

Blessing Families

Our Family Values:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Joshua 24:14-15

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Today is Mother's Day, a day when our nation honors the position of motherhood and the people who serve in it. Our church, as a denominational family, calls this Sunday *the Festival of the Christian Home*. For us, it is a day set aside to not only honor the women who serve as mothers, but also to specifically support the formation and development of Christian homes.

Christian homes come in such variety. They may be a small apartment housing a single young adult. They may be a husband and wife with foster children. They may be a home where children are shared between divorced spouses, or one where step-parents are present. A Christian home may consist of three generations: mom, dad, children and grandparents, or it may be a memory-packed house with an elderly widow or widower. Whatever the case, Christian homes are the primary places where God develops his children. I've come to believe that, and so have the elected leadership of Bethany. Consequently, we embrace the following as a critical value and core activity for our fellowship. Read it with me:

Blessing Families: We value families (or households) as God's primary means of providing for, protecting and developing people (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Joshua 24:14-15).

Now turn with me to Deuteronomy 6. The most quoted passage of Scripture among Christians is John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*" The most quoted passage of

Scripture in the Jewish faith is Deuteronomy 6:4. It is called the *Shama'*: ***“Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One.”*** It continues: ***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”*** What immediately follow these words are instructions on how to make that happen.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, NIV)

Did you notice how the commands and truths of God are not meant to be left in a book on a shelf? They're not instructed to decorate a synagogue, temple or church building. The place where the word of God is to be most visible and most audible is where? It is the home. The home is the place where we grow lean or we grow fat. The home is the place where we grow strong or we grow weak. The home is the place where we learn our values, develop our habits, raise our children and live with our neighbors. The home is the primary place where the word of God is to be visible and audible, and therefore affect our hearts.

Some years ago, I learned of a powerful renewal movement sweeping the suburbs of Rome. Some Catholic priests decided that parents were responsible for the religious education of their children. They refused to hold classes for the children and youth. Instead, they insisted that they would only work with the parents who in turn would impart the faith to their children. There was resistance to this idea, but the priests were stubborn and wouldn't budge. Soon parents found themselves in classes with the local priests learning the faith and learning how to share it with their children. What followed was amazing! The parents' hearts, activities and lives were changing and creating children and youth filled with passion for Christ. Parents were networking with other parents and building support systems of faith for themselves and their

families. Youth experienced spiritual bonds with their parents and with the youth and families in the network their parents organized. The change in life and lifestyle was so radical and profound that the Church in Rome is changing dramatically and so is the society where these families live.

These priests tapped into God's way of raising people by invading with faith the thinking, activities and habits of parents. They helped parents make a critical choice voiced by Joshua. This great leader, who led Israel into the Promised Land and overcame their enemies, challenged his countryman: "*choose this day whom you shall serve, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*" What Joshua understood and these Roman parents learned is that they have the greatest influence on their children's lives.

I spent much of this past week in Little Rock, Arkansas. My days were filled with studies on marriage and parenting. My evenings gave me an opportunity to relate with my son and daughter-in-law. I took long walks with them, and I also enjoyed sporting activities and being annihilated in table games. Most of all, I got to listen, talk and observe what is important to a son I invested so much of my life in, and what is important to his wife. (I'm humbled and grateful for the tremendous investment so many of you made in my child.)

As I watched them, I quite naturally evaluated what I saw in light of the material I had just studied. I realized that even though I had made a lot of mistakes, and I would do a number of things differently, I could see in this young couple many of the values we gave ourselves to. Even so, I wished as a family I had written down our critical values, posted them and had each family member agree to live by them. I wish I had done what Bethany has now done. Although it is an awkward process and we are uncertain how to get everyone of you to approve a set of values, it so important that we order and discipline our lives based on common values. If we don't, there is little chance we will move together and transmit those values to others. Indeed,

many Christian parents are shocked by the values and beliefs their children now hold. They realize that someone else got to the hearts and minds of their children.

We often associate this with the post-high school period; however, current studies reveal something else. They reveal that we are losing our children while they are in our homes. The parenting skills required to raise godly children today are different than when I started out as a parent almost three decades ago. The culture is much more hostile to faith in Christ, and more profoundly infiltrates our everyday life. Indeed, text messages, cell phones, computers, televisions, iPods and a host of other media are authoring the thoughts, emotions and habits of our homes. Families are meant to be relationally centered, rather than technology centered. However, the average child spends far more time with technology than their family members.

The Bible says: ***“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*** (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV) The question is who through technology is training up our children? Whose voice is heard and whose values are imparted? With the challenge of an increasingly hostile and infiltrating culture, Christian parenting today requires great sacrifice... perhaps equal to the pioneers who settled this nation. There are a number of skills and principles we parents must learn and embrace so that godly values become the core values of our homes. We will be holding some parent sessions at Bethany, and I will address this at a special parent meeting between worship services next Sunday. However, there is another question: Who will support the parents and affirm the values of faith they want their children and youth to embrace?

All Christian believers are called to cultivate lives that advance Jesus' mission in a world where it is opposed. The evil one has received a lot of authority and power to create misery and pain. I believe all of us would be removed from this world and spared its pain when we first

reconciled with God if we each didn't have an enormously important mission. Jesus prayed for his disciples:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (John 17:15-16, 18, NIV)

You have a mission. You have a mission to your generation and to the generation that follows you. You are here to develop your faith in difficult circumstances, to develop a godly home and impact the homes being grown around you. You have a call to reconcile with God and then invest in the next generation. Jesus took the time to bless the children, so as his disciple you can do that too. Are the children and youth in your church family important to you? Have you let them know that? Do you act as if they are important to you? As you are led by his Spirit, you will invest in children. You will love young people. You will not separate your life from them. You'll find ways to invest in them. You'll find ways to assist and support their parents. Your legacy is the next generation.

Now hear this. Parents, we are rallying to your support. Will you receive it? Parents and heads every household, have you defined in writing what values will guide your daily conduct and determine your priorities? Will you do so now? For those of you who are heads of household, will you solicit the agreement of the rest of your family? Will you support one another and hold one another accountable? Let this Mother's Day be the birth of a new day where God's Spirit lives and visibly leads the activities of your home.