

Introduction

James Dobson tells about a 38 year-old pilot named Cliff who was killed in a plane crash. After his death, his wife wrote Dobson a letter recounting her favorite memory of him, which is this. He adored his three little daughters and always ended their play times together the same way. He'd shout, "**What's the most important thing in the world?**" To which they'd joyfully reply, "**Knowing God.**"

That little anecdote fleshes out the Scripture we read this morning, Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It illustrates what parents are supposed to do with their children and how. Let's examine briefly what that is.

Parents as Teachers

The word "**sons**" in verse 7 makes clear that Moses is speaking to the Israelites as parents here.

Parents, by the very nature of their position, wear many hats. One of those hats is that of teacher. Let me ask you a question. Of whom do you think first when I say the word "**teachers?**" Almost everyone thinks first of those professionals who instruct our children in public and private schools. But they aren't the ones of whom I think first. Parents are.

Notice the word "**teach**" in verse 7. There's something that parents need to grasp. Of all the responsibilities you have to your children, none exceeds that one in significance. You must teach your children. You are in fact the most influential teachers they will ever have.

What to Teach

But what is it that you're to teach them? Hopefully it isn't math. One mother told me not long ago about her fourth grade son: "**I can't help him with his math homework anymore. It's beyond me.**" If it isn't math you're to teach your children, then what is it? An article I read identifies the first responsibility of a leader. It's to "**define**

reality” to his or her followers. Parents, you are the leaders of your children, which helps us identify what you should teach them. It’s reality – or more specifically the most defining realities in human life.

Verse 4 reveals the very first of those. It’s God. God is the dominant reality of the universe. He is infinitely superior to everyone and everything else that exists. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist, therefore, to know that you should teach your children first and foremost about Him. You should help them build a correct and thorough vision of Him. Remember the 18 qualities of God that we learned. You should teach those qualities and their details to them.

Verse 5 reveals the second reality you should teach your children. It’s how to love God. The Bible makes clear that loving God is the greatest of all the commandments. Or as I call it, it’s the first aim in life that we should set and seek to achieve. It’s an indirect freedom that involves a process. You, as parents, should learn that process and teach it to your children. I’ve written and taught a detailed study of that titled “The First Aim.” It will assist you in doing so.

But it isn’t just God and loving Him that you should teach your children. It’s all the defining realities they’ll need to live a life that’s abundant and full. Most of those, of course, are found in Scripture. So you teach them what it says about friendship with Jesus, spiritual disciplines, peers, sex, honesty, the work ethic, patriotism, criticism, anger, competition, simplicity and materialism, and much more.

Several months ago, for instance, I preached a sermon from the Bible’s classic statement on sexual purity, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. You should know that text and teach it to your children. They shouldn’t enter the teen years without knowing the principles it reveals, like this one. The degree of physical intimacy in a relationship must match (never exceed) the degree of relational commitment, with the greatest physical intimacy reserved for the greatest relational commitment, marriage. Children, at the appropriate age, desperately need to learn that, but they won’t if you don’t teach them.

That illustrates what parents should teach. It's the defining realities in human life, the most important of which are in Scripture.

How to Teach

Having identified what parents should teach in verses 4-5, Moses goes on to explain how they should teach it in verses 7-9. He uses a series of metaphors here. In verse 7, the metaphor is talking about what God says when sitting in the house, walking by the way, lying down, or rising up. In verse 8, it's fixing what He says to the forehead or hand. And in verse 9, it's writing it on the doorposts of houses and on gates. The opening line articulates what those metaphors represent. It's parents teaching the defining realities in Scripture **"diligently."**

The metaphors and that adverb together reveal how parents should teach their children. It's pervasively, which means two things.

First, you make opportunities to teach them. You instruct them formally in other words. It's planned. There are specific realities they need to know. So, you identify and explain those realities to them. When my son Moses got his first job, a paper route, I explained the work ethic formally to him. It's found in Ephesians 6:5-8 and Colossians 3:22-25. I told him: **"You're working for God. He's your boss and He's always watching how you do your work. So, you give 100% effort 100% of the time, no matter how much or little you're paid."** That illustrates one thing that teaching children pervasively means. You make opportunities, formally, to instruct them.

It means a second thing. You take opportunities to instruct them. You instruct them informally in other words. It's spontaneous. In the normal course of activities, experiences, and events, teachable moments will arise. Spot and embrace those moments. That's what Mike Brady of the Brady Bunch did and you should too. Two years ago, I was at the Poland Fourth of July Celebration with my grandsons and found a wallet with \$150 in it. I explained to them that we were going to return it and why: **"The world says 'Finders keepers.' But God says, in**

Deuteronomy 22:1-3, "Finders returners.' He loves people and wants them to get back what they lose so they won't be sad." That was a teachable moment and I embraced it.

You can see then how parents should teach their children. It's diligently or pervasively. Make and take opportunities to teach them the defining realities in human life.

Conclusion

I close with the words of a child psychologist, Haim Ginnot, who said, **"Parents often talk about the younger generation as if they didn't have anything to do with it."** He implies, and rightly so, that parents do have something to do with how their children turn out – not everything certainly but something. That something is to teach.