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RAISING GODLY GRANDCHILDREN

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

By

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Marla and I used to enjoy the TV series, "Little House on the Prairie." One of my favorite episodes was when Charles and Carolyn (the father and mother) left their little farm to travel to Milwaukee for a 25-year high school class reunion. They discovered that most of their old friends had become wealthy and sophisticated. The simple Charles and Carolyn just didn't fit in with the high-society, well-to-do crowd. But while their friends had it made financially and appeared successful, it also was apparent that they had unhappy marriages and empty lives. At the end of the program, Charles and Carolyn got off the stage coach back in front of their humble little farm house. As their children bounded out of the house, delighted to welcome them home with hugs, Charles remarked to Carolyn, "Now if that's not success, I don't know what is!"

"Amen!" In America, we wrongly view success in terms of money, fame, or career success. But God views success in terms of godly, loving family relationships. I want to talk about how to raise godly grandchildren. I say *grandchildren*, rather than just *children* because the real test of child rearing is the third generation, not just the second. Of course God wants us to raise godly children. But the true test of the process is whether or not our children raise godly children. If the parents are spiritually lukewarm, the children often will be stone cold. The grandchildren will be completely pagan.

So how can we, as Christian parents, raise up godly generations? Deuteronomy 6 has some answers (6:2, "grandsons"). Moses preached this to Israel as they prepared to enter the land of Canaan. They would face many temptations in the land. They would be surrounded by pagans. He says that ...

To raise up godly grandchildren you must love God fervently, teach your children diligently, and live in the world carefully.

The result is that it will be well with you (6:3) under God's blessing.

1. To raise up godly grandchildren, you must love God fervently (6:4-6).

The most important requirement for raising godly children and grandchildren is for you to have *personal reality* with God. You communicate what you are. You cannot pass on to your children what you do not possess. And, you will note, at the heart of personal reality with God is *solid theology*. Verse 4 is called the "Shema" (from the Hebrew, "Hear"). The call to hear implies that the following words have extreme significance and that we must grapple with applying them personally. What we are to hear is, "Yahweh is our God; Yahweh is one." It can also be rendered, "Yahweh is our God; Yahweh alone." It means that Yahweh and only Yahweh is the true and living God, and He alone is to be the object of our worship. As the Lord proclaims through Isaiah, "I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God" (Isa. 45:5). He is one God, not three gods, although He exists in three persons, as revealed several places in the Old Testament, and made explicit in the New.

The only way we come to know this only true God is by His revelation to us of Himself through His Word. In other words, the living and true God is not a composite of the speculations of the great religious thinkers down through the ages. Rather, *He is!* He has existed from eternity, unchangeable in His attributes, perfect in all His ways. He has been gracious to reveal Himself to us. This very chapter reveals a number of things about God: His unity and exclusivity (6:4, 13-14); His personality (we can have a love relationship with Him, 6:5); His grace to His chosen people, as seen in keeping His covenant (6:10-11); the reverence and worship due to Him (6:13); His jealousy and anger (6:15); His sovereignty over trials (6:16); His absolute authority (He commands us how to live, 6:17); His redemption of His people, as seen in the exodus (6:20-23); and, His goodness (6:10-11, 24).

What I'm getting at is that to rear godly offspring, we must love God fervently. But to love God is more than having wonderful feelings about some vague being who is partly the projection of our imagination. One well-known TV preacher says that he follows Jesus because Jesus is such a positive person. That's not the Jesus of the Bible! That's a "Jesus" of that man's imagination! To love

God, we must know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word. Thus at the root of raising godly generations is being people who are theologically grounded because we love God's Word and are steeped in it.

I'm seeking to counter the strong anti-doctrinal bias that permeates current American Christianity. We cannot raise up godly children unless we know God ourselves. We are deceived to think that we know God if we just sit around singing songs that make us feel good about God as we conceive Him to be, but if we aren't grounded in Scripture. Our kids need to see in our daily lives a love for God's Word which reveals God to us.

Coupled with and built upon solid theology is a *fervent, heart love* for the Lord. The idea of "heart, soul, and might" (Jesus adds "mind"--Matt. 22:37) is a total-person love for God. Every area of our being must be consumed with and subservient to this great quest of loving God. The love of God is not some ethereal, mystical thing. Nor is it just having warm feelings about God. As Jesus and the apostle John make clear, if you love God, you keep His commandments (John 14:21, 23; 15:10, 14; 1 John 5:3). And so the great goal of knowing God through His Word is a life of obedience motivated by God's great love for us as seen in His plan of redemption at the cross.

As soon as you mention obedience, many modern Christians think "legalism." Obedience can become legalistic when people do it outwardly to look good before others, but their hearts are far from devotion to God. Some of the Jews, for example, obeyed verses 8 and 9 quite literally. They wore these verses in little boxes strapped to their hands and foreheads, and they put them in a little box by their doors and on their gateposts. But they missed the sense of the passage, which is that the Word of God is to permeate every area of life. The results were ultimately disastrous, because it was the religious Pharisees, who outwardly kept the law to the letter, who rejected the Messiah who preached the need for inward reality.

There are Pharisees in the church today, who lay down rules that are not in the Bible in an attempt to get their kids to look like good Christians to the rest of the church. But they themselves are judgmental of those who don't meet their manmade standards, they

gossip, they're proud. That's not biblical obedience. Biblical obedience goes down to the heart level, where God's Word judges our sinful thoughts, motives, and attitudes. The obedience of faith means that out of love for the God who showed me mercy at the cross, I seek to be conformed to Christ in the inner man.

My spiritual heroes are men who blend solid theology with a fervent love for the Lord and who also preach holiness. John Calvin, known as a theologian, loved God. Read him and he will feed your soul! Jonathan Edwards is known as one of the most profound thinkers and theologians ever born in America, and yet he loved God fervently. He tells of a time when he was walking in the woods, meditating on God, when he became so caught up with the excellencies of God that for about an hour, as far as he could judge, he was in a flood of tears, weeping aloud, filled with an ardency of soul that he describes as "emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love Him with a holy and pure love; to trust in Him; to live upon Him; to serve and follow Him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity" (Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], p. 100).

Another such man was Martyn Lloyd-Jones, whose expositions of Scripture are theological meat. But he was no stuffy, academic scholar. In reaction to those who say that scholarship means that we must be calm and without passion, he exclaims, "Out with the suggestion! That is quenching the Spirit! The Apostle Paul breaks some of the rules of grammar; he interrupts his own argument. It is because of the fire! We are so decorous, we are so controlled, we do everything with such decency and order that there is no life, there is no warmth, there is no power! But that is not New Testament Christianity; ..." (*The Christian Warfare* [Baker], p. 273).

Good teachers always love their subject. When you sit under a good teacher, you get infected with his love of what he's teaching, even if it's a subject that at first bored you. If you want to teach your children to follow God, you've got to love God fervently. His Word must be on your heart. One reason many Christian parents see their kids grow up and not follow God is that the parents are lukewarm. They've lost their first love for God. Your kids can smell phoniness or hypocrisy, and it will not attract them to the

Savior. But if they see you walking with God daily, loving His Word, applying it to your life, and growing in holiness as you learn to obey Him, your love for God will be infectious. That's the foundation for Christian parents.

2. To raise up godly grandchildren you must teach your children diligently (6:7-9, 20-25).

The word "teach diligently" in Hebrew means literally to sharpen or whet. It may have the idea of repetition. Your teaching should penetrate your child deeply so that it has an effect on him (the NIV translates it "impress"). You come at it from every angle, at all times, and in every situation (6:7). As mentioned, the Hebrews came to take verses 8 and 9 literally. But the idea rather is that God's commandments are central in your life so that you're thinking about them every time you turn around. As we've seen, this is an overflow of your own walk with God. If God's Word is on your heart continually, then you'll be talking about it constantly with your kids.

Verse 7 assumes that you do, in fact, take the *time* to sit down in your house to *talk* with your family (with the TV off, I might add!). If you're so busy as a family that you don't all sit down to at least one meal a day on a regular basis, you need to change your schedules. At that time, you should read a portion of the Bible and spend a brief time in prayer. You may also want to sing. We also read the *Global Prayer Digest* and pray for the unreached people group mentioned. When your children are young, keep it short and stick to the story parts of the Bible. As they get older, you can venture into more didactic portions, like Romans. Even though we've done this for years, it still takes diligence to keep at it. The phone invariably rings when we're reading the Bible. Tell them to call back later! You've got to make it a priority and persevere in it.

Men, as the spiritual head of the family, it is your responsibility to make sure that this happens! Many Christian fathers wrongly think that child rearing is the wife's task. But most of the biblical commands are aimed at the father. This also means that if you're counting on the Sunday School to train your children, you're failing as a father. Sunday School is fine, but it's no substitute for family times in God's Word and prayer.

"When you *walk by the way*" implies teaching your kids when you go places together. Maybe it's just to the grocery store. Or maybe it's a family outing or a hike together. Those are choice opportunities to talk about the way other people act and why, and how Christians are to act, and to point out God's beauty through His creation. "When you *lie down*" points to bed time as a great opportunity to talk with your children and pray with them. "When you *rise up*" implies that mornings are another opportunity to teach your children. Teach them how to start the day off right with the Lord. Again, your example teaches a lot. If your kids are always grumpy in the morning, show them and tell them how to start off with a cheerful heart.

Binding God's commands on your *hand* means that you should teach your children God's ways by your actions. Putting them on your *forehead* means that your thoughts and attitudes should communicate God's truth. Putting them on the *doorposts* points to the home life as a setting for teaching God's truths. The *gate* points to civic or social life as another chance to talk about God. Discuss national and world events with your kids from God's perspective. Moses is saying that everything you think and do, from the bedroom to the business world, should be permeated with the Word of God. And you should teach your children how God's Word applies to every area of their lives as you live in a godly manner before them.

You need to answer your children's *questions* about God and the Christian life (6:20-25). When your son asks about spiritual things, you are not to say, "Go ask your mother!" The fathers were to explain the great deliverance which God brought about for His people. The exodus in the Old Testament is parallel to God's redemption at the cross in the New Testament. Dads, you should explain the great truths of salvation to your kids. The dad shouldn't respond to his children's questions by saying, "That's just the way we believe," or, "Because I said so!" Your child needs to understand the "why" behind things as he grows older. Notice, too, how the dad is to explain that God's commands are for our good (6:24). God gives many negative commands, but not because He is a heavenly killjoy. He cares for us and wants to bless us; obedience is the way to experience His blessing. So the godly father presents God's truth in this wholesome, helpful, explanatory way.

The Bible is not some pious book to display on the coffee table and dust off for births, weddings, and funerals. It's a book that applies to every aspect of life. It tells us what to think and how to act, from the most private to the most public details of our lives. We need to teach that to our kids and have the kind of open communication where we can talk about all these areas. If you want to raise up godly grandchildren, you must love God fervently and you must teach your children diligently. Finally,

3. If you want to raise up godly grandchildren, you must live in the world carefully (6:10-19).

Moses warns Israel of the spiritual dangers that they will face when they settle into Canaan. It's easy to drift into the ways of the world. I point out two safeguards from these verses:

(1) *Continually examine yourself.* "Watch yourself" (6:12)! There's a progression that sets in when times are good: Satisfaction (6:11); forget the Lord (6:12); follow other gods (6:14). There is a sense in which it's easier to trust the Lord when times are hard. If it was not legal to gather as a church, every one with the courage to come here would be actively trusting in the Lord. But since we have it pretty easy and live comfortably, you don't have to trust God to be here. Probably some of you are coasting spiritually. You've gotten lulled into the lifestyle of this world and are even worshiping some of its gods.

You say, "What? We're Christians! We don't worship false gods!" Really? What about the god of *affluence*? Are you giving generously to further God's work? What about the god of *pleasure*? Often this god comes in a 21-inch box that many of the Lord's people sit before for several hours a night while it spews filth into their homes. Their commitment to worship this god prevents them from studying their Bibles or praying or teaching their kids God's ways or serving the Lord. It's easy to forget the Lord and the great salvation He provided (6:13).

Or what about the god of *personal peace*? This is the god we follow for the benefits he gives. As things go well, you worship him. But when trials hit or hard problems come along, you abandon this god. Israel treated the living God this way at Massah (6:16; see Exod. 17:1-7). They grumbled because there wasn't any water

and wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt rather than endure this trial. How you handle trials teaches your kids a lot about God! You need to examine yourself continually.

(2) *Constantly focus on pleasing God.* "You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord" (6:18). Every aspect of life--my thoughts, attitudes, words, deeds, schedule, possessions--must be lived with a view toward pleasing the Lord. Your goal is to teach your kids to please God in all of their lives. They have to answer to God, and if you only teach them to obey you, it won't work when you're not around. If you continually examine yourself and constantly focus on pleasing God in light of His Word, you won't live like the Canaanites. You won't be seeking the things they spend their lives going after. You will be growing in godliness. When you sin against your family, you confess it and seek their forgiveness. Your kids will see the reality of your love for God. They will want to follow Him too.

Conclusion

Do solidly Christian homes make a difference? In 1677 an immoral man named Max Jukes married a licentious woman. Over 1,200 descendants of that marriage were studied. Of these, over 400 were physically wrecked by lives of debauchery; 310 were professional vagrants; 130 were sent to the penitentiary for an average of 13 years each, including 60 thieves and 7 murderers; 190 were public prostitutes; 100 were alcoholics. Of the 20 who learned a trade, 10 learned it in prison.

Another family studied was that of the godly Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, the great New England revival preacher and president of Princeton University. Over 300 of his descendants became ministers, missionaries, and theological professors. Over 100 were college presidents and professors. More than 100 were lawyers and judges. More than 60 were physicians. More than 60 were authors or editors of books and journals. Eighty-six were state senators, three were U.S. Congressmen, and one became Vice President of the United States (although he, Aaron Burr, Jr., did not follow the Lord). No reference was made of anyone spending time in jail or being on welfare.

Remember, no one ever got to be 65 and said, "I wish I'd spent more time on my business." But many lament that they neglected their families. True success is raising up godly children and grandchildren. To do it, you must love God fervently, teach your children diligently, and live in the world carefully. How is your walk with the Lord today? Is it vital and growing, or lukewarm? Are you diligently involved in teaching your children and grandchildren the things of God? Are you being careful to maintain a distinctive lifestyle and not get sucked into the world system? If you've been negligent, the Lord is rich in mercy if you will turn back to Him today.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the Bible promise for certain that if we raise our children properly they will not go astray?
2. What are some ways to guard ourselves from losing our first love for the Lord, or for restoring it if it's gone (see Rev. 2:4-5)?
3. Which is more important in child rearing: A parent's fervent love for God or proper techniques and methods?
4. How can a man who feels spiritually inadequate learn to lead his family and train his children in the things of God?

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