

## Will the Next Generation Follow God?

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

My wife Amy and I have been married for thirteen years. She is the oldest of ten kids. She entered into marriage having helped so much with her younger siblings that she wasn't all too eager to start a family of our own. Though I wanted kids, as the baby of my family, I entered into marriage not knowing how to share any of my stuff. My mom tells a story about how I counted my candy and wrote the number of remaining pieces on the bottom of the container to make sure no-one stole any when I wasn't looking. It's not hard to imagine that, at the time of getting married, the kind of sacrificial love it takes to raise a child was going to be a stretch for me.

Years passed, memories were made and I matured, a little. I clearly remember the day when my wife said to me, "I think my calling in life is to be a mom." The prospect of having kids was both wonderful and terrifying. With that sentence, we began the long, lonely and scary journey of infertility.

More years passed. Tears were cried. Hard decisions were made. Frustrations were expressed. We journeyed through the lowest of lows. We realized adoption would be our path to building our family. We jumped through all the hoops and then we waited. On a sunny August afternoon in 2010, I'm sitting in a meeting at FarmHouse, where I was an advisor, and I get a call and see Life Choice Ministries on the caller ID. I step out, answer the phone, and hear the words, "It's a good day to be a parent."

Fast forward three hours and my wife and I are standing at the hospital amidst a whirlwind of activity. Doctors are giving reports of possible complications and things we need to be aware of.... We're soaking all this information in and then it hits us. We know nothing about this baby! NOTHING. We just know, it's ours. We stood just outside an open door to a delivery room and a little after 5:00pm we heard the first cries of our child. Within seconds we're looking at our baby through the nursery window. The nurse brings our baby over, holds it up and mouths the words, "It's a boy." Through much emotion, my wife, more to herself than out loud says, "He's perfect."

Becoming parents, for us, both, took what seemed like forever and yet happened in an instant. In the days that followed I experienced so many emotions. One that stands out is fear. Would I be a good dad? Could I provide for him? Would he follow God?

In my role here at Faith my official title is Next Generation Pastor. The words "next generation" specifically refer to children from birth through eighteen years of age. In addition to asking the question, will my son follow God I also get to ask that same question on behalf of all the children whose families call Faith home. That's the question I want to pose today. Will the next generation follow God?

If you're not currently parenting, it might be tempting to tune out as a lot of today's message will be directed to parents. Please don't, you may have a big part to play in the

discipleship of the next generation. As you listen today be in prayer about what you're hearing. Ask God, "Do You have a part for me to play in the lives of the Next Generation?"

Some of you might be in the same shoes my wife and I were in when we were fighting infertility. It's a lonely, frustrating place. It can and often will make life miserable. To you I want to say I am so very sorry. Please reach out to me or the H.E.A.R.T. Ministry here at Faith. We want to support you in whatever ways we can. For others, your kids may be grown and you're thinking the ship has already sailed. You may be tempted to feel like a failure. Situations like these are so complex; keep fighting for your relationship with your kids. I've seen God redeem so much in my life. I pray he will do so in your situation.

Last week Brian Anderson taught through this same passage. If you missed it it's on our website. Today, we're focusing specifically on what it says in terms of how we should pass our faith on to the next generation. When asking the question, "Will the next generation follow God?," we find three principals in Deuteronomy 6 that I believe, if lived out, will help the next generation follow God. First, the passing on of faith begins with the our own pursuit of God.

## **You Can't Give Away what You Don't Have**

"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. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart."

Deuteronomy 6:4-6

You can make the case that this is one of the most important passages in all of the old testament. When someone challenged Jesus asking him, "What is the greatest commandment?" this is where He went. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

When we think about asking the question, "Will the next generation follow God?" This is where it begins. It begins with the heart. We have to ask, is God's Word on our hearts in the way that's described in this passage? As Steve has said before, the heart is the control center of our lives. If God's Word is on our hearts it can't help but impact how we live!

Kids are more perceptive than we give them credit for. If we claim to follow a God that is gracious, truthful, honest, compassionate, ever present and available but we're nothing like those things kids will see through us. I'm not saying we have to be perfect but we do need to be visibly engaged in our pursuit of God.

In college, I lived in FarmHouse fraternity and after every meeting we'd recite our object. One of the lines in our object reads, "And every member shall be honest with himself as with his brothers." I've found it helpful to apply that principle to my faith. When trying to

analyze my own spiritual health I ask, “Am I being honest with myself?” I ask God, “Am I being honest with You?”

At several points in my life and a fair bit over the last few years I haven’t liked the answer to those questions. It wasn’t as though I had walked away from my faith but there was a lack of depth. If you find yourself in those shoes here are a few ideas you might consider.

-Commit to regular worship attendance. This is hard for me. There are dozens of things every Sunday morning that I could be involved in that would keep me out of this room and they often do. Worship, just as we’re experiencing now, is a critical component of Christian growth.

-Commit to reading the Bible. Recently we’ve started publishing reading guides that correspond with the sermon series, you can find these at the welcome desk in the foyer. For me, I’m a technologically inclined person, I am a huge fan of reading on my kindle and phone; but when I read the Bible I’ve recently found great value in reading from this specific copy.

-Find a Christian community to connect with on a regular basis. This may be through a campus ministry or a life group here at Faith. This can be extremely hard for young families. If you are a young family and you want community but you feel like there are no good options reach out to me. Let’s work together, maybe we can create something awesome together.

When we think about the next generation, we can’t give what we don’t have. Be honest with yourself about your pursuit of God. “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart.”

## **We Must Teach Diligently**

The second principle is that we need to teach the Bible diligently to our kids. Picking up in verse 7 we read;

You shall teach them diligently to your children...

Deuteronomy 6:7a

The word “them” refers to the commandments that Moses is teaching. In our time, we might say it this way, “You shall teach the Bible diligently to your children.” Children can be taught and can comprehend what the Bible teaches.

You may hear that and think, I know it’s important to teach my kids the Bible then turn to the Bible and wonder where in the world to start? After all, there’s a lot in here! This is where we come in. The NextGen team devotes a lot of time to research and prayer asking God, “What is the very best thing we can teach our children right now?” Instead

of asking, "Where do I start?" I might suggest asking, "How can we take what our kids are already learning at church and maximize it's impact on our kids."

Many of you have heard me talk about the color Orange before. We use the color orange to remind us of the partnership that we hope to share with families. One of the churches primary jobs is to shine light on who God is and all He has done. We use the color yellow to represent that light. One of the primary jobs of the family is to reflect the love of God to their children. We use the color red to represent that love. Yellow plus red equals orange. This idea of extending their Sunday lessons into the home is Orange exemplified. When we work together we have the potential to have a much greater impact than when we work alone.

For example, every month our elementary aged students have a new virtue that they're learning about. This month's is Love. We define love as, "Choosing to treat others the way you want to be treated." Some parents are saying, "Amen!" Teach that to my kids. In addition to the monthly virtue every week has a bottom line, a way to live out that month's virtue. This week's is give to others who are in need. Let's break this down, if you have an elementary aged kid who regularly attends here at Faith they will get 12 virtues a year, from the Bible, and 50 ways to live those virtues out. If we only expose our kids to these virtues on Sunday mornings, some stick but many will fade. Could you imagine the impact it might have in the lives of our kids if they gained twelve new virtues every year and had opportunities to put those virtues into action? What might it change in our homes, in our schools and even in our community if our kids understood and lived out virtues like humility, grace and forgiveness?

Today, when you were dropping your kids off, on a table in the kid's wing atrium, you might have noticed we have printed materials of everything we typical send to you via email. Grab those resources when you're picking up your kids today and spend some time this week brainstorming how you might use these resources to teach the Bible diligently to your kids.

## **We Must Talk About God Often**

The third principle is that we must connect what we've taught to everyday life. We have to talk about what we experience God doing in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

Looking at verse 7 again;

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.

Deuteronomy 6:7

In addition to making sure we're diligently teaching the truths of the Bible to children we also need to make sure we're connecting those truths to everyday life. In this passage

we have two opposites. Talk about God's truths when you sit and when you walk. Talk about them when you lie down and when you rise. I can't think of anything in my day that is not encompassed by these actions. That was God's intention for this passage. Our faith needs to be a conversational faith that has both give and take with our kids.

For this to happen we absolutely have to be present in the life of a child. For a second I'm going to talk directly to parents and then after that I want to talk more broadly to all of us as the church.

Parents, currently, my wife and I have a six year old, a three year old, a two year old and we're planning on getting a puppy. Simply making it to bed time is a lot of work. The prospect of adding anything more to our schedule seems absurd! Yet, being conversational about the things of God does not actually require extra time. It simply requires that we're physically and mentally present, it happens very naturally when God's word is on our heart.

All too often we only talk about the things of God on Sunday mornings or around holidays. We get in the car after church we ask our kids how was it? What did you learn about and then, we're done. I am guilty of this. I fail to connect God to the everyday parts of life for my children. If we pay attention and are intentional God gives us opportunities to connect our faith to real life. Back to the virtue of love that we're learning about this month. Instead of asking my son how was school today I can ask him, "Hey, Mason did you see anyone who got left out of the game at recess today? How would you feel if that happened to you? What can you do tomorrow if it happens again? Then the next day I pick him up. Buddy, remember what we talked about last night did it happen again? Did you do what we talked about? Did you see how God used you? Isn't that incredible, let's praise Him, what an honor to be used by God! Sure, I know, it's not always going to work like that but sometimes it does. Even when it doesn't, though, you still connected your faith to everyday life.

One more thing about being present. I love my phone. It's a super useful tool. It's also a very distracting toy. I didn't think I had a problem with being distracted by my phone but multiple times my wife and our kids have said something to me and I had no idea what they said. It's hurtful to them. I'll have to stop them and ask can you back up? It doesn't have to be your phone. It could be the newspaper, a book, work; it can be anything really. As parents, we need to make sure we have time where we are physically and mentally present, with our kids and for our kids, connecting our faith to everyday life.

More broadly, to all of us as the church. We, collectively, have a responsibility to be present in the lives of the children God has trusted to our congregation. I'm not saying everyone in this room has to directly invest in the lives of children that aren't your own. But I think God wants a lot of you to do just that.

In this passage Moses is talking to families. As I mentioned earlier, if you don't have kids it might not feel like much of this is applicable to you. In the same way, it can cause those of us with kids to look to our own households and not be mindful of how God

might want to use us in the lives of the children who are not our own. If I were to study this passage independent of the rest of the Bible I could get behind both of those ideas. But when I turn to Jesus, Jesus has a way of giving us perspective, I can't help but think we're all responsible for the Next Generation. At the end of Matthew 12 Jesus is

While He (Jesus) was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Matthew 12:46,50

As part of the body of Christ we have become a spiritual family that reinforces what happens at home and fills in the gaps families have. You see it all over the new testament. Paul often refers to Timothy as his son and Jesus even said, "Let the children come to me." There are kids in this building who greatly need a Paul in their life. They need someone to show up for them and to be present for them because some of them don't have a mom at home, some of them don't have a dad at home. Some of them are scared because mom or dad is deployed and they need someone else to say, "I see you. I'm here for you."

Amy and I have a knack of raising strong willed, independent children. They don't always listen to what we say. Yet, there are a few people in their lives, people who we've strategically built relationships with that our kids will listen to. They love these people. These people matter to our kids. Down the road, our hope is that these people are able to say things to our kids in ways that our kids will never be able to hear from us.

You may sense God tugging on your heart to be one of those people in the lives of a few kids? If so, we need you. There's a card in the back of the seat in front of you. Take that card and fill it out, on the back check one of the boxes about serving in our Next Generation ministries then drop the card in the offering bag when it passes in a couple of minutes. Filling this card out is not a commitment it's just the start of an exploratory process by which we seek God with you to see if He has a call on your life to be a name in a child's story. To be the person that maybe someday, even my own son or one of my own daughters might say, "I believe in God because Ruth, Sarah, Emma, Robyn, Brandon believed in God and shined a light so bright that I could see who God was and what He had done for me. I believe because God used those people to show me Himself." That's our calling. I do not believe God would have trusted us with the hundreds of children He has if He did not also give us all the people we need to shine enough light on Him so that our children could clearly see Him.

Coming back to our our original question, "Will the next generation follow God?" I can't fully answer that. I can tell you, some of them already are, in incredible ways! I see so much potential in our kids. But to get an answer for the the original question I think we

have to ask a different different set of questions. I think we have ask, "Will we follow God? Will we teach the Bible diligently to our kids? Will we be present in their lives?"