

The Christian Home

Lesson 7: Raising Children in the Lord: Teaching the Faith at Home -- Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Ephesians 6:4

There is a prayer that faithful Jews have whispered for more than three thousand years, morning and evening, the first words a child learns and the last words a dying man speaks: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” They call it the Shema, from the Hebrew word for ‘hear.’ It is the heartbeat of the Old Testament faith, and God placed it at the center of His instructions to a nation about to enter the Promised Land. But notice what comes right after this towering confession about who God is. Not a building project. Not a battle plan. A word about how to raise children: “You shall teach them diligently to your children.” God’s strategy for keeping His truth alive across the centuries ran straight through the family dinner table.

And look closely at the order, because it changes everything. Before God says a single word about teaching the children, He says, “these words ... shall be on your heart.” First the parent’s own heart, then the child’s. You cannot hand down a faith you do not hold. A child can spot the difference between a parent who knows the Lord and a parent who merely knows about Him, and that difference will preach louder than any lesson. The most important thing you will ever teach your children about God is what they see when they watch you love Him on an ordinary Tuesday.

Then God gets wonderfully practical. Where does this teaching happen? “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, everywhere and all the time. Faith is not meant to be quarantined to a religious hour once a week and outsourced to professionals. It is meant to be woven into the fabric of ordinary life, talked about in the car and at bedtime and over breakfast, until knowing and loving God feels as natural as breathing. The home, not the church building, is the front line of passing on the faith.

Centuries later, Paul says the same thing to fathers in the church: “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” It is a high and holy assignment, and Paul lays it especially at the feet of fathers, who are so often tempted to leave the spiritual work to mothers or to no one at all. This lesson is about the most important job description most of us will ever receive: not to make our children successful, comfortable, or even happy, but to do everything in our power to help them come to know, love, and follow the Lord for themselves. Read these verses slowly, and let God remind you what your home is really for.

Group Discussion: Many Christian families assume that the spiritual training of children mainly happens at the church building, in Bible classes and youth programs. Deuteronomy 6 puts the front line of teaching the faith in the home, woven through ordinary daily life. Why do you think

God designed it this way, and what is lost when families outsource the faith to an hour or two a week?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about your own walk with God, not your church attendance, but your actual love for the Lord. The Shema says God's words must be 'on your heart' before they can be taught to your children. Where is your own heart toward God right now, and how is that shaping (for good or ill) the people who watch you most closely?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Ephesians 6:4

Study Questions

1. The Shema declares, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4–5). Before any instruction about children, God commands wholehearted love for Himself. Why must this come first, and how does a parent's own love for God form the foundation of everything else in raising children?
2. You cannot give what you do not have. Be honest about your own heart: is your love for God whole and warm, or has it cooled into routine and duty? Where do you most need God to revive your own first love, knowing that the people around you are learning what it looks like to love Him by watching you?
3. God says, "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart," and only then, "you shall teach them diligently to your children" (vv. 6–7). What does this order, your own heart first, then your children, teach about the relationship between a parent's walk with God and a parent's ability to pass on the faith?
4. Children are far more shaped by what they catch than by what they are told. What are your children (or the young people who watch you) actually catching from your life about how much God matters, how you handle trouble, how you treat people, how you speak of the church? Where do you sense a gap between what you say and what you model?
5. God commands that His words be taught "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (v. 7). What does this picture of all-day, woven-in teaching reveal about how God intends faith to be passed on, and how is it different from merely formal or scheduled religious instruction?
6. Many parents unintentionally outsource their children's faith to the church building, a Christian school, or a youth group, while little is said about the Lord at home. Where have you been leaving the spiritual teaching to someone else? What is one specific way you could begin weaving the Lord into the ordinary moments of your home, the car, the table, bedtime, this week?
7. Paul writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Why do you think Paul addresses fathers in particular, and what does it mean to 'bring up' children in the instruction of the Lord without 'provoking them to anger'?

8. Fathers especially are tempted in two opposite directions: harsh, exasperating severity on one side, and passive disengagement that leaves the spiritual work to others on the other. Fathers, which way are you more tempted to lean, and what would it look like to step more fully and gently into your God-given role this week? (Mothers and others, where might you encourage and support this?)
9. The deepest goal of teaching the faith is not merely well-behaved or religiously informed children, but children who come to know, love, and obey the Lord for themselves, eventually making their own response to the gospel in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ. Since faith cannot be inherited automatically or forced, how should parents understand the difference between their part (faithful teaching, modeling, and prayer) and the child's part (a genuine, personal response to Christ)? How does this both relieve and sober a parent?
10. Look back across both passages, the call to love God wholly, the order of heart before household, the all-day weaving of faith into life, the father's charge, and the goal of a child's own faith. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about raising children in the Lord that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Timothy 3:14–15, Timothy acquainted from childhood with the sacred writings able to make him wise for salvation; Psalm 78:1–7, telling the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord so they set their hope in God; Joshua 24:15, the resolve that ‘as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’; Proverbs 22:6, training up a child in the way he should go; Acts 2:38–39, the gospel call and the promise that is ‘for you and for your children’