

Inspiring Faith That Lasts

Talk for Penrallt Baptist Church, Sunday Morning 22nd March 2020

Today we are focusing on Deuteronomy Chapter 11. Deuteronomy is Moses' final word to the Israelites after leading them for 40 years.

The great Moses was about to leave his people as they entered this new stage of life. He had:

- Freed them from captivity by challenging the super power of the day
- Led them through the red sea
- Encountered God on Mount Sinai and received the 10 commandments
- Led them through the wilderness, where they witnessed multiple miracles.

Moses was giving this speech as the people were living between realities:

- Looking back – to how they had been rescued from slavery in Egypt
- Looking forward – to the promised land that awaited

However the younger generation had not seen first hand all that God had done and provided.

Deuteronomy 11 v2-7 says:

Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the Lord your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the Lord brought lasting ruin on them. It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the wilderness until you arrived at this place, and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the Lord has done.

We face the same challenges today. If we want our children to experience God for themselves we need to show them and tell them what we have witnessed God doing in our lives. This can be more challenging than it sounds. For the Israelites this was a bit like when we try to describe to our children what the world was like before mobile phones or google.

Research shows that at present only around 50% of children brought up in Christian homes still follow their faith as adults. It's our job to change that.

I want to be clear that this is not just for parents. Although these commands clearly are for parents it was also true for the whole Israelite community. In Luke 2 v 43, which was 1000's of years later we read about Jesus getting left behind in Jerusalem by his parents when they had gone back to Nazareth.

'After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it'

These are verses I find reassuring on a bad parenting day. At least I haven't lost my child and left them in a different town, although some of you will have heard of my parenting fail at Christmas time when I did leave Finley's birthday gifts in a different town to what he would be in for his birthday!! But actually this is not an example of bad parenting, it shows the Israelites shared a real sense of community where they looked out for one another. Jesus' parents had just assumed he was within the wider group.

In our world today where grandparents and relatives often live in different areas, and many parents lead busy lives, there is a need for more support for parents in helping them with their children. We

can all have a part to play in raising the next generation to have their own personal faith in Jesus. So your first challenge of the morning is to consider which parents and carers can you intentionally encourage and support as they nurture their children's faith?

Make the Gospel the centre of our message to our children

When we read Deuteronomy 9-10 we see how time and time again the Israelites were rebellious and failed to keep God's laws, and yet by his grace had brought them to the border of the promise land. It is in these chapters that we see the character of God, his holiness but also his grace.

Today we live under a new covenant. We don't need to earn God's favour by keeping his commands but we respond to the love of God expressed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, by saying thank you with our lives.

The danger is we can think of the Christian faith as lots of legalistic laws to follow and that is what we teach our children. But really, the Christian faith is living in response to God's love for us. Love and obedience go hand in hand.

If I gave you a choice of homes to live in and one had a sign on the door that was a list of rules around your behaviour and conduct, some of which were quite challenging to keep to and the other house had a notice on the door about the unconditional love that you would experience once you entered, that there was no test to pass before entering and nothing you could do would cause you to be evicted. The notice also lets you know that there are house rules (the same rules as in house 1) that all inhabitants strive to keep and every person fails but the rest of the family pick them up and support them through love and encouragement to try again and never remind them of the time they failed. Which house would you want to move in to? Once you're in the house, you have joined the family and you see how others are living and experiencing the unconditional love how much more likely are you to strive to please the master of the house.

Therefore I believe the consistent and persistent delivery of the gospel message that Jesus died on the cross for each and every one of us is the first and vital key to inspiring a faith that lasts in the next generation.

Moses gives some commands in Deuteronomy 11 v 18-21 that we are going to try and unpack today. These verses come with ancient wisdom that might help us all, as the church, change that statistic of how many of our young people keep on their faith journey as they move into adulthood.

Deuteronomy 11 v 18-21

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

BEING MARINATED IN GOD'S WORD

Crisp Game: Go and get a packet of crisps and eat one (or put some jam on a slice of bread).

Food takes on the flavours of the herbs and spices it is marinated in, or the topping it is covered with. Moses' first command is to marinate ourselves in the word of God. Deuteronomy 11v 18 says "*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*"

If we are going to live obediently to the scriptures ourselves and teach them to our children then we have to actually know them ourselves.

Moses gave some practical ideas for how this may be done. In verse 18 it says “*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*”

This was an ancient Hebrew practice of literally wearing scripture through square leather box holding inscriptions of the commandments on their heads and arms. But really it's about making scripture visible, so what might that look like for you and me?

Maybe display Bible verse in your home, start the day reflecting on scripture, listen to worship music when you are going about your every day life.

Some colouring sheets here with scripture on if any children or adults would like to do some colouring whilst listening to what I have to say and then you can stick it up at home:

- <http://www.supercoloring.com/coloring-pages/christianity-bible/bible-verse>

Here are some posters on the internet:

- <https://tinyurl.com/rtz8zga>
- <https://tinyurl.com/r7v5cxc>
- <https://tinyurl.com/tjzwfjq>

Make sharing and experiencing faith part of every day life

V 19 says “*Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates*”

Moses isn't talking to the priests but to the whole community. Often in the modern world we send children to professionals to learn things, whether it be ballet or football or a musical instrument. The danger is we do the same when helping children explore their faith. We send them to Sunday school or a Christian camp. But research shows the biggest influence on children's lives is their home life. It seems Moses already knew this when he is sharing his wisdom all those years ago. Also, research tells us that if children have 5 significant relationships with older Christians outside the family acting as role models, this will make children significantly more likely to stay in faith too. So the whole church has a hugely significant opportunity to play a part in this too.

Let's look at home first.

Moses makes clear that the time to teach our children about our faith isn't just special occasions like Christmas and Easter but during every day life. Jesus was the perfect example for this teaching disciples when fishing, eating and walking. What every day activity this week could you use as a time to talk about faith?

Here's some ideas:

As we sit at home...

Saying grace at meal time

Unpack themes that come up in a TV programme from a biblical perspective

Over the dinner table as 'how did you see God at work today?'

Bake something as a family for another family in need as way of sharing God's love

Demonstrate hospitality in your home.

As we walk along...

Explore the outdoors together and give thanks for what you see

Model generosity and give when you see charities asking for donations

Discuss issues like litter and homelessness as you see them

Book ends...

Breakfast prayer times

Bible reading and story telling before bed

Doorposts

This is referring to the Jewish practice of placing small boxes of scripture outside the home. A doorpost also carries a symbol of life transition. So its good to think about how we could mark:

- Birthdays,
- New school terms
- Stages of life...

... and bringing God into those.

When we invest in the faith of our children, there is no certainty that they will share our passion for God as they become adults. They have to make their own choices. But by investing in them, we set them up with the best opportunity of knowing Christ. And we can be sure that God is with us, he will never leave us and will always help us. In Matthew 28 v 19-20, Jesus gives his disciples a command to share their faith and then the promise that he will be with them until the end of time. That is a promise that we can claim for ourselves.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Today, we have the opportunity to follow the command to share our faith with the next generation. As we look forward with excitement and trepidation let's keep these two questions at the forefront:
How will I marinate myself in the words of God?
How can I intentionally look to share my faith with the next generation in every day life?

I've said throughout that this is not the job of just parents but the whole church community but it is Mothers' Day so I want to honour the hard work of all the mums amongst us. In a minute, when this talk ends, there will be an opportunity to watch another video that honours mums. I also wanted to honour the mums by giving them all bath bomb. That was the plan if we were in the chapel. As we are not in the chapel this morning, mums, I can't give you your bath bomb but I want to send it out in the post to you. If you're watching this morning and you're not a church member please get in contact with the church office (office@penrallt.org), send us your home address and we would love to send you a little bath bomb in the post this week. The idea is that you can marinate your bodies in lovely scents in the bath while you marinate your minds in God's word.

Have a great week.

Wendy Lemon, 22nd March 2020