

# The Word-Centered Home

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on March 31, 2019

## Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're taking a break from our series through the book of Exodus, but we're not going too far from Exodus. We're camping out in Deuteronomy 6. Today's message is timed with our upcoming launch of Homelife, a new resource ministry that's aimed at strengthening and deepening marriages and families in our church.
- ❖ We want to focus on the intersection between family and faith. **Because, according to a recent poll, family and faith are considered the top two sources of meaning in life.** Last November, Pew Research asked people an open-ended question about what provides them with a sense of meaning.<sup>1</sup> They could fill in the blank with anything. And almost 70% of them said "family". The next most popular answer was "career" at 34% and then "money" at 23%. And coming in fourth was "spirituality and faith" at 20%.
  - When pollsters asked a closed-ended question with 15 set options, then 40% chose "spending time with family" as the most important source of meaning in their lives. That was the top choice. And in this case "my religious faith" came in second at 20% again. **So what becomes clear from these survey questions is that family is extremely important for the average American.** Seven out of ten people you meet will name "family" as their source of meaning and fulfillment in life. Faith is up there, but it still doesn't come close to family.
- ❖ Now on one hand, you can take that information and conclude that we're at the risk of idolizing the family. **You can go too far in focusing on the family if it becomes your primary source of meaning in life.** If having Jesus is not enough for you. If you feel like your life is empty and pointless because you're still not married or because you still don't have children – or you lack joy and contentment because your marriage is not as exciting as you imagined or parenting isn't the adventure you hoped for – if the state of your marriage or the status of your kid's education holds greater significance to you than Christ and his kingdom, then yes you've probably turned family into an idol.
  - We all need to check our hearts. Because it's so subtle. Back around the same time as that survey, Kevin DeYoung tweeted, ***“One of the acceptable idolatries among evangelical Christians is the idolatry of the family.”*** Ouch. But if that Pew survey is right, then that's not a stretch of the imagination. Apparently a lot of Americans – including American Christians – are susceptible to the idolization of the family.
- ❖ **But having said all that – after recognizing the danger of idolatry – there's still something important that we should affirm about the centrality of the family.** It's no coincidence that so many people would find so much meaning in family. And it's because that reflects God's good created order. **The family unit was always intended, from the very beginning, to play an instrumental role in the spiritual formation of the individual.** The first family is introduced to us within the first few chapters of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/11/20/where-americans-find-meaning-in-life/>

- ❖ **In many ways, the family takes center stage in Scripture.** Just think back to when we studied the Ten Commandments. Remember how we distinguished between the First and Second Tables of the Law? And we said the First Table (Commandments 1-4) was directed towards our relationship with God. But then the Second Table shifts the Law's orientation to a focus on our relationship with others.
  - **It's no coincidence that the first relationship on the horizontal plane that the Law addresses is our relationship with our parents.** It's significant that the parent-child relationship is foremost in God's mind. Because according to his good created order, the family is fundamental to preserving the fabric of society.
    - **A people who have not learned to honor their own parents will not honor the other authorities God has established in their lives, and thus the very fabric of society will eventually unravel.** That's how important the family is.
  
- ❖ Just think about our text. **The context surrounding Deuteronomy 6 is the re-giving of the Mosaic Law – a covenant renewal ceremony of sorts.** A new generation of Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land. Their parent's generation were unfaithful forty years earlier and had refused to enter. So God had them wander in the wilderness until that generation died off. But their kids were just kids back in Exodus 20 when the Law was first given, so this new generation of Israel needs a re-giving, a retelling.
  - In chapter 5, Moses re-gives the Ten Commandments and reaffirms the need for a proper fear of the Lord to make you careful to keep all his commandments. Then in chapter 6, Moses affirms the uniqueness of the LORD God and how he is to be loved and his Word is to be on our hearts.
    - So you'd think whatever Moses is going to say next must be significant. **What is he going to address and who is he going to address it to?** The future leaders of Israel – the future judges and kings – about how they should lead the nation? Does he appeal to broad cultural movements and call for sweeping societal changes? What does he address? **He addresses parents and how they should train up their children.** Moses focuses on the family.
  
- ❖ **More specifically he focuses on the words that are spoken in the family.** But it's not so much a focus on how many words or even what words – but *whose* words are spoken in the home. Moses describes what we call a Word-centered home. And there are three things happening in a Word-centered home: listening, internalizing, and talking.

### **Listening to the Word**

- ❖ Let's start with the first. **In a Word-centered home, there will be a deliberate effort to listen to the Word – to hear the Lord.** That's how Moses begins – with a call to listen/hear. He says it in vv3-4. Earlier Moses says in v1, *“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.”*

- ❖ What he's doing is telling us the goal of our parenting. **It's so that not only our sons but our sons's sons – our children and our grandchildren – may fear the Lord, walk in his ways, and enjoy long life.** That's what all believing parents want. That's the goal of our parenting. And I love how it's a long-term goal.
  - We're not just aiming to get our kids into a good college, to see them financially independent and stable, or to see them married with kids. No, think longer dream bigger. **If you're a Christian parent, you should be thinking, dreaming, and praying for your future grandchildren to be walking fearfully with the Lord.** That's the bigger, long-term goal of parenting, even if your kid is just a newborn.
  
- ❖ But if that's the goal, how do you get there? **Moses says you, as a family, need to hear.** To hear what? To hear what God has revealed about himself. Look at v4, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*" In a Word-centered home, parents will be teaching their kids to listen. To listen to God's self-revelation, to who God says he is.
  - **A common problem for most of us is that we do more talking about who we think God is than listening to who he says he is.** We gather around the Bible as a family (or as a small group) but spend all our time sharing our thoughts about God instead of opening up that Bible and truly listening to what it says. The problem is that we end up with a lot of self-constructed views about God based on our own wisdom and intuition – but these views don't reflect what God has revealed about himself.
  
- ❖ Imagine if one day someone decides to write a biography about you. I'm sure it would be flattering. But how offended would you be if the biographer simply ignored your words and actions and just constructed their own version of you? Painting a very different picture of you. One that you don't even recognize.
  - That's how God feels when we construct our own versions of him. **We may do a lot of talking about God, but do we take the time to really listen?** To hear the Lord? And I don't mean in some sort of mystical way. I'm talking hearing God in his Word – in his written Word, in Scripture.
  
- ❖ **And that's one of the key responsibilities we have as parents – to train our kids with ears to hear God's Word.** To build into them the instinct to listen to Scripture with intent. To not draw any conclusions about God until we've listened to what he has to say about himself.
  - And this training starts when they're young. I mean very young. I've been reading to my daughter almost every night since she was a newborn. Even after she learned to read, I still try to maintain her habit of listening to words being read – whether it's the Words of Scripture or of good books. Why? **Because I hope that she grows up with a penchant for listening to spoken words – especially preached words in a corporate worship service like this.**
    - And that's why we've been bringing her into service from an early age. We saw David and Alice Carter and John and Kelly Ma and others doing this with their kids when they were little and it rubbed off on us.

- ❖ **If we want our kids to be trained to listen to the Words of God, then we need to expose them to biblical preaching from an early age.** Sure, they may not comprehend the content, but they'll get the form. They'll get that it's important to gather every week with other worshippers to hear a book read and explained and applied.
  - You do realize that Christians are a peculiar people, right? **Nowhere else do people gather on a weekly basis to listen to a 3,000 year old book like Exodus being read and discussed in a 40-minute monologue where you just sit there and listen.** That doesn't happen anywhere else but in a church service. That kind of behavior is weird. Christians are weird. So why wait to expose your child to our weirdness? **The world may find it weird, but you want your kids to grow up thinking it's normal to listen to the preaching of God's Word on a weekly basis.**
  
- ❖ Now I realize some families have extenuating circumstances that make it particularly hard to bring their kid (or kids) into a worship service. That's understandable. But if you have the chance, then make it a priority. And don't wait until they're teenagers. You might think they won't appreciate preaching until they're older. **But if your kids aren't trained and accustomed to listening to biblical preaching from an early age, you'll find it even harder to transition them into service when they're teenagers.** So start young and help them develop those ears that are trained to hear the preaching of God's Word.

### Internalizing the Word

- ❖ But I'm sure someone might object. "What good is it if you bring your kids into service but they're not paying any attention? They won't remember anything. They won't retain anything." Well I agree that the bigger goal is for them to engage thoughtfully with the Word, but I don't think it's fair to say that small children aren't retaining anything or that sitting under weekly preaching has no effect on them. **Sure, they may not remember most of the sermons they hear, but at least they'll grow up remembering how important it was, as a family, to regularly sit under biblical preaching.**
  - Do you remember what you ate last Sunday? What about a month ago? Do you remember what you ate on this day one year ago? Probably not. **You can't remember most of the meals you ate. But I'm sure you grew up with the recognition of how important it is to eat a meal every day.** Sitting down for a meal was a habit engrained in you since you were young. And who trained you with that good habit? Parents who cared about your physical health. **So if you care about the spiritual health of your kids, then build up within them the habit of sitting under biblical preaching every week.**
  
- ❖ Now how much they're going to understand or retain will largely be age dependent. It's the same thing when you're eating with your family. When your kid is 8-months old, he's only eating a tiny fraction of the full meal on the table. But when he's 8, you'd expect him to eat far more. And by the time he's 18, he's probably be devouring more than you. **But regardless of how much they're taking in, the 8-month old, the 8-year old, and the 18-year old will all have the habit of sitting down for a family meal.**

- ❖ The habit of sitting down to listen to biblical preaching is what we're after. We're not expecting a young child to process and retain a whole lot – just as a toddler won't eat as much as a teenager. But as our kids enter those teen years, then we need to feed them more of God's Word and help them thoughtfully engage with it. This leads to our second point: **In a Word-centered home, there will be a deliberate effort to internalize the Word of God.**
  - Moses is not content with mere exposure to the Word. He calls Israel to take it to heart, to effect their affections. Let me read vv5-6, "<sup>5</sup>*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* <sup>6</sup>*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*"
    - **That's the goal: For the Word not just to be in our ears but on our hearts.** When God's Words are impressed upon our hearts – when we understand the heart motivation behind his commands – it'll combat mere moralism.
  
- ❖ **That's one of the biggest dangers in Christian parenting – that we'll raise good-tempered, well-behaved, little moralists who have little to no grasp of the gospel.** I remember reading this interview with Phil Vischer, the creator of VeggieTales. It was such a popular children's show used in children's ministries across America.
  - But in this interview he looked back at his life work and realized it went off track. He said, "*I looked back at the previous 10 years and realized I had spent 10 years trying to convince kids to behave Christianly without actually teaching them Christianity. And that was a pretty serious conviction. You can say, "Hey kids, be more forgiving because the Bible says so," or "Hey kids, be more kind because the Bible says so!" But that isn't Christianity, it's morality.*"<sup>2</sup>
  
- ❖ **In other words, until we help our kids understand the why – until we speak to their hearts, to their affections, to what they love – until then, we're only creating well-behaved moralists.** Not God-loving, compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ. This command in v5 to love the LORD your God will all your heart, soul, and might – is what Jesus later describes as the first and greatest commandment. It means our everything should be devoted to him. Everything we think, do, and feel should be focused on loving God.
  
- ❖ **Parents, one practical way to help your kids grow up loving God this way is to help them love his Word.** Because that's where we meet God – in his Word. But that's why we have to be careful in the way we use Scripture in the raising of our kids. We have to resist the urge to use the Word of God in a manipulative way – to guilt-trip our kids or to beat down their resistance. Don't exasperate your kids with God's Word (cf. Eph 6:4).
  - **If you misuse the Bible to manipulate your kids, they'll shrink from it when they're young and abandon it when they're grown.** If the goal of your parenting is to have your grandkids, fifty years from now, sitting in church under the preached Word, worshipping God with a heart full of love, holding your great-grandkids in their arms – if that's your vision, then aim for your kids to fall in love with the Word.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://world.wng.org/2011/09/its\\_not\\_about\\_the\\_dream](https://world.wng.org/2011/09/its_not_about_the_dream)

- ❖ **But a love for the Word is better caught than taught.** So we have to examine ourselves and how we treat the Bible. How do you view God’s Word? If you see it as a heavy taskmaster, if you read it as a book of laws and commands that you can never live up to, then it’s no surprise if your kids see it in the same way and have little interest reading it.
  - **Friends, we have to fall in love with the Word first. If it's not sweeter to you than honey from the honeycomb, if Scripture tastes bitter or sour to you, then you'll likely pass on those same tastebuds to your kids.** Whether you have kids or not, this is the something we can all grow in. If you don’t have a regular time in your daily schedule for reading or meditating on God’s Word, then don’t be surprised if you struggle to maintain a consistent, fervent love for God. And don’t be surprised if your kids grow up to be in worse shape.
    - If you don’t know where or how to start, go to our website and look under the Resources tab and you’ll find a page with suggested Bible Reading Plans that you can utilize to jump start a regular habit of reading God’s Word.

### Talking About the Word

- ❖ So in a Word-centered home, there’s an effort to listen to the Word of God and to internalize it, to love it. Well when we love something, we love to talk about it. Which leads to our third point. **In a Word-centered home, there’s a deliberate effort to talk about the Word.**
  - That’s what’s affirmed in v7, and the remaining text explains how godly parents go about teaching the Word to each successive generation. Look at v7, “*You shall teach them diligently to your children.*” Other translations say, “You shall repeat or impress [these Words of God] on your children.”
    - So when you read that phrase “*teach diligently*”, don’t picture preaching, lecturing, or the Socratic method – which are all fine forms of teaching. **But in v7, Moses had in mind the idea of inculcation.** To inculcate a lesson is to impress it on someone’s mind and heart by frequent repetition and recitation.
- ❖ **Moses is telling parents to help their children internalize the Word by memorizing the Word.** By repeating it to them and having them repeat it to themselves. We’re basically talking about Scripture memory. **All kids, both ancient and modern, are adept at memorizing large chunks of Scripture.** Adults find it hard – we find it boring – but children tend to respond very well to routine and repetition.
  - You could argue that having small children memorize Psalm 19 is fine and all, but they don’t understand its theological nuances regarding general and special revelation. Sure, maybe not when they’re six. But when you get around to explaining the theology of that psalm when they’re sixteen, that Word will have been ripening in their hearts for many years. **They’ll be more ready and primed, to receive the truth and implications of God's Word after having hidden it in their hearts for so long.**

- ❖ Moses goes on to say in v7 that this practice of inculcating the Word onto the hearts of your children calls for you to talk about God's Word with them all the time. *"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."*
  - **In other words, there should be a rhythm and routine in your family life that centers on the Word of God.** Now it's probably going to look different for every family. You might make Bible reading a part of your bedtime routine (*"when you lie down"*) or a morning routine before school and work (*"when you rise"*). Or maybe your family listens to the Bible while in the car (*"when you walk by the way"*) or after dinner (*"when you sit your house"*). Your rhythm, your routine, it might look different. Just as long as your family has one centered on the Word of God.
  
- ❖ One of the features of our new Homelife ministry will be a resource board with pamphlets called Pointers, and some of them will be directed towards parents, trying to help you develop a Word-centered rhythm and routine in the home. We'll also launch campaigns throughout the year that will challenge parents and their children to deliberately talk about relevant issues facing families and to work through them together.
  
- ❖ The goal is to get families talking more and to center that conversation on God's Word. We definitely want to train our children to listen to the Word. **But as they get older, we've got to talk about the Word to help them understand and apply what they're hearing.** That's what we see happening in Deuteronomy 6. If you look down in v20, the children are asking their parents to explain the meaning of these testimony, statutes, and rules.
  - They want to know why. Why do we celebrate the Passover? Why can't we have leaven in the house? Why don't we work the fields on the Sabbath? Why is it wrong to bend the truth, especially when the truth is so uncomfortable or embarrassing?
    - Why do we go to church every Sunday? Why do we do devotionals? Why do we give an offering? **Kids, both ancient and modern, need to know why we believe what we believe. Why we behave the way we behave.** We need to help our kids understand the reason behind their obedience.
  
- ❖ If you keep reading in chapter 6:21, after your kids ask you the meaning behind these commands of God, the Hebrew parent is supposed to explain by recalling and retelling their spiritual history. *"<sup>21</sup>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. . . . <sup>23</sup>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.'"*
  - Do you see the point? What's the meaning behind these commands? What's the reason behind our obedience? **Why, Dad, do we have to obey God?**
    - **Because he delivered us from bondage.** He redeemed us from slavery. He freed us. By sheer mercy. By amazing grace. By his outstretched arm and mighty hand. We obey because we are his now. He is our God and we are his people. **We obey because we love him – for all that he is and all that he's done for us.**

- ❖ For an Israelite family, the Exodus was the highpoint in their stories. It was the climactic redemptive event of their spiritual history. **But for us, for Christian families, we have an even greater story to tell. We have Calvary. We have the cross and the empty tomb.**
  - When our kids ask us the meaning behind God's Word? Mom, Dad, why do we have to observe all that Jesus has commanded? When they ask the "why", we get the privilege of recalling and retelling the gospel story, *our* story, *our* spiritual history.
  
- ❖ Tell your kids, "Kids, you want to know the meaning behind all these testimonies, statutes, and rules in Scripture? **You want to know why Mom and Dad are so committed to obeying Jesus and loving him with all our heart, soul, and might?**"
  - It's because he took our place at the cross. He lived the righteous life we were supposed to live, and he died the gruesome death we were deserved to die. He delivered us. He redeemed us. He set us free. By sheer mercy and amazing grace. Kids, there's no greater privilege than to serve this kind of God with faith, love, and obedience." **That's what you tell your kids. Especially if your goal is *not* for them to grow up as a well-behaved moralist.**
  
- ❖ A moralist has no problem with obedience. A moralist is very good at obeying. If your goal is to raise a moralist, then train your child to obey God's Word. **But if you want your child to be a Christian, then train him to not only obey God's Word – but to understand that the true children of God obey out of gospel-driven faith and love.**
  - Church, we're going to be launching Homelife in a couple of weeks. You'll see the resource board in the lobby and it'll be manned by volunteers from our Family Life team. We hope you advantage of the resources, and we pray that God's Word takes centerstage in your home.