

CONNECTING Church + Home

I realized that it was a different world when I asked a young woman if she was going home for the Christmas holidays. “Which home?” Her parents were divorced and she was one of 6 siblings. She was the oldest and the rest of her siblings were half siblings. Since then, her dad had passed away, and she had been closer to her step-mom than her biological mom. With her biological mother having recently gotten married and having moved to a new community, she wasn’t quite sure where home was.

The nuclear family as most of us know it has undergone incredible challenges in our day. While we live in a community that looks stable, broken homes are all round us. The result of these broken homes are children who suffer with an identity crisis and a lack of stabilizing forces in their lives.

There are several factors that have changed.

First, marriage has been reduced to a lifestyle choice. There were days in my lifetime where politicians referred to marriage as “the foundation of our society.” People understood that the most basic unit of order was the family. From God’s original design in the garden, a man and woman together in marriage served as the first governing society. Marriage was considered the bedrock of a society. Tax structures were designed to promote family life where children could flourish. But today, marriage is now something that is considered one of many options. For this reason, the age of people getting married continues to increase. In the 1990s, the vast majority of men and women would be married by the age of 30. Today, only 20-30% are married by this age.

Further, people are experimenting with marriage. There are open marriages, gay marriages, marriages to yourself or to plants. The word “marriage” has been so redefined that it barely means anything anymore, so that people say, “But love is love!” without giving a thought to how meaningless that statement has become.

Second, children have become a burden. Until the industrial revolution, children were integral to the future. You had children because they were necessary for the well-being of the future of society. They secured your future. They were important to train and raise to create a better society. Today, fertility rates are plummeting around the world. To have a child is considered an economic burden. According to a US Department of Agriculture report, children will cost \$233,610 to raise from birth to age 17. They are expensive. It’s cheaper to have a dog! Plus, having children is now seen as being environmentally irresponsible. Climatologists declare that having children increases the carbon footprint and only speed up the destruction of the planet. So it is no surprise that people who treat children like a luxury find that their children grow up being consumers rather than producers.

Third, the post-family structure is on the rise. If marriage and children are things you use to enhance yourself and help you become the person you want to be, then relationships with a

Connecting Church and Home – Deut. 6:4-9

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall
August 22, 2021

partner or children are only to help you make you happy. Who needs a husband/wife to have a child? Why bother? No longer is the family the place of forming people – including ourselves. Instead, these relationships are about making me happy. And if you don't make me happy, then these relationships are unnecessary to my well-being, let alone anyone else's.

Finally, with all of these challenges, Christians struggle to understand the value of family. In other words, Christians are struggling to think like Christians. Instead of understanding how central the family is to Christian thought, Christians are reflecting the cultural landscape. Why call your husband or wife your spouse when partner is less offensive? Jesus is no longer your bridegroom; he's become your self-help coach. Jesus exists to help you become the better you, not to save you from yourself and your sins.

But the Bible is full of familial language: God is our Father, Jesus is the only begotten Son, Christians are the bride of Christ, we are fellow heirs as brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been adopted into God's family, and we could go on and on.

With all of these challenges going on, where do we start? I want to look at Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and reflect on a few things that come out of Israel's great confessional statement, the Shema. (READ Deut. 6:4-9).

So where do we start? **Start with the Lord our God** (vv. 4-6)

When we understand Israel's context, we recall that Moses is giving these instructions to a people who have come out of the slavery of Egypt and spent 40 years travelling nomadically through the wilderness. They are about to go into a land where they are going to have to fight to establish their survival because the other nations around them do not share their convictions and values and beliefs. They will face the pressure to assimilate to the culture around them unless they maintain a vigilance about their beliefs and identity.

So where do you start when your identity is going to be challenged? You start with your most basic beliefs. The God of Israel is one. He alone is God. Therefore he alone is worthy of worship and devotion. When other gods are competing as rivals, Israel made this confession over and over. Yahweh, our covenant God, is committed to us and calls us to be committed to him. All other rival gods – the gods of prosperity, happiness, success, and joy – are no gods at all. All the other gods demand more and more and more. But this God is One – utterly committed to his name and his word. And since his people bear his name, he is committed to them.

What this means, practically, is that before we talk about anything else, we consider God. He calls us to love him with all of our being – heart, soul, mind, and strength. He wants us to think his thoughts, to desire his ways, to work for his glory, and to live for him. In a world full of rival gods, we could start with many other things. But first, we start with what God has commanded – to know, trust, love, and obey him.

Connecting Church and Home – Deut. 6:4-9

CBC Ilderton

Andrew Hall
August 22, 2021

Starting with God isn't some sort of rule. It is rooted out of a relationship of divine love. Out of all the people on earth, God had chosen these people to show that he is great. He chose a small, weak, enslaved people. Why? To show that God's love isn't conditioned on what we can do for God, but upon what God can do for those who trust in him.

So before we begin talking about family ministry, we talk about God. God exists to make himself known, and that means that family ministry exists to make God known in our families. This is the reason Moses says to Israel in v. 6 that these commands are to be on their heart. God had given commandments on two stone tablets. But stone tablets don't change the heart. Words on stone have no effect to change the course of a life. They are external commands. What is needed is for these commands to become heart-commands. They are to become things that we love because God is worthy of our praise, because God is devoted to his name and his Word, and that name and Word are upon his people. So to love God means we begin by internalizing these things.

Practically, what does it mean to internalize God's commands? Simply, we need to know his ways. If the only time we open our Bible is on Sunday morning, we will not be shaped by his Word. We will be shaped by the other pressures of daily life. We have to make God's Word something that we internalize. We read it. We pray it. We study it. We take time for it. We memorize it. We put it in our hearts so that we will not sin against him.

Family ministry starts with God the Father and us knowing our Father.

Second, **Inform all of Life with God (vv. 7-9)**

If God is worthy of our devotion because he is devoted to us, then what should our lives look like? Does the worship of God mean one hour a week? At minimum, we should gather together with other Christians! We need other Christians to encourage us, remind us, help us, pray for us, and love us. But the pressure of the surrounding nations could not be restrained by Israel if they depended on their religious services and practices.

Instead, every area of life was to be informed with God's ways. How do you do ethical business? How does your job relate to your faith? Why is work a good gift to be enjoyed? How do you rest in a workaholic world?

The commands here are to teach and talk about the commands of God. It's good to have times where we practically sit down and formally instruct our families. We need times where we pull out the Bible and read it together. We need to pray and thank God for our meals. We need to have family devotional times. We need to have a plan – what will we read? When will we read it? How long will we take?

Connecting Church and Home – Deut. 6:4-9

CONNECTING Church + Home

But the greater burden of these commands is to have a God-infused life. As you walk along the road. As you lie down. When you sit at the table. Life is not a classroom where we impart knowledge from one mind to another. Life is about sitting, walking, and lying down and having Christ inform every aspect of our lives. More is caught than taught. I can talk about reading the Bible and praying, but do my children ever see me reading the Bible and praying on my own? What about the hundreds of questions children ask before bed – is this a distraction tactic to avoid sleep? Or are their minds wrestling at the end of the day with things that they've seen and heard and are trying to process? Is my faith something that is compartmentalized, or does it seep in to every aspect about how I think, act, and work? Do I act as a person who believes in mercy by confessing my wrongs? Do I apologize to my children when I've blown it, or do I double down because I'm the parent?

Family ministry exists because God is our Father. And when we profess that we trust and love him, we are part of his family. He is shaping our lives to look more like his. In a world where families struggle, what we discover is that God is for the family. He wants your home to be full of the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. He wants Scriptures to be bound to your forehead, coming into your mind from your heart as you sit, walk, and lie down. He wants every part of your life to ooze with God-informed love.

This fall, as we move to adopt a family ministry model, we want to help young and old to start with God and be informed in all of life by God. We want to help your home. We can't replace your home. We can't do what you can't do. We want to partner together, encourage one another, and shape ministry so that together, as the family of God, we might love God and love one another better.

When that young woman came back after visiting her family, I asked her how her time had been. "You know," she said to me, "I've come to realize that my church is my family. I may not know where home is here, but whenever I gather with God's people, I know I'm at home."

Lord, help us to be that kind of family in a world where people don't know where home is.