



**For the Children's Sake**  
**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 for the fastest relay team in the world. Then 25 minutes later, the same thing happened to the women's relay team. Eleven other relay teams dropped the baton and failed to qualify.

Think about that in the context of family. Psalm 78 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, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (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 from one generation to the next. There's more to parenting than potty training and 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 Apostle John stated a spiritual truth that should be the heart of every parent. He said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4, ESV).

***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.

In Deuteronomy 6, the Lord outlined foundational principles for the family. The family was the center of Hebrew culture. So goes the family, so goes the culture. If Israel listened, if families followed His design, He promised "all will go well with you ... you will have many children ... (and you will live) in a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deuteronomy 6:3, NLT). To those who follow His design for the family, He promises blessing.

Family may be hard for you right now, broken, and filled with disappointment. You feel like you're doing the best you can to be a good parent, yet family may be a struggle right now. Let me encourage you, don't give up, and don't give up on God. I urge you to lean on Him. Keep being faithful and trust Him to be faithful as well. God has a plan and He wants to bless your family.

The first step to building a spiritually vibrant home is for you, the parent, to have a spiritually vibrant walk with God. It starts with you.

Parents, more often than not, your family is going to look like you. Your children have your eyes, your smile, and your mannerisms. They got those things from you. And their faith? Hopefully, they're going to get that from you too. So, ***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

Deuteronomy 6 is called the Shema, which means “hear.” “Hear, O Israel.” Listen up parents! The next generation needs role models. If you want your children to follow in God’s footsteps, then they have to see you *love God with all your heart*. “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).<sup>1</sup>

To pass the baton of faith to your children, you, as a parent, must know God, love God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and live like Jesus. You’ve got to love God with all your heart.

To “love the Lord your God” is to love your Creator, to love the one who gives life and revere the one who takes life. To “love the Lord your God” is to love the one who has say over your life. To “love the Lord your God” is to love your heavenly Father. To “love the Lord your God” is to love 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”? For God to have first place in your family, He must have first place in your heart.

To love God “with all your heart” is to give Him your heart’s affection. The heart is the seat of emotion. There can be no one else and nothing else that captures your heart like God. It’s giving God first place in your soul. The Hebrew word for soul means breath.<sup>2</sup> To love God “with all your soul” is to love Him with every breath you take. To love God “with all your might” is give Him every ounce of strength and resolve and determination you have.

The point is simple. Love God with all of your being. Completely. Absolutely. “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

If you want your children to follow in God’s footsteps, you’ve got to *teach by the way you live*. “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 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.

This is such an important phrase. Parents, you have to get this. “Teach them diligently” (ESV, NAS). Other versions say, “Impress them on your children” (NIV) and “repeat them again

and again” (NLT). The Hebrew word for “teach diligently” means to sharpen.<sup>4</sup> This word was used to describe sharpening swords for battle.<sup>5</sup> When a Hebrew parent heard the phrase “teach diligently,” that image would have come to mind. They would have sensed the urgency of preparing their children to enter the world, much like soldiers entering battle. Parents were to sharpen the minds and hearts of their children just as soldiers sharpen their swords.

And how do we do that? Verse 7 says parents are to “teach” and to “talk” about their faith. It’s both formal and informal, scheduled and spontaneous, verbal and visual. Because most families are too busy and too tired to make spiritual formation a priority at home, Reggie Joiner makes verse 7 very practical by showing us how we can redeem pockets of time for spiritual conversations with our children.<sup>6</sup>

- **“When you sit in your house”** – Talk to your children about God when you’re sitting around the house. One of best times to do this is **MEAL TIME**. We had two sons and meal time was like two pigs at a feeding trough, with a lot of grunting going on. But think about it. Meal time is an opportunity for “focused discussion.” It allows time for you to be a teacher, and day after day and meal after meal, to establish core values in your children. I believe the most impactful activity you can do as a family is regular meal times during the week.
- **“When you walk by the way”** – Talk to your children about God during **DRIVE TIME**. We live in our cars; going to school, going to soccer, going everywhere. Use that time for “informal dialogue.” It’s a time for casual conversation. Be a friend and help your child process life. There’s a lot of time to talk when you’re stuck in traffic.
- **“When you lie down”** – Talk to your children about God at **BED TIME**. We do this better when our children are young, but teenagers need this too. They don’t need us to tuck them into bed, but your teenager would benefit if you ended the day with “intimate conversation.” Be a counselor and listen to your child’s heart.
- **“And when you rise up”** – Talk to your children about God in the **MORNING TIME**. Kathy was the only one morning person in our family. So, the boys and I were not that talkative in the mornings. So, if you’re the morning person, keep it brief. But don’t miss the chance to send your kids off for the day with “encouraging words.” Be a coach and inspire your child with a sense of purpose.

Parents, these are four strategic times during the day when you can influence your children. You’ve got to take advantage of specific times to “teach” and to “talk” to your children about God.

### CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT

Another thing you must do is ***create an environment in which your children can’t miss it***. Listen to Moses’ instruction to Hebrew parents. “You shall bind them” – referring to God’s commands – “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).

Every Jewish man was required to bind God’s words to his head and to his house. Jewish men would tie a little box to their forehead, called a phylactery, which contained tiny scrolls of Scripture from the Shema. A similar box, called a mezuzah, also containing tiny scrolls of Scripture

from 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 on their head and nailed it to their house. By attaching Scripture to their head and to the door of their house, a Jewish parent was giving God a place of prominence in the home.

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. How?

1. ***Create an environment in which your children see you put God first.*** A study of American families revealed the greatest threats to family life today. And on top of the list were not divorce, media, poverty, or substance abuse. The greatest threat to the family was busyness. Thom Rainer points out that it's not that we're doing bad things; it's that we're doing too many things. A trend all church leaders are grieving about is less and less family attendance to church. Families fill up their calendars with so many activities, that church becomes secondary. So many families today attend church only 1-2 times a month. Parents, think of the ramifications of that. Your children need to see you put God first.
2. ***Create an environment in which your children see the importance of spiritual disciplines.*** The spiritual disciplines of the word, prayer, repentance, faith, and submission, should be present in every Christian's life, and especially in every parent's life. Your children have got to see how important the Bible is to you. From reading Bible stories to them when they are young to hearing you share what you're learning when they are teens, you've got to model that the Bible is important to you. The same goes for prayer and the other spiritual disciplines.
3. ***Create an environment in which your children receive love, love, and more love.*** 1 Peter 4:8 says, "love covers a multitude of sins." I leaned on that verse so many times as a parent. Making large deposits of love into your child's heart will counter many of your parenting regrets. As they see how much you love them, it will point to how much God loves them.
4. ***Create an environment in which your children see grace.*** In order to make it in life, to make relationships work, every one of us must learn to forgive. And the best place for your children to learn grace is in the home. Model what it looks like to say "I'm sorry." And model what it looks like to grant forgiveness. If you do that, your children will also learn how God forgives.
5. ***Create an environment in which your children learn respect.*** Insist that your children respect you and obey you. I never counted to my boys. "I'm going to give you to the count of three to do what I say. One ... two ..." I gave my boys to the count of "now"! Insist that your children respect you, and respect other people, especially other adults

and those in authority. Why respect? Learning to respect you, and others in authority, will teach them how to respect God and to submit to the leadership of Jesus.

6. ***Create an environment in which your children see other role models.*** Be a part of a community with other families so your children can see what authentic faith looks like. That's why the church is so important. I'm so glad that my sons had other men and women in their lives as role models; teachers, church leaders, coaches, and friends. To this day, both of my sons will mention men and women that impacted their lives.
7. ***Create an environment in which your children see how you handle life.*** Stress is a part of life. Conflict is a part of life. And so is disappointment. Your children will learn how to handle these things by watching how you handle these things. My sons have seen me get down, and they've also heard me pray for God's help. Show your children how to lean on God, and how to trust God when life is hard and when life doesn't go your way.
8. ***Create an environment in which your children learn about marriage.*** The greatest gift you can give your children is a healthy marriage. Even if you're divorced, you can still point your children to God's best. You've got to teach your children God's plan for marriage and the sacred commitment between a husband and wife. Both of our boys have said that the best thing we modeled for them was a healthy marriage. It wasn't perfect, but we wanted our sons to know that we loved each other and to show them what God had for them one day.

## CONCLUSION

***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.***

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. See TWOT #1395, Strong's #5315.

<sup>3</sup> 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.”

<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word is *shanan*. See TWOT #2422, Strong's #8150.

<sup>5</sup> See Deuteronomy 32:41, Isaiah 5:28, Psalm 45:6.

<sup>6</sup> Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), page 72.