

Sermon: Parenting
Text: Deuteronomy 6:1 – 25
Date: May 4, 2008
Place: Jesup First UMC

They took that little girl, all wrinkled and wiggling, and placed her in my arms and said: “Daddy, take your daughter and follow the nurse down to the nursery.” And there I went, with both sides of my head hitting the wall, scared to death to even breathe, and smiling from ear to ear. And when I stepped inside the doorway of the nursery, the nurse looked at my little girl and then, looked up to me and asked: “Daddy, how does it feel to see your heart outside of your chest?”

I’ve had that experience three times as a daddy and many times as a pastor. I’ve taken those little children into my arms, looked into those squinting eyes, and stood in awe of the handiwork of God as I counted 10 little fingers and 10 little toes. I want to tell you: there’s not a greater privilege than this.

You’ve had that same privilege. When mama and daddy brought their children to the altar and stood before God and the congregation, making solemn promises to God, you were there to affirm them in their commitment and to commit yourself to the highest ideals of the Christian life. Oh what a privilege we have to be involved in the lives of children.

And with that privilege, there comes a great responsibility, a responsibility to mold and shape their lives for the Kingdom of God. And so, this morning, on this day when we celebrate the School of Discovery, I want us to reflect on five things that you and I can do, as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, and friends, to shape the lives of our children. We all want our children to grow up to be well-adjusted, mature, and godly adults. So, how does that happen?

1. WE MUST KNOW GOD OURSELVES.

In verses 1 and 2, Moses says: “Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the Lord your God charged me to teach you ... so that you and your children and your children’s children, may fear the Lord all the days of your life.”

If you want to be a good parent, if you want to raise godly children, you must learn to follow God yourself. You can’t pass on to your kids what you do not have yourself. You can’t teach your kids the difference between right and wrong, if you don’t know it yourself. Listen: you cannot lead someone to a place you have never been yourself.

If you want your kids to love the Lord, if you want your kids to have a personal relationship with Jesus, then friends, look at yourself first.

The first key to effective parenting is to know God yourself.

2. WE MUST LIVE WHAT WE PROFESS!

Not only are we to know God and His Word ourselves, but we must live what we believe. Moses says: “God wants me to teach you so that you might obey all his decrees and commandments.”

Now, can I just take a minute and speak to the young folks here, well maybe I need to speak to everybody, but there’s something that troubles me.

Kids, your parents are not perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect person or a perfect parent. Parents make mistakes; parents blow it; parents lose their tempers; parents do things they shouldn't. We aren't perfect so stop expecting perfection.

Now, having said that, I'll never forget the day Sandy came to my office. I was Sandy's youth pastor and she was having trouble at home. And I said: "*Sandy, I don't understand. You've got it made. You have godly parents who love God and love you. What more could you want?*" And Sandy said: "*Tucker, you don't know my parents ... the people you see at Church aren't the people I live with.*"

Listen friends, if you're going to preach it, you better be prepared to live it, because your children will be the first to notice the difference. If you're one way at Church and another way at home, your kids will see it. If you fuss and fight all the way to Church and then walk in with a smile on your face, your kids will learn to do it too.

And guess what? If you teach honesty and then they see it lived out in your life, that's what they'll learn. If you teach love and then, they experience it from you and see you loving others, that's what they'll learn. If you teach forgiveness and then, they see you forgiving others, that's what they'll learn. You see, most of the time, what you do is a far more important sermon than what you say.

The second key to effective parenting is living what you believe.

3. WE MUST TEACH WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED.

Verse 6 says: "*Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.*" Now, many times, we try to separate things; we say: "*This is when we learn about God*" and "*This is when we just live our normal lives.*" But I want to remind you: all of life is a classroom; the whole earth is full of the glory of God.

One day, we drove down to St. Simon's Island and we went out and sat down on the pier, looking out over the water toward the sunset. And Lori called the kids over and said: "*Hey kids, look at that beautiful sunset.*" And the kids said: "*Wow!*" And I said, "*Yep, my daddy did that just for me.*" It was just a single moment in time, but we took that moment to teach the kids about the awesomeness and the creativity of God.

Yes, we need to teach our kids the Word of God. Yes, we need to have prayer time and Bible Story time, but we need to learn to take advantage of those "*Wow Moments*". Take every opportunity to tell them about the love of God in Christ Jesus! How God loved them so much that He sent Jesus to die for them!

The third key to effective parenting is teaching what we've learned!

4. WE MUST PROTECT WHAT WE'VE BEEN GIVEN!

In verses 10 – 19, Moses teaches the importance of guarding what God has given. For Israel, God has given freedom and a new land, flowing with milk and honey. Verse 14 says: "*Do not follow other gods ... because the Lord your God ... is a jealous God.*"

You know, there are so many distractions today. We have things that no one would have even dreamed of a few generations ago. We've come so far and God has given us so much, but not everything we have is good. And sometimes, the very things that we bring into our homes for the good of the family end of destroying the family.

We must stand on guard, guarding ourselves and especially our children. There are some things your children do not need to do. There are some things your children do not need to have. There are some places your children do not need to go. Just because everybody else has it, or does it, or goes there, doesn't mean God's children have to have it, do it, or go there.

Listen, the Bible says Satan is like a roaring lion, roaming to and fro seeking whom he may devour. And I believe he is preying on our children and our families. We need to get back to the basics. We need to guard our hearts and our kids from the enemy.

The fourth key to effective parenting is protecting what we've been given!

5. WE MUST PREPARE FOR THE TOUGH TIMES.

In verse 20, Moses begins to explain: "*When your kids ask why ... this is what you should tell them.*" Now, sometimes those "*why*" questions are innocent, but not always. Someday your children might come and say, "*Why? ... Why do we have to go to Church every Sunday? ... Why do we have to have a family devotional? ... Why can't I just be like everybody else?*" And you better be prepared.

Well, how do you prepare for the tough times? ***First, discipline them when they are young.*** Proverbs 13:24 says: "***Those who love their children are diligent to discipline them.***" Now, this isn't talking about beating your children; it isn't even necessarily talking about whipping your children, but every child, every person, needs discipline. That's something many kids in our community are missing. They're out there, running wild, and some of them have never been taught any better. Discipline when they are young.

Second, pray for them every chance you get. Pray for them and pray with them. Ask God to put a hedge of protection around them. Ask God to keep them pure. Ask God to reveal Himself to them. Ask God to use them in great and wonderful ways. Ask God to send them just the right person to date or to marry. Pray and keep on praying. Pray Until Something Happens. That's how you prepare for the tough times.

The fifth key to effective parenting is preparing for the tough times.

One day, a lady was pushing her buggy through the store when she heard a little boy screaming. And the further she went, the louder the boy got. And finally, she heard the boy's daddy whispering, "*Keep calm, George. Don't get excited, George. Don't yell, George*" over and over again. And finally, the lady went up to the man and said: "*Young man, you are to be commended for your patience with little George here.*" And the man turned to her and said: "*Ma'am, I'm George.*"

You know what? Parenting takes a lot of patience. It is the greatest privilege in the world, but it's also the greatest responsibility. Will you allow me to pray for you as you fulfill God's calling on your life?