

God's Vision for Your Family

Deuteronomy 6:1-12

Introduction

Good morning! For those of you newer to Northlake, my name is Bill Sullivan, one of the pastors here. I'm substituting for Jeff today while he is in Virginia in classes.

First of all, I also want to say, "Happy Father's Day" to all you Dads out there. Today, we're going to be talking about family. Though not specifically addressing Fathers, I believe this is an appropriate message on a day when we are recognizing the unique role and responsibilities Fathers have in our church and in our society.

Before we begin, let's pray.

I want to talk today about vision – specifically as it relates to the family unit. Last week, Chad talked to us about a global vision for the work God is calling us as a church family to in Uganda. Today, you heard from Vern McCauley about the work God is doing in Thailand. God has a vision for us that is global in perspective. But God does not just stop there. God also has an eternal vision for us that is as personal as your relationship with your children and your relationship with your parents. It is this vision I want to talk about today.

Today, we're going to take a look at a passage from the Old Testament, in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 6:1-12

¹These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ²so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress 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. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. ¹⁰When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹²be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

To remain true to the text, we must remember that what is recorded here is Moses speaking to Israel. The specific promises given here about “taking the land”, “prospering in the land” etc. Were promises given the Israelites if they kept the commandments. These are not specific promises given you and I. However, it is important for us to understand the concepts of what is being talked about here, and to understand that the picture of Israel living in the land flowing with milk and honey is a vision of our relationship with God as His children living in His kingdom.

God has an eternal vision for the future of your children – our job and theirs is simply to follow His vision for our lives. But we all know it’s not that simple, though sitting here on Sunday morning, most of us would agree that it is the best thing to do.

Before we go any further, I should stop here and talk about just what that “eternal vision” as opposed to “temporal vision” is. I believe God places on our hearts His vision for our family. If you are sitting here this morning and don’t have a spouse, or don’t have children, perhaps God has given you a vision of the family you will have some day in the future, or perhaps it is a vision of your interaction with your extended family, or perhaps it is a vision of an adoptive family . . . but the point is, I believe God gives us glimpses into His plan and purposes for our future.

Although it will take many forms and have many details that will change from family to family, and even from person to person within a given family, there is one common, simple, yet supernatural factor in God’s eternal vision for you, your children and your children’s children. He tells us what it is in verse 5:

Deuteronomy 6:5

⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Jesus expanded on this when asked what was the greatest of all the commandments. He said:

Matthew 22:37-40

³⁷ Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Whether your vision for your family involves particular fields of vocation they will enter, or the spouse they will marry, or what their church involvement will be, if the vision you have in your head for the future of your family does not have as it’s over-arching theme the love of God and the love of people, you have missed God’s eternal vision, or have replaced God’s vision with your own temporal vision.

Please understand what I’m saying. There is nothing wrong with encouraging your children to excel in whatever field they show an interest and a gifting or calling. But if your purpose or theirs has at it’s root power, prestige, money or influence, and not a means by which they are able to love God and love other people, the vision is not God-

centered, rather it is self-centered . . . and as a follower of Jesus Christ, the tension between His will and yours will lead to frustration, anger, resentment and a lack of fulfillment.

So why is it so hard to just follow the road map God gives us in His Word, the counsel He provides through prayer, and the godly wisdom of other Christians when sitting here today we would all agree that His commands are given for our good? Jesus was not being a dictator when He told His disciples that if they loved Him they would follow His commands. He was able to say that because He knew – being God – that His commands would lead to our good and God’s glory.

So why is following God’s plan for our family so tough? Although I’m sure there are more, I’ve come up with three main reasons:

Problem #1 – Vision Leaks

Remember what Moses told the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress 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. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

It seems that God has a great concern here. God recognizes that unless His commands are not on your heart – if they are not talked about often, if you don’t have them written down in places where you can see them, you will forget.

Why is that? I believe God identifies the most important reason right in this passage:

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

¹⁰When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹²be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The very prosperity that God promises can cause His vision for our future to leak away. That is exactly what happened in the life of Israel. It did not take long as God was giving them cities they did not build, and food they did not cultivate, that they began to take credit for their prosperity themselves. They stopped seeking the LORD. They stopped praying for their daily bread because their refrigerator was full. And you and I do the same thing.

God blesses us, and instead of being thankful, and becoming more dependent on Him, we convince ourselves that somehow we did build the cities, or our cleverness filled our

house with things we did not provide. Just as God warned the Israelites, we tend to forget the LORD. And when we forget the LORD, His eternal vision for our lives and our family becomes corrupted.

Problem #2 – Your Family Does Not Buy Into the Vision

What happens when your children walk away from the vision you've presented to them?

Well, first you need to ask – is what you have promoted in your family your temporal vision or God's eternal vision? If it is God's, you have a tremendous opportunity in the life of your children if they don't buy into God's vision right away. Jesus gave us an example of vision conflicting between generations when He told the parable of the prodigal son.

The parable is found in Luke 15, beginning in verse 11. I'm not going to take the time to read the entire story this morning, but it is a famous story of a young son who decides he does not want the vision his father has laid out for him. He prefers to take the short cut. So he takes his inheritance and spends it on wild living. Very quickly he finds himself homeless and penniless and decides to go back home and work as a servant in his father's house.

What is the father's response? Does he ridicule the son? Does he humiliate the son? No, we find his response in verses 20-24:

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

So, Moms and Dads, what is your response when your children don't follow the path you lay out for them? I'm not saying you need to condone their activities, or make it all better when they go down a wrong path. But do your children know that you love them regardless of the choices they make? If there is a question in your mind about that, think about this – Aren't you glad that your Heavenly Father's love is not based on you always following the right course? You have an opportunity to show the love of Jesus Christ, and give your children a picture of their Heavenly Father's unconditional love by not putting conditions on your love and acceptance of them.

Life is a marathon – not a sprint. There is still room for hope even if your children have chosen a path that is not God's direction. Your reaction and willingness to remain engaged and pray for them will be huge in your children's future choices.

Problem #3 – Life Happens

Finally, there is a problem we all face as we go through life trying to follow the path God has laid out. And that problem is life itself. Life happens. When you envision your future and your family's future, most likely pain is not in the picture. Disappointment is not part of the vision. Heartache, illness and untimely death are not part of the picture. But because of the fallen world we live in, heartache, disappointment, illness and untimely death are part of life.

Believe me, it is very difficult for me to stand up here and talk to you about God's eternal vision today. Too often right now I feel very stuck in the temporal. Jean and I feel that we are very much rookies in the heartache department. There are people here in the room who have struggled with very difficult life issues far longer than we have. But the fact is that our vision for the future of our family was altered radically five months ago when Annie got sick. When we think of the future now, it is changed by Annie's condition even though we are confident that healing is happening and complete restoration is possible.

What are we to do when life takes an unexpected turn – a turn that is not a consequence of our bad choices or rebellion against God, but is a result of the fallen nature of our world? How do we move forward knowing that any plans we make, any vision we may have of the future, could be changed in an instant?

Solomon offered one solution in Ecclesiastes 8:14-15a:

Ecclesiastes 8:14-15a

¹⁴There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless. ¹⁵So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad.

Since evil happens to good people and good happens to evil people, what's the use? Let's just have a party. Planning and vision for the future is meaningless. Solomon offers a temporal vision of the future.

But perhaps there is a better way. How do we get to the point in our relationship with God where we are able to say as Job did:

Job 1:21

²¹He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

We sing this often on Sunday morning. But how vigorously do we sing it when God takes away? Job had just lost his family and his wealth. Yet he still maintained an eternal vision of God's majesty, love and ultimate Lordship over everything.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must confess I find myself vacillating between Solomon's attitude and Job's as Jean and I wander through our new life. I need you to know that it

is only your prayers of intercession and God's grace on our behalf that allow us to move toward the Job attitude.

And perhaps that is the point. When life happens and your vision for your future seems irreversibly changed – the strongest of the strong here cannot bear that alone. Folks, our only hope is God's grace and one another's love and encouragement.

Conclusion

So finally, what are some very practical ways we can keep the vision God places on our hearts for our families from leaking away? How do we transfer that vision on to the next generation? God tells us here in verse 7:

Deuteronomy 6:7

⁷ 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.

I believe there is a very simple, and then a more profound lesson in this verse. The simple lesson is to teach your children the commands of God. Teach them all the time. Teach them formally and informally. Live the truth of God in front of them so that your words match your actions – you have integrity.

The second lesson in this verse is a bit more subtle but more profound. Our children are learning all the time from us. So it is not a matter of if you will teach your children as you sit at home, or walk along the road, or lie down or get up . . . the question is WHAT are you teaching them? Are you teaching them a life of integrity? Are you teaching them that living a life that honors God in words, actions and thoughts is important? Or are you teaching them a life of hypocrisy? Are you teaching them to be one person at church and another person at home? Are you teaching them that pursuing God's eternal vision for our lives is worth the sacrifices, or like Solomon, have you given up?

In the video we watched right before I got up here, there was a quote that said, "He [father] didn't tell me how to live; he lived and let me watch him do it."

As your children watch you, are you teaching them the attitude of Solomon – to eat, drink and be merry? Are you teaching them that life is unfair and hopeless, so the best one can do is to live the life of a victim?

Or are you teaching them that God is good no matter what? Are you teaching your children that all of your wealth, all of your health, all of your talents are gifts from God – that you are enjoying living in a city whose walls you did not build? And that if God chooses to take something from us that was not ours in the first place that 1) He has a right to do so, and 2) He always has our best intentions from an eternal viewpoint in mind?

Your responses to the life situations we all encounter from time to time will teach your children volumes more than their formal studies. Again, it's not a question of IF you are teaching your children, it is a question of WHAT.