. **Lead** (7-9)
5. **Launch** (10-12)

1. Learn. The first task we're called to is to learn God's Word for ourselves. We see this in verses 1-2: ***"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."***

Moses knew he needed to teach because God commanded him to do so and the people needed to learn. The word **"teach"** has the idea of *"training in order to be able to do something."* Part of trusting God is to take Him seriously and know what He says in His Word. It's important for us to know as much of the Bible as we can because we will never grow in our relationship with God unless we grow in our relationship with God's Word.

2. Live. It's not enough to just learn God's Word, we must also live it out according to verse 3: ***"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."*** We must be careful to obey by hearing *and* heeding. The word **"careful"** means, *"to watch carefully, to be on guard."* It's not enough to just know information – it must lead to personal transformation. Blessing is linked to obedience.

3. Love. Check out verse 4: ***"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one."*** This is the beginning of the Jewish *Shema*, which literally means, *"Hear!"* or we might say, *"Listen up!"* It can also mean *"to listen intelligently and attentively; to obey."* The *Shema* is a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to

the Almighty. It was recited when rising in the morning and when going to bed at night. It was the first prayer a Jewish child was taught to pray, and it was the last thing a Jew would pray prior to death.

This verse defines the relationship God's people are to have with Him: *God is the only God, there is no other.* He is totally unique, not some vague pantheistic force. Surrounded by a world filled with other so-called deities, the people of God must declare: *"The LORD is our God, the LORD alone."* Notice He is **"our"** God – He is personal and relational, and His people can enjoy intimacy with Him.

Verse 5 continues with a challenge to love God with everything we've got: ***"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*** Jesus quotes this passage in Mark 12:30. Our love is to be wholehearted and is to pervade every aspect of our life because God wants our exclusive and intensive devotion. I'm struck by at least three truths in this verse.

- **Love is more than a feeling.** It's a command and a privilege. You and I must make a conscious decision to love God. Love is principally a verb or action; not primarily an emotion.
- **Love is fleshed out in relationship.** What God wants most is our love for Him. Do you see the phrase, **"your God?"** That leads to a question. Is He *your* God?
- **Love is to be comprehensive.** Notice the uses of the word **"all."** God's whole-hearted love *for* us cannot be answered with half-hearted commitment *from* us. By listing the heart, soul, and strength, no area is left out. The word strength means literally *"with our much-ness."* We're to love Him with everything we have – with devotion in our hearts, with passion in our souls, and with the much-ness in our lives. A.W. Tozer once said we're called to *"an everlasting preoccupation with God."* We're to love Him ahead of everyone and everything else, with every faculty of our being. God's limitless love for us should drive out any lukewarm love we may have for Him.

In his book called, "Raising Kids to Love Jesus," Gary Oliver makes a provocative statement: *"Our primary call isn't to be good parents. Our primary call is to model a vibrant and vital love relationship with the living God."*

Verse 6 reminds us God's Word is not to just be in our heads, but also in our hearts. The Bible is to be lived out, it's not just something we give mental assent to: ***"And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."*** The

people knew God's commands were engraved on tablets of stone; God wants His holy Word to be resident in their hearts and fleshed out through their hands.

Fellow parents, God must be all-important to us if we want Him to be all-important to our children. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, *"Who you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying."*

Before moving to the next point, I want to introduce a concept popularized by the Puritans. They viewed *"every home as a little church."* They believed the father should be the pastor in his home the same way an ordained minister pastors the church. One writer called the home *"the seminary of the church."*

They were so serious about this that if a father neglected the spiritual training of his family, he could be brought before the elders for church discipline and if he refused to take his proper leadership role, he could be disbarred from the Lord's Table. Ray Pritchard writes, *"Such a thought seems extreme to us, which perhaps says more about our laxness than it does about the strictness of the Puritans."*

4. Lead. After learning, living and loving, we're in the right spot to lead our children according to verses 7-9.

- **Teach truth intentionally.** We see this in the first part of verse 7: ***"You shall teach them diligently to your children."*** The phrase ***"teach diligently"*** means *"to sharpen"* or *"teach incisively."* It's the idea of going over and over until the knife is razor sharp. It also means to use gentle pressure so as to leave a mark in the mind or memory. We are to teach truth so intentionally that we look for ways to precisely pass along what we are learning, what we are living, and who we are loving. We are to talk about God's Word 24-7. The task of imprinting truth is a never-ending, full-time assignment.

Would you notice whose responsibility this is? Look at this clause again: ***"teach them diligently to your children."*** This task is not for the church to fulfill but for the parent to faithfully do. The church is meant to supplement what is done in the home.

- **Talk truth relationally.** Look at the last part of verse 7: ***"...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."*** Notice this is more than just getting your kids up for church once a week. We are to make an impression

upon them by talking about God when we're sitting at home, when we're out and about, at bedtime and at breakfast. The basic idea is we don't preach at them but reach them by showing how God relates to everyday life.

What was instinctive in Hebrew homes must become intentional in families today. Reggie Joiner adds, *"The principle of rhythm is transferable to every culture throughout all time. Generally speaking, all people groups get up with the sun, move around during the day, share meals and sleep throughout the night...it is important for parents to cooperate with the way life naturally happens."*

We could break it down this way.

<u>Times</u>	<u>Communication</u>	<u>Goal</u>
Meal Time	Formal Discussion	Establish Values
Drive Time	Informal Dialogue	Interpret Life
Bed Time	Intimate Conversation	Build Intimacy
Morning Time	Encouraging Words	Instill Purpose

We are to show our kids who God is, not just in formal spiritual settings, but also in the casual classroom of everyday life. Look for those teachable moments to intentionally make an impression.

- **Transmit truth practically.** In verses 8-9, we see the Israelites had visual reminders everywhere about God: ***"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."*** Many Jews took this literally by putting passages of Scripture into little boxes called phylacteries and attaching them to their hands and foreheads. They would also put mezuzahs containing this passage on the doors of their homes. The idea is for God's Word to be so central to your family's life your kids think about it every time they turn around.

While it's ok to put up literal reminders, our ***"hands"*** represent our actions, ***"frontlets"*** represent our thoughts and attitudes, ***"doorposts"*** symbolize our homes and ***"gates"*** refer to social life outside of our homes. Keep in mind Jesus was not impressed with the Pharisees who took this passage literally but didn't apply it to their lives in Matthew 23:5: ***"Everything they do is***

done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long.”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once had a dinner guest who was an atheist. During the meal his guest expounded the virtues of freedom of choice and how religion prevented people from being truly free. He was especially upset with how parents train their children in the faith, claiming kids should be free to believe what they want without any outside influence from their parents.

After dinner, Coleridge got up and asked his friend to come outside with him to take a look at his garden. Coleridge was known as an expert gardener, so his guest was expecting to see beautiful flowers, sculpted shrubbery and flowering plants. Instead, he saw weeds everywhere and out-of-control vines and general disorder. Everything was overgrown. The atheist looked puzzled and said, *“This is your garden? What happened?”* Coleridge responded, *“Well, I just took your advice. I wouldn’t want to impose myself upon these young vines – I just let them grow like they wanted to.”*

Parents, what kind of garden are you growing in your home?

5. Launch. After learning, living, loving and leading, we’re to launch our children by passing the “belief baton” to the next generation. In verses 10-11, God looks ahead to the time when His people will finally arrive in the Promised Land. They will have things like flourishing cities, furnished homes, and an abundance of food and refreshments. God knows these “things” may sap their spiritual vitality and they will lose their sense of trust as a people. The hand-off must be smooth for the relay to be won.

Satisfaction can lead to spiritual stagnation and forgetting can lead to forsaking. Look at verse 12: ***“Then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*** God wants us to be “careful” not to forget. We need to be vigilant or the “things” of life will crowd out the Giver of our things.

Did you notice God wants them to remember what they used to be? They were slaves in the land of Egypt and God brought them out. We need to remember we were at one time slaves to sin, lost and separated from God. It is only by His grace that we’ve been set free. When we start to forget, we’re in danger of losing our edge spiritually.

At the end of the book, and near the end of his life, Moses gave this message in Deuteronomy 32:46-47: ***“Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”***

Parents must pass along the faith they possess. We do that by...

- Learning
- Living
- Loving
- Leading
- Launching

14 Gospel Principles

I want to pivot now and pass along some life-transforming truth found in Paul David Tripp’s outstanding book called, *“Parenting: 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family.”* In a few minutes I’ll tell you how you can get what I believe to be one of the best parenting books ever written.

I’m going to simply list each principle, along with a summary statement, followed by a quotation from each particular chapter.

1. Calling: *Nothing is more important in your life than being one of God’s tools to reshape souls.*

“God has designed that you would be a principal, consistent, and faithful tool in His hands for the purpose of creating God-consciousness and God-submission in your children. The most important thing that a child could ever learn is the existence, character, and plan of God. Connect everything you require of your children in behavior and belief to the story of redemption.”

2. Grace: *God never calls you to a task without giving you what you need to do it. He never sends you without going with you.*

“There is nothing more important to consistent, faithful, patient, loving and effective parenting than to understand what God has given you in the grace of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ...understanding God’s grace will change you, as it changes you, it will change the way you relate to and parent your children...my biggest, ongoing problem as a dad is not my children, it’s me. God calls unable people to do important things so that He will get the glory and not them.”

3. Law: *Your children need God’s law, but you cannot ask the law to do what only grace can accomplish.*

“If rules had the power to change our children’s hearts, Jesus would not have needed to die! We need to preach and model the gospel of grace to ourselves and our children every day, realizing we are more like our children than unlike them, in deep need of our Father’s forgiveness.”

4. Inability: *Recognizing what you are unable to do is essential to good parenting.*

“You have no power whatsoever to change your child...God has given you authority for the work of change, but has not granted you the power to make that change happen...Good parenting lives at the intersection of a humble admission of personal powerlessness and a confident rest in the power and grace of God.”

5. Identity: *If you are not resting as a parent in your identity in Christ, you will look for identity in your children.*

“Our natural inclination to seek our identity from our children is not only a miserable place to look for identity but creates a crushing burden for our children to carry with them all the expectations and demands that flow from it. It just never works to ask your children to be your own personal saviors.”

6. Process: *You must be committed as a parent to long-view parenting because change is a process, not an event.*

“Parenting is not a series of dramatic confrontation-confession events, but rather a life-long process of incremental awareness and progressive change. See parenting as one unending conversation. Just as God

parents us daily with grace and love, we can pass His blessings along to our children.”

7. Lost: *As a parent you're not dealing just with bad behavior, but a condition that causes bad behavior.*

“Our children are not just disobedient; they are disobedient because they are lost. Our children do not just make foolish choices; they make foolish choices because they are lost...as Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost, He calls us to love and to rescue our lost children.”

8. Authority: *Teaching and modeling the protective beauty of authority is one of the foundations of good parenting.*

“Their struggle with authority really does reveal the depth of the hold of sin on their hearts and their need for the grace of the Savior...every moment of rebellion reveals a child's heart, and every moment when a child's heart is revealed is a God-given opportunity to talk about the Savior who alone can deliver this child from himself.”

9. Foolishness: *The foolishness inside your children is more dangerous to them than the temptation outside, and only God's grace has the power to rescue fools.*

“If you don't understand what the Bible says about foolishness, you won't fully understand what God has called you to as His instrument in the lives of your children...as a parent you are never, ever dealing with just the words and actions of your children. You are always dealing with the thing that controls their words and behavior: the heart...the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart.”

10. Character: *Not all of the wrong your children do is a direct rebellion to authority; much of the wrong is the result of a lack of character.*

“They don't have a character problem; they have a worship problem that produces a character problem...will [our children] learn early what controls their hearts and how what controls their hearts shapes the character of their lives?”

11. False gods: *You are parenting a worshiper, so it's important to remember that what rules your child's heart will control his or her behavior.*

“It is vital to understand that God has called you to something deeper than to manage, guide, and control your child's behavior. God has called you to be an agent of his rescuing, forgiving, transforming, and delivering grace. You cannot allow yourself to settle for anything less...every single thing your child has ever said or done is rooted in worship...children do what they do because of what they worship. Because of this, change is not so much about behavior management, but worship realignment...because your children are worshipers, your only hope for them is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

12. Control: *The goal of parenting is not control of behavior, but rather heart and life change.*

“They need more than careful parental control because something has gone wrong inside of them...your children need to see their sin so they'll cry out for God's mercy...you are called to make use of every opportunity that God will give you to help your children become aware of the grave danger of the sin that lives inside them.”

13. Rest: *It is only rest in God's presence and grace that will make you a joyful and patient parent.*

“It really is true that good, godly, transformative parenting grows best in the soil of a heart at rest...your hope as a parent is not found in your power, your wisdom, your character, your experience, or your success, but in this one thing alone: the presence of your Lord...you have been sent, but the One who sent you has packed up and come with you, so that you would have everything you need to do what He's called you to do.”

14. Mercy: *No parent gives mercy better than one who is convinced that he desperately needs it himself.*

“We are the first responders in the lives of our children...Look for every opportunity to shower your children with grace...Parenting is about the willingness to live a life of long-term, intentional repetition...He doesn't ask you to do what you can't do, and He is eternally willing to do what

only He can do...He faithfully parents you, so that by his faithful grace you can faithfully parent your children. ”

Here are three ways you can consume this content from Paul David Tripp.

- Order the book, “Parenting” and read one chapter a day for 14 days.
- Go to RightNow Media and search for “Parenting” by Paul Tripp and simply watch one brief video (around two minutes) every day for 14 days. We offer a free subscription to RightNow Media on our home page at edgewoodbaptist.net.
- Download the free “Paul Tripp App” to your phone or tablet by going to Google Play or the Apple App store. These brief videos and other resources are available.

Take-it-Home

I love how the New Living Translation renders Isaiah 28:10: ***“He tells us everything over and over - one line at a time, one line at a time, a little here, and a little there!”*** It’s time to take some small steps, a little here and a little there. I like how the title to a book captures this thought: *“A Long Obedience in the Same Direction.”* Remember a child’s heart is like a big bottle with a small opening – in order to fill it up, we do so a little at a time.

Here are some next step suggestions.

1. Make mealtime a priority. Here’s a question you might want to ask each other around the table. We stumbled upon this several years ago and it ended up being a great exercise: *“I wonder what life would be like if I were _____?”* Take turns completing this sentence for each family member.

2. Read the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) whenever you can with your family. Howard Hendricks once said if he had just one sentence of advice to offer to parents, he would encourage them to drench their minds with this passage.

3. Figure out your role with each of your children or grandchildren. Beth and I read an article from Focus on the Family many years ago and still reference it today. The basic idea is our parenting roles change as our children grow. I don’t have time to explain it fully but here are the four phases:

- Commander

- Coach
- Counselor
- Consultant

4. Trust Jesus for your own salvation. Before you can pass the “belief baton” to your kids, and to your grandkids, you have to have faith yourself. Are you in the family of God? Have you trusted Christ yourself? Have you engaged your will and received the greatest gift of all time by asking Jesus to save you from your sins? You can’t give your kids what you don’t have. You can only pass along what has first entered your own life. Over 100 years ago, Woodrow Wilson said: *“If you wish your children to be Christians you must really take the trouble to be a Christian yourself.”*

If you’re ready to be saved, pray this prayer with me.

Jesus, I realize I’m a selfish and self-centered sinner. I repent of how I’ve been living and confess I desperately need You. Thank You for dying in my place on the cross as my substitute and for rising from the dead on the third day. I come to You in need of the mercy and rest only You can provide. I believe and now I receive You into my life. As my Lord, enable me to follow Your will and your way. If there’s anything that needs to change in my life, please change it so I can reflect You to the world around me. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Reggie Joiner admits his greatest struggle is to trust God to do what only He can do. After a particularly bad conflict within his family, he sat down and thought about what God would say to him.

- *I’m not trying to make them happy; I want them to really live.*
- *In the middle of their pain, I can be a better friend than anyone, even you.*
- *I am the only one who can really love them unconditionally, forgive them forever and be a perfect Father.*
- *So maybe you just need to trust Me enough so that they can see Me.*
- *Besides...with all your issues, I think it’s probably better for them to trust Me more than they trust you.*
- *Isn’t it more important for them to love me more than they love you?*
- *I can heal their hearts; you can’t.*
- *I can give them eternal life; you can’t.*
- *I’m God; you’re not.*

Parents, what will you do with the time entrusted to you? [Hold up gumball]

Please send us a note if we can help you take your next step with Jesus at info@edgewoodbaptist.net.

May God be with you until we meet again.