

Give Them Jesus, Deuteronomy 6:4-9

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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. I'm excited to be kicking off a special little series today called Families Creating Culture. Why would we take three weeks to focus just on families?

- Well, no matter our current stage in life, we're all the product of families.
- Antioch has a ton of young families. The Bible addresses families in the midst of addressing the whole church, because marriage and parenting is the church's business, not a private matter.
- As a church, we are a family. Whether single or married or divorced or widowed, we are given to each other and need each other.
- Thus, we are all creating culture(s).

So, during this series we're going to unpack what the Bible has to say to families in three important ways:

- 1) Parents discipling their children in the love of God
- 2) Parents discipling their children in gender and sexuality
- 3) Parents discipling their children in an age of technology

So turn in your Bibles with me to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which you can find on page 151 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of the sermon is "Give Them Jesus," and the main idea is just what we mentioned a moment ago, "Families creating culture means parents discipling their children in the love of God." In order to have given more time to today's Evidence of Grace, I'm going to move through the passage pretty quickly in this way:

- 1) Loving God Above All Else - vv. 4-5
- 2) Loving God in All of Life - vv. 6-9

Both of which, I want to provide a very practical next step. With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ 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 that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ 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 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God’s people said, *Amen*. You may be seated.

Exposition

A few months ago the pastors and our wives gathered here in the training room for our annual Spring Retreat. This year’s speaker was Brian Croft, pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church just down the street, and the topic was the pastor’s family. As pastors we want to constantly keep before us the truth from 1 Timothy 3 that our primary ministry is in our homes, not in the church; that, in fact, faithfully shepherding our families is part of what even qualifies us to shepherd the church in the first place.¹ What would it profit us if we have the most awesome church in the world, but our wives and children walk away bitter toward us and God and his church!

Do you think we ever get those priorities wrong? Absolutely! That weekend was a gut punch to us all, I think. But one of the most helpful, practical takeaways from it was Brian’s challenge to spend weekly 1-on-1 time with each of our children, in order to disciple them. After all, we do that in coffee shops with church members—why not also in our homes?

Interestingly, this past week when I opened one of my books on family ministry in preparation for this sermon, here’s how the author began:

When I sit with my daughter...I am at war. This is not war with my daughter; it is war for my child’s soul. Even as I train Hannah to take up her cross and root her identity in Jesus Christ, the surrounding culture calls her to celebrate immaturity, smirk at sin, and center her passions on pleasures that will slip away. This is war because the same serpentine dragon who longed to consume the fruit of Mary’s womb also wants to

¹ 1 Timothy 3:4-5

*devour my children (Rev. 12:1–9)...I am able to remove some of these influences from Hannah's life for now, but I cannot and should not shield her from them forever. What I can do is guide her to love what is good, beautiful, and true. I can train her in the fear and reverence of God. I can constantly call her attention to the gospel. And that's precisely what I work to do—not only week-by-week in the café on Dutchman's Lane, but also moment-by-moment in conversations about everything from the latest superhero film to the implications of Daniel's prophecies. These may look like meetings for hazelnut coffee and whole-grain bagels, but what happens here is nothing less than the preparation and execution of a cosmic battle plan. Every week, every day, this is war.*²

Church, we cannot aim for reaching the neighborhood and reaching the nations, and forget about reaching the lost neighbors who live within our own households: our children. And as we celebrated on Promotion Sunday, that will take the whole church. But we want to be clear: the primary responsibility to disciple children belongs not to the church, but to the parents; and just as much of that responsibility in the church falls on pastors, in the home it falls on fathers.³

And that's not just an Antioch conviction, or even just a New Testament conviction, but it begins in the Old Testament. As we mentioned briefly last week, following the tower of Babel, God made a covenant with a pagan⁴ named Abram, promising to bless him in such a way that all the families of the earth would be blessed (grace!).⁵ Later, God would prove himself faithful to this promise when Abraham's descendents, the people of Israel, were enslaved in Egypt and God rescued them through his prophet, Moses (grace!).⁶ Therefore, over and over in the book of Deuteronomy, which teaches about God's covenant relationship with his people, in light of such grace he had shown them, they were to remember it and respond with supreme love and obedience, rather than forgetting and worshiping other gods.⁷

The portion of Deuteronomy that we are reading today was the heart of God's law, the most important part of Israel's response to his grace. It became known as "the Shema," which is the first Hebrew word of the passage: "*Hear*". This is similar to the book of

² Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), Loc 286

³ Ephesians 6:4

⁴ Joshua 24:2

⁵ Genesis 12:1-3

⁶ Exodus 1-15

⁷ J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IVP, 1974), 136-137; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976)

Proverbs in the way it pictures parents calling a child's attention to wisdom for their own good (think of it like getting your child's attention after they nearly run across a busy highway):

⁸ Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. Proverbs 1:8-9

The Shema was so important to God's people that it even became a daily recited prayer; and in some ways, the definitive words of Judaism.⁸ We do well to give attention to its meaning.

1) Loving God Above All Else - vv. 4-5

That brings us to our first part of today's passage: loving God above all else. Read with me in verse 4:

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Deuteronomy 6:4

One thing that's very clear from this statement is something we call monotheism. Simply put, there is only one God. This may not seem like a big deal, but it was an audacious claim in the context of a world where people worshiped all kinds of gods, and usually multiple at a time. Consider some of the implications:

- First, if there is only one God, then all the other gods that people worshiped were made up and had no power.
- Second, if there is only one God, then he is not divided within himself and was therefore completely trustworthy.⁹

And just like how we've written our Mission Convictions, a truth like this would then inform so much of how the people of God lived. Something like this: if our God is one, then he is above all else in life and worthy of our deepest love and obedience. And that's exactly what the next verse teaches:

⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Deuteronomy 6:5

⁸ Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 95; Thompson, 137

⁹ Thompson, 137; Craigie; Wright, 96

Just like we emphasized in our last sermon series, our response to God isn't meant to just be adherence to certain doctrines or duties—God is after our hearts. It's about genuinely loving him with all your heart and all your soul and all your might—your head, hands, and heart—your whole being.

But in my experience, we as Christians so easily get this backwards and are overwhelmed by it. It becomes this impossible standard that we just feel guilty for not being able to maintain. However, as Dan and I discussed this week's passage, the way he put it really captures the true meaning I think. He said, "The times I have actually loved God with all my heart was when I had forgotten what I was supposed to be doing for him and was enamored by what he had done for me." *That's* what we're talking about. It's what Jesus meant when he called this the greatest commandment.¹⁰

And that's what we're talking about in the context of families creating culture: parents constantly dousing themselves with God's grace in order to genuinely love him above all else. If God doesn't have our hearts, then we'll just end up pouring doctrine and duty on our children; many in this room may have experienced that growing up, and you know how it can conform the behavior of a child, and completely miss the heart. We want to aim for the heart.

Like the people of Israel, if we are being led back the good news of God's grace over and over, then he will lead us back over and over to being first in our hearts. And if he is first in our hearts, then he will be first in our families, even in the craziness of life. That means we will regularly repent of being syncretistic, combining the worship of God with the worship of other gods; which sends mixed messages to our children about who is supreme:

- God, or the work of our hands.
- God, or the stuff we own.
- God, or the appearance we project.
- God, or the success we demand of them.¹¹

If this hits home, then one practical next step I encourage you to consider is a family mission statement. You know how Antioch has a mission statement that's meant to guide all we are and do? Why not create the same thing for your family? And then teach it to your children, and use it in your planning, and put reminders of it around your home. Mine goes like this (yours could be totally different): "The purpose of our family is

¹⁰ Mark 12:28-34

¹¹ J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 141

to live for the day we meet Jesus face to face.” It regularly reminds me—often when I’m getting off track—the main reason why God even gave me a family, which is to help each other get ready to be with him forever, and to help each other love him above all else.

2) Loving God in All of Life - vv. 6-9

And yet not only to love him above all else, but to love him in all of life. This is our second part of today’s passage, beginning in verse 6:

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. Deuteronomy 6:6

What should stand out here is that God wasn’t telling his Old Testament people to keep his words on stone tablets, but on their hearts.

When I lived overseas, sometimes when we would give Bibles to people we would find out later that instead of reading them, they put them under their pillow to make them more pious. Kinda misses the point, right?

The same is true here. What’s the benefit of having the truth about God here (the head) but not here (the heart)? After often missing this point for centuries, the prophet Jeremiah reminded the people of Israel (and us) of God’s mission in his family:

³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jeremiah 31:33

But, I think this should bring up a couple of questions for us. For one, does God want love or obedience? If God and his law are written on our hearts, does that mean inward feeling or outward action? Well, here’s the way Jesus answered that question:

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. John 14:15

²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. John 14:21

Do we love him and therefore are moved to obey him? Yeah, sometimes. And do we also obey him and therefore are moved to love him? Yeah, sometimes. It's both. And both depend on him to do the supernatural within us.¹²

That leads us to the second question, does he want us to teach our children love or obedience? Law or grace? This is one of those parenting questions that could ruin a marriage or split a church, right? 'Well, I teach my kids rules and consequences.' 'Well, I teach my kids rewards and reinforcement.' Which way is the right way? Well, if we are to disciple our children in the love of God, preparing them to understand a cross where wrath and mercy meet, then both must be present in our parenting.

The rest of the passage helps to make this tangible. Reading in verse 7,

⁷ 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 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:7-9

If this passage didn't already clearly apply to parents, now there's no question. You would think that the greatest spiritual commandment to God's people would be the responsibility of the greatest spiritual leaders of God's people—'Holy priests and mighty prophets, teach these people!' But that's just not how the love of God passes from one generation to the next; not by gifted speakers in grand sanctuaries, but by *everyday parents in everyday moments*.

The idea here is the love of God being the central and absorbing interest of a family's life—not just when they're at church, but when they're sitting at home and taking a walk and going to bed at night and getting up in the morning.

Some have taken this literally over the years by writing the Shema on tiny scrolls and tying them to their hands and heads and doorposts. Others have taken this literally by constantly barraging their children with their violations of God's commands. But I'm not sure either of those effectively disciple children in the love of God.

Instead, the idea is that out of the overflow of your heart, your mouth will speak¹³:

¹² Thompson, 138-139

¹³ Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45

- On the car ride to school: ‘Son, look at that sunrise. Who made that?’
- During a breakdown: ‘Baby girl, I’m sorry you’re feeling sad. I remember one time when Jesus was sad. Let’s read that story together and then talk to him about it.’
- On the way to bed: ‘Hey, what can we give God thanks for from today? Anyone or anything on your mind you’d like to pray about?’
- Regularly (at least it is at my house!): ‘Family, Daddy was too harsh. I’ve asked God to forgive me—would you forgive me too?’

Like we discussed in Genesis, this is walking with God in all of life. These are little, everyday ways to show our children that he is real to us. Now, that won’t guarantee *they’ll* accept him as real, *but that’s only ours to display, not to decide*. Discipling our children in the love of God means the simultaneously freeing and humbling truth that their salvation doesn’t fully depend on our performance, but God’s grace.

One of the most practical ways you can help cultivate this is something called family worship. It’s gathering your family on a regular basis to love God together by some combination of Scripture, song, and prayer. There’s no right way to do this, and it will look different for each family in each season of family life. But in order to give you an example, here’s what we do in my family:

While we’re all gathered around the table at dinner, we give thanks for the food and pray for a missionary (we have them on the wall next to the table). Then I shovel down my first helping, and grab a storybook Bible on a nearby shelf. We read the story and I ask a few questions, which usually feels like a trainwreck in keeping attention and getting the right answers. Then we sing a song together, usually one of the songs we sing at Antioch so they make a connection between home and church.

Most of the time, it’s chaos, and we wonder if it’s even worth the effort. But every once in a while, we get a little glimmer of hope. Like when we suddenly realize our two-year is playing by herself in another room and singing the lyrics of “All I Have Is Christ”. And we smile and laugh and remember, what an amazing privilege to have been given Jesus, and to give him to our children.

Conclusion

One night after our Spring Pastors Retreat I was hanging out with Brian, who is basically on the opposite spectrum of parenting from me: his kids are graduating and leaving his household while mine are being born and entering the household. I was telling him something about the challenges and limitations of having little ones, and he

listened kindly. Then he described to me what it had been like for him over the past years to say no to so many opportunities in order to say yes to his wife and kids. And he also described how, in God's grace, now that they're going off to college and life, all those opportunities he turned down are still coming his way. But, he said with tears in his eyes, the most beautiful thing of all, isn't the opportunities, but the fact that he can move into the next season of his life without guilt, knowing that when his children were in his home, he was *there*.

I know from personal experience that a sermon like this can come as a crushing blow, especially to parents who are just trying to keep their right nostril above the waterline; especially for dads, upon whom the Bible puts a lot of responsibility; and especially for moms where dads are literally or figuratively absent. But this sermon isn't meant to tear down, but to build up.

Remember the preceding context of the Shema? Loving God with all their hearts and teaching their children to do the same was actually a response to something: *that God had rescued them*. Well, what comes after the Shema? We read it in verse 20,

²⁰ "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?' ²¹ then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. ²³ And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. Deuteronomy 6:20-23

What comes after the Shema is the same as what comes before. A constant reminder of God's grace to us. It's the genuine joy of being able to simply say, "We love because he first loved us."¹⁴

And the way he loved us wasn't just by choosing us as an ethnic family or rescuing us from slavery to people, but by choosing us as a spiritual family and rescuing us from slavery to sin. So that when your son or daughter asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of these things we say and do at home and church?' then you can say to them, 'We were slaves to sin, but the Lord brought us out of sin with a mighty Son, Jesus Christ. And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against sin and against Satan, when he sent Jesus to die on the cross in our place and rise again. And

¹⁴ 1 John 4:19

he brought us back to life, so that he might bring us into relationship with him and give us a way to be with him forever. *Hear, O child:* we say and do these things because we are remembering God's grace to us; we are loving him because he first loved us.'

Therefore, church, this table that we come to each week is a table of remembrance of God's grace. But it's also a table of response to God's grace, a way for us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts. On the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ gave us himself, that we might give him to our children.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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