



Passing the Baton of Faith
Deuteronomy 6

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At the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, the American 4x100 relay team featured four of the fastest men in the world. The foursome won the World Championship months earlier and were favored to win Olympic gold. But during a qualifying heat, leading into the final turn, they fumbled the exchange and the baton fell to the track. The dream of Olympic gold was over. Then 25 minutes later, the same thing happened to the US women's relay team. Eleven other relay teams dropped the baton and failed to qualify.

Think about that in the context of family. The Hebrew Scripture, what we call the Old Testament, talks about passing the baton of faith. "Tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done ... That the generation to come might know ... That they should put their confidence in God" (Psalm 78:4, 6, 7). ***The ultimate goal of family is to pass the baton of faith to the next generation.***

With each birth, genes pass from one generation to the next. And so it should be with faith. Parents are responsible to pass the baton of faith to the next generation. There's more to parenting than potty training or teaching your kid to ride a bike. The ultimate goal of parenting is to help your children believe in Jesus, to love Him, and to follow Him. ***The ultimate goal of family is to pass the baton of faith to the next generation.***

Therefore, parents, be careful not to drop the baton. ***If you want your children to follow in God's footsteps, then you've got to follow in God's footsteps. If you want your children to follow in God's footsteps, you've got to love God with all your heart, teach by the way you live, and create an environment in which they can't miss it.***

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

If you want your children to follow in God's footsteps, they have to see you ***love God with all your heart.*** Moses said to Hebrew parents, "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 6:5-6, ESV).¹ To pass the baton of faith to your children, you, as a parent, must love God with all your heart.

What does that mean? It means loving your Creator, loving the one who gives life. It means loving your heavenly Father, the one who loves you the most. It means loving the one who forgives us time and time again, the one who hears us and answers our prayers, the one who comforts us when we hurt, and the one who guides us when we are confused.

How can you not love a God like that "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"?

To love God "with all your heart" is to give Him your heart's affection. There can be no one else and nothing else that captures your heart like God. It's giving Him first place in your soul. The Hebrew word for soul means breath.² To love God "with all your soul" is to love Him with

every breath you take. To love God “with all your might” is to follow Him and obey Him with every ounce of strength and resolve and determination you have.

Three times the passage says “with all.” “With all” means with everything you’ve got. Not 50%, not 75%, not 95%, but 100%. When God loved us, He held nothing back. To love God with all your heart means holding nothing back.

If you want your children to follow in God’s footsteps, as parents, you’ve got to love God with all your heart.

TEACH BY THE WAY YOU LIVE

You’ve got to *teach by the way you live*. Again, Moses said to Hebrew parents, “You shall teach them (the teachings of God) 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 up” (Deuteronomy 6:7, ESV).

Ancient rabbis instructed a father to “circumcise his son, teach him the Torah, find him a wife, teach him a trade, and teach him to swim.”³ I think there’s more to Deuteronomy 6 than that. Moses was calling parents to model faith, to be an example. To teach by the way you live.

It says, “Teach them diligently” (ESV, NAS). Other English versions say, “Impress them on your children” (NIV), and “repeat them again and again” (NLT). The Hebrew word for “teach diligently” means to sharpen.⁴ This word was used to describe sharpening swords for battle.⁵ When a Hebrew parent heard the phrase “teach diligently,” the image of sharpening a sword and preparing for battle came to mind. Parents sensed the urgency of preparing their children to enter the world, much like soldiers entering battle. As parents, we are to sharpen the hearts and the minds of our children as we send them into the world.

And how do we do that? Verse 7 says parents are to – look at the three verbs – “teach ... talk ... walk” their faith. It’s formal and informal, scheduled and spontaneous, verbal and visual. You’ve got to teach your faith to your children. You’ve got to talk about it. You’ve got to walk it, and show them what it looks like to love God with all your heart.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT

[Slide] Another thing you must do is *create an environment in which your children can’t miss it*. Moses said to Hebrew parents, “You shall bind them” – referring to God’s teachings – “as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:8-9, ESV). Let me explain the history of that.

Every Jewish man was required to bind God’s words to his head and to his house. When a Jewish man prayed, he would tie a little box to his forehead, called a phylactery, which contained tiny scrolls of Scripture of Deuteronomy 6. A similar box, called a mezuzah, containing tiny scrolls of Scripture of Deuteronomy 6, was nailed to the doorframe of every Jewish house. Phylacteries

and mezuzah were physical reminders of God’s design for the family. Fathers literally tied Deuteronomy 6 on their head and nailed it to their house to show that God was Lord of their family.

Now, I don’t think verse 9 is saying that all we have to do is hang a Bible verse on the wall and our children will follow Jesus. But I do believe that verse 9 is urging us to create an environment where God’s ways are so prominent that our children can’t miss it.

Every time a Jewish child walked through the door, they passed by the mezuzah reminding them that God was the Lord of their home. Every time a Jewish child observed their father in prayer, they could see the phylactery on his forehead reminding them that God was the Lord of their father. So, somehow, every time your child walks through the door of your house, they should be reminded that God is the Lord of your home. Every time your child looks at you in the face they should be reminded that the God is the Lord of you. You’ve got to create an environment in which your children can’t miss it.

PASSION OF OUR PASTORS

I’ve asked three of our pastors to come up and share their passion for families. Ashley Brewer is our Preschool Pastor, Patty Evans is our Children’s Pastor, and Dusty Brewer is our Student Pastor. These are three stars in our church. And their job is to build the faith of the next generation. Their job is to help you, as parents, pass the baton of faith to your children. So, I wanted to give them a few minutes to share their passion about helping all our kids love God and follow Jesus. [\[Watch video for their comments\]](#)

CONCLUSION

If you want your children to follow in God’s footsteps, you’ve got to love God with all your heart, teach by the way you live, and create an environment in which they can’t miss it.

NOTES

¹ Twice a day, when waking up and when going to bed, a devout Jew would recite the Shema. This passage summarized what was most important in their faith. It declared the Hebrew God as the one and only God. And it commanded a person to love God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength.

² The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. See TWOT #1395, Strong’s #5315.

³ Ronald H. Isaacs, *Beginnings – Raising A Jewish Child: Early Year* (United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Commission on Jewish Education), excerpt in an article “Jewish Obligations of Parents to Their Children.”

⁴ The Hebrew word is *shanan*. See TWOT #2422, Strong’s #8150.

⁵ See Deuteronomy 32:41, Isaiah 5:28, Psalm 45:6.