

The Importance of Teaching our Children

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2015

Preacher: Mark Macleod

[0 : 00] Well, if you turn for a short time this morning to Deuteronomy chapter 6, I remember hearing a saying once that it only takes three generations to lose a truth, a biblical truth. The first generation, they know the truth and they know why they believe the truth. The second generation, they know the truth but they no longer know why they believe the truth. And then the third generation ends up losing the truth altogether. That is what happens if truth is not taught. It will disappear just like that and perhaps even disappear quicker than three generations.

But if you had to say, well, who's at fault there? What generation would you point the finger at? Would you point the finger at the generation who knew the truth and who knew why they believed the truth? Would you point the finger at the generation who knew the truth but didn't know why they believed it? Or would you point the finger at that third generation?

those who didn't know the truth and they didn't know why they believed the truth. Which generation would we point the finger at? Well, I would suggest to you today that the problem is with that first generation. We as families, we must teach our children not just what we believe but we must teach them why we believe it. Otherwise, we are in danger of seeing a whole generation of children forgetting the Lord their God, forgetting the God of their fathers, forgetting the truths that have shaped our lives, forgetting the lives of our forefathers. And today, as part of our family service, we focus on a particular aspect of family life. And that is what I want to look very briefly with you today. This idea of teaching our children and the importance of teaching our children. Because we are seeing these forgotten truths, if you like, happening before our very eyes. I am maybe especially seeing it out in

Glasgow, but I know what's happening here as well. These truths are slowly being forgotten. And as each generation goes by, we are losing them. And this is an important era for that very reason. Because we aren't just slowly falling away from the standard of God, we are pretty much an accelerated freefall from it. And these things are happening so quickly, you can, those perhaps older can see how quickly that has actually happened. Society now tells us that there's no place for the Bible. The world tells us there's no place for the Bible in society. When we look at our schools, they will say there's no place for the Bible in schools anymore. Oh yes, 10-20 years ago, but not now. And we might think, oh yes, that's okay, but they can't do anything about our home. The world cannot drive the Bible out of our homes. At least we're safe there. We have control over that. Or do we? We have to ask ourselves, what place does the Bible have in our homes? Where is Christ in our families? Is it the case that the world is not just driving the Bible and the law of God out of our society and out of our schools? Is it the case that the world is actually, and the pressures of the world, forcing the Bible even out of our own homes? Are we losing?

Our children to the idols of this world? And that's exactly what we're going to look at here in Deuteronomy, because that's what God, through Moses, tells the people here in Deuteronomy.

[4 : 34] He shows them the importance of teaching, teaching the children. He exhorts them, as we'll see time and time again, make sure you teach your children. And this is true for not just our children, but our grandchildren, nieces, nephews, we are all connected in some way with children, even the children in the Sunday school and connected to a congregation here. We all have some kind of link there with children and some kind of way of being able to instruct and teach them. So let's look together at this particular text here. And I guess if we were going to take a text, it would be that verses five to nine there. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 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. You shall bind them 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. So that's the context of what I want to look at today. But I want to do that by looking at three questions. First question, what are the dangers of not teaching? Because I think if we see the dangers of not teaching, it'll be a stark warning to us to make sure that we do teach. So we'll look at that question. And then what are we to teach? And then how do we teach? I'm not going to answer these exhaustively, obviously. I'm going to answer them with reference to the particular chapter that we're looking at here in Deuteronomy. But first of all, where actually are we in the story?

Where are we here? I wonder if you know exactly where Deuteronomy takes place. Well, this is beside the River Jordan. We're near the River Jordan and the people of God are really preparing to go and cross the Jordan and to conquer and take hold of the promised land, this land of Canaan. And Deuteronomy is basically a sermon from Moses. And Moses is preaching this fairly lengthy sermon to them before they go and take possession of the promised land. Now, he's actually addressing a new generation of Israelite here. This is the end of the 40 years of the wilderness wandering. So this is a new generation of Israelite. A lot of these people weren't alive when they came out of Egypt during the Exodus. They weren't alive when they crossed the Red Sea. They weren't alive when they were at the foot of Sinai and God appeared in that powerful way there. They weren't alive then. So God, through Moses, reminds the people of their past. And he majors on this requirement. You must teach your children these things. Three times at the, you could say, the beginning of this sermon. He says it.

If you go to, well, you don't have to go to it. But in various chapters, you'll find it. Chapter 4, chapter 6, and chapter 11. Three times, you pretty much see the same words.

This exhortation, make sure you teach your children these things. So then, with that in mind, the first question. What are the dangers of not teaching?

[7 : 52] Well, in some ways, the danger is fairly obvious. The danger is that our children forget the Lord their God. And in some ways, if we don't teach, even we ourselves will forget the Lord our God.

You see that in verses 10 to 12. And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to give you with great and good cities that you did not build, houses full of good things that you did not fill, cisterns that you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take care, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. So, you see, God is saying here, watch out.

When you get to Canaan, and I give you all these good things, when I give you all these blessings, when I give you that land flowing with milk and honey, watch out that you do not forget me.

That you do not forget the God who has given you these things. You see, in the wilderness, for the last 40 years, they relied on God in a very visible way, didn't they?

They relied on him for the bread from heaven, manna from heaven. So, God was literally feeding them. They relied on him for drink. They came to him when they were thirsty.

[9 : 28] They relied on him for protection, for guidance. They visibly relied on God for all of these things. And when you're in that kind of situation, it's much easier, or much harder, I should say, to forget God.

Much harder to forget God. And that would have been the case here on this island many years ago. People wouldn't have relied on the shelves in Tesco for their food.

They would have very much relied in a very visible way on God. They would have relied on God in terms of the elements, the weather, on crops growing, on being able to eat of local produce.

They relied on God in a very visible way. And in some ways, that made it easier for them not to forget God. But look at us.

We're like the Israelites once they got into Canaan and they were in that land of milk and honey. We don't lack anything. We feel like we don't rely on God.

[10 : 36] I mean, we have nice warm houses to go home to at night. We don't need to really worry about the weather. We might lose a few tiles. But, you know, realistically, we don't need to worry. We have plenty of food.

We are quite safe here. Certainly compared to other parts of the world just now. And with that comes the temptation to forget.

And if we forget, and if we don't teach our children, they most certainly will forget. So God is saying here, all these things you have, all these things that I will give you in the future, houses that you did not build, vineyards that you did not plant, cisterns that you did not dig, that is all from me.

I am giving you this, so do not forget it. Are we forgetting God? Do we feel like we're becoming self-sufficient?

Do you feel like you don't actually rely on God? Do you feel like all that you have is from your own wisdom, your own power, your own effort, your own strength? Do you feel like coming here to God's house is almost like you doing God a favor?

[11 : 45] As though I will give God some of my time. As though you don't really need him, but I will come and I will give him some of my time in worship. Are we forgetting our Lord and our God?

If we do not teach our children all that God has done for us and all that God continues to do for us, they are going to forget him altogether.

We have all this because of God and his goodness. You see, our children, they may well grow up thinking this has all been accomplished by man.

All been accomplished by the wisdom of man. And that's what the world and the media, that's what they tell us. And if we don't teach our children, rest assured, the world and its media will fill that void.

They will come in and they will teach our children for us. And they're going to teach them a very different past. In fact, they probably won't teach them the past at all. They'll just teach them that all that we have now is because of us, because of human ingenuity, because of human wisdom, because of human power and strength.

[12 : 58] Strength. But, you know, the sad thing is, it doesn't stop there. Because if we forget God, that's not an end in and of itself.

It leads to something. And it leads there to verse 14. This temptation to then go after other gods. If we forget our God, then the natural temptation is to go after other gods.

This whole idea of a secular society is really only a transition, isn't it? It's a transition to something else. We don't know what else yet. But it will be to something else. Secular society is not stable in that sense in itself.

There'll be a temptation there to go after other gods. We become surrounded by false idols all around us. The world is full of idols.

It feels as though it's never been as full of idols. The idol of the celebrities and your sportsmen and women and the idol of image and the idol even of materialism.

[14 : 03] A huge problem in our day. And it's quite ironic, isn't it? Because God has given us so much, but we want more. God is saying, I have given you all this.

And we're saying, we'll grab it, but we want more. And we want more. And this greed grows into a drive that will stop at nothing to feed that habit of wanting more. Wanting better. There's something better available.

I know there is. I will get it. And I don't care who I hurt to get it. That is the kind of world our children will grow up in if we do not teach them the ways of God.

So that's, if you like, the warning of what will happen if we don't. So then, what are we to teach them? That's their second question. What are we actually to teach them? Now, I think this is actually one of, if you like, our biggest problems.

And we think that we're fulfilling our vows as, baptism vows, as parents, by just teaching certain facts or truths as bare, cold, and in many ways confusing legalism.

[15 : 15] That is a great danger for us. Now, don't get me wrong. We must teach them laws. We must teach them the facts, the biblical truths.

We have to do that. But we have to do that with a foundation of love. We have to do it in the right context. We must show that God's rule for our lives is a rule from a loving father.

And we need to make sure our children see that. Not from a distant, condemning judge, but from a loving father. They must see God's law in that light. Verse 5 and 6.

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.

On your heart. The organ of love. That is where these laws need to be. They come, if you like, from the heart of God to our hearts.

[16 : 15] If we disassociate God's law from this idea of love, we'll lose the point altogether. And it'll be a losing battle when we are teaching our children. It's not about having these laws written on tablets of stone, but on our hearts.

These commands from God are for our good. They are designed from love. That is where they are designed. Not to be a heavy burden that just knocks us down continually.

They're designed to help us to live a blessed life in right relationship with God.

God deals with us as a father, deals with his children. So we have to learn with how God deals with us. In terms of how we teach our children.

We discipline them out of love. We rebuke them out of love. We teach them who God is and the ways of God from the foundation of love.

[17 : 21] I cannot stress that point highly enough. We must see that connection between the love of God and the law of God.

I've given you an example there. Because these things are sometimes hard to describe. And I think it's better by example. And I could have chosen any example. But basically the first thing that came to me was the Sabbath day.

So look at that as an example. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. A day of rest. A day of worship. A day where we have a degree of freedom, if you like, from our usual daily routines.

A day specifically for God. A day for fellowshiping with families together. This has never been needed more than an hour day.

When people are busier than ever. When families are barely spending any time together. You see, the Sabbath day is a blessing from God.

[18 : 24] It's a day where God is saying, look, this is a day where you will worship me. You will rest from all your work. And you will fellowship, if you like, with your families. So it's an example of a positive command.

But what do we, or what can we very easily do with it? We can very easily turn it into a day of bondage and legalistic rules. And turn it into a spiritual drain.

Rather than it be a source of spiritual blessing. You see, that's the difference. If you look at it like that in the negative. If you look at it like that.

Then the next generation are just going to grow antagonistic to it. I dare say maybe that has already happened. They grow antagonistic to this command from God about the Sabbath day.

And eventually, next generation along, we'll just lose it altogether. You see, that's an example of a positive command that's for our good. And yet, we turned it, or some people, have a tendency to turn it into a legalistic rule.

[19 : 29] That serves no other purpose than to condemn us. And then eventually, we lose that truth as the generations go on.

Something good from God. And we're in danger of losing it. And that also means that we must ourselves be motivated by love.

We have, as parents, we need to understand this relationship between God's law and God's love. If we don't see that connection, how are we going to teach our children? So we must be motivated by love ourselves.

We must be examples of love to our children. Showing them the love of God and how we deal with them. Now, I am not suggesting that is easy. And I'm not suggesting that we're going to go about this duty in a flawless fashion.

We know that's not true. But we need to be working towards it. That is what we aim for. We must teach our children. So what are we to teach our children?

[20 : 33] We are not trying to chisel commands into tablets of stone. We are trying to teach their hearts, if you like. So that these laws would be in their hearts, in their affections.

Part of their love. The law written in love. So thirdly, how are we to teach them? How do we teach our children?

Well, that really takes us to the verses that I mentioned earlier on. Verses 7 to 9 there. You shall teach them diligently. You shall talk to them when you sit in your house.

When you walk by the way. When you lie down. When you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand. They shall be as frontlets between your eyes. They shall be written on your doorposts and on your gates.

So, we are to teach these things diligently to our children. The Hebrew word there for diligently, it implies this idea of repetition.

[21 : 29] Of telling them over and over again. And we must do that with our children. Over and over again. Teaching them the truths of God. And that requires patience on our side.

It's difficult. I'm not suggesting that this is going to be easy. This is difficult. But we must do so. Diligently. Modern day experts, they kind of, they change their minds every few years, I think, as to whether this is actually a good way of teaching our children.

Whether we should be, you know, repeating things. Whether we should be making them memorize things. But we don't take our advice from them. We take our advice from God. And here, here we are told that these truths are to be repeated over and over again.

This idea of diligence coming at them with the truth time and time again. So that they learn these truths. Might be biblical stories.

Might be actual verses from the Bible. Might be songs or psalms. Psalms are great because they're God's word in a metrical form and much easier to remember.

[22 : 35] Or catechisms. They still exist. Some people think they no longer exist. They're still there. But the catechisms, why don't we teach these things to our children? And you know what?

When we do that as families, we will all benefit from it. It's not just our children. And we'll all together grow in our knowledge of God. Together we'll learn about God.

Maybe things that we've forgotten. Many of us have probably forgotten the catechism. There's great things in the catechism. Great truths. So this will be a blessing for the whole family.

Not just our children. And this idea of teaching with diligence. It also implies an idea of structure. It's an idea of structure that should be thought through.

It can be very easy just to go to your favorite Bible passages or favorite verses or favorite portions of the Bible and teach them over and over again with our children.

[23 : 34] And by doing that, we might inadvertently neglect important truths of the Bible. We want to cover everything, don't we? I'm not suggesting we have lesson plans for every time we teach our children.

I'm not suggesting that. But give it thought. Don't be coming thoughtlessly to when we come to teach our children. Opening it up at the same page that we have added at for the last three months. Give it thought. Be diligent. Be structured in how we teach our children. You shall talk of them when you sit in your house and walk by the way.

Do you sit in your houses and talk to your children about God? About the things of God? I hope we do. If we do that when they're young, then it'll be more likely that they'll do it when they're older. We'll instill this atmosphere of talking about God. Talking about the things of God. It's difficult to start it later on. It's much easier to start it at the very beginning.

[24 : 39] So we should be teaching our children and getting them used to hearing about God. Around the dinner table or when we're sitting together. Particularly on the Sabbath day itself.

When you lie down and when you rise, it says. Really what God is saying here. In every aspect of life. In every aspect of your family life. You should teach your children. In the house. By the way. When we wake. When we rise. Our whole family should be a platform. For teaching our children the things of God.

And there are struggles with this. I know there are. Different struggles for different age groups. A three year old is very different to a teenager. That is true. But we are commanded to teach. There is a command. And I found it interesting actually thinking about this. This is real. This chapter that we read contains. If you like a summary of the whole command. It's written there.

[25 : 35] The greatest commandment. In verse five and six. You shall love the Lord your God. With all your heart. With all your soul. And with all your might. Right. That's kind of the heart. The summary if you like of the commandment.

What's the command that comes immediately after that? You shall teach them diligently to your children. That suggests to me that this is pretty important. God gives us if you like the summary commandment.

And then straight after. Make sure you teach your children this. We are commanded to do it. It is the most important factor. Of our family life.

And every aspect of home life. We must teach them. Now we can't save our children. We can't do that. We can't make them believe. Can't do that either.

But we can. And we must. Teach them. And who knows. What will happen with that knowledge in the future. I was speaking to some people in here.

[26 : 33] And they were telling me. Oh it's amazing how. How the catechisms. Or how verses. Or how psalms come back to them later on in life. Maybe decades afterwards. We never know. How God might use these truths.

Might even be past. Our lifetime. We might not actually see it. We never know how God might use. These wonderful truths. And it's our hope that one day.

Our children will come and ask us this question. That you find in verse 20. When your son asks you in time to come. What is the meaning. Of the testimonies.

And the statutes. And the rules. That the Lord our God. Has commanded you. As we teach our children. We hope that one day. They will ask us that question. That they will ask us.

Why do we do this? Mom, dad. Why do you live like you do? Why are your lives so different? Why are God's word.

[27 : 29] And God's command. So important to you. They're not important to that other guy. Or my other friend's parents. Why are they so important to you? So I hope that our children ask us that.

And when they do. We need to be ready to answer. Would you be ready to answer that question? If your children asked you. Your grandchildren. Your nieces or nephews.

If they asked you that question. Why? Why? Well Moses tells them really. In those subsequent verses. How to answer it. He basically tells them.

Look tell them these laws. They come from a loving God. Who has redeemed us. From Egypt. And. We then show our love. And gratitude to him. By obeying that law. Our God. Has redeemed us. From the bondage of sin.

[28 : 27] And out of our love for him. We seek to obey his commandments. Knowing that these commandments. Are for our good. We must teach our children.

What to believe. But how much more important it is. That they know why. We believe it. Now.

I am conscious that that. And these kind of things. Can be difficult for us. And it can. Maybe come across that. We are so responsible for our children. That it is actually our fault.

If our children don't come to faith. And I know. That is a fear that some people have. I have spoken to some people about this. I know that some people really.

Struggle with this idea. They blame themselves for failing their children. If their children don't come to faith. Even though they have done all they can. To teach them. Well.

[29 : 25] Just by way of. Comfort in that regard. And really in closing as well. I will leave you with a story. That will hopefully be a means of comfort.

To those who struggle with that particular issue. There was a. A man once. And he was the oldest. Or one of the oldest. In his family.

And. He would pray night and day. For his family. He would teach them the things of God. He would be a perfect example.

His witness was like no other witness. You've ever seen. He never put a foot wrong. And none of those younger members. Of the family believed. Even after his death.

Or even. Up until he died. None of the members of his family believed. And that might seem to you like. Quite a. A regular story.

[30 : 25] That you might hear. But that man. Was Jesus. Jesus Christ. After his death.

His family came to faith. But. The reality is that. While. Jesus grew up in his house. While he sat around. The dinner table. With his family.

They had God. Sitting there. Beside them. And they didn't believe. They did not. Believe. And I say that.

By way of comfort. Because supposing. We had the perfect witness. And the perfect teaching. We cannot save our children. We leave the work of salvation to God.

Our job is to teach them. Our job is to teach them. And I pray. That God would help us. To teach.

[31 : 22] And to raise our children. As we have it in the baptism boughs. In the nurture. And admonition of the Lord. Amen.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

We give you thanks. Oh God. That we have been able to gather here. This morning. And to consider these things. And we pray that we would. Go home and think about them.

And that we would. Lord seek to do all that we can. To teach our children. That we would realize the importance. The urgency of the matter. Particularly in our day and age.

When we seem to be. Drifting so far. From the God of our Father. So far from our God. And we pray oh Lord.

[32 : 22] That you would equip us and help us. As families. And as a wider family. As the church. As congregations. As Sunday school teachers. In all that we do.

And those who work with. The likes of the ABC club. And point to life. And scripture unions. Throughout the island. All these ways. That we have to teach our children. May it all.

Be done to the glory of God. And may your blessing follow it. And we ask all this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.