

When we make faithfulness our goal and not success, then we too receive a moment of grace in our own lives as parents. Now don't hear me wrong. This command tells us to be intentional and to do what we can to impress our faith to our children. This is not about abdicating our role. However, it is about being free from the result. Our children are created by God with a free will and they will answer to God for their choices and their own faithfulness. We must answer to God not for our results, but rather for our faithfulness in regards to parenting. I know there are many here today who would say Jeff, I did everything I know to do in regards to raising my children within the faith. One has chosen to follow Jesus and another has turned away. What could I have done differently? Nothing, as long as you were faithful.

In her article "But I Did Everything Right" Sharon Begley wrote these words:

We must be clear about our limits as parents. We are not capable of producing perfect followers of Christ as if we were perfect ourselves. Our work cannot purchase anyone's salvation or sanctification. Parents with unbelieving children, Christian parents with children in jail and the faith heroes of Hebrews 11 are powerful reminders of this truth. We will parent imperfectly, our children will make their own choices, and God will mysteriously use it all to advance his Kingdom.

Then she concludes:

It is time to acknowledge there is only so much influence parents can have. Scripture has taught us this all along. We are not sovereign over our children-only God is. Children are not tomatoes to be staked out or mules to be trained or numbers to be plugged into a formula or equation. They are full human beings wondrously and fearfully made. Parenting like all tasks under the sun is intended as an endeavor of love, risk, perseverance, and above all faith. It is faith rather than formula, grace rather than guarantees, steadfastness rather than success that bridges the gap between our own parenting efforts and what by God's grace our children grow up to become.³

Choose faithfulness as your goal and not success. Let every moment become a teachable moment. Make sure your faith is authentic and real, so you

can truly impress it upon your child and remember that your child and every child are fearfully and wonderfully made. So accept them, love them, pray for them, witness to them, impress the Lord's commands upon their hearts and teach them well. ✨

¹Leslie Leyland Fields *The Myth of the Perfect Parent* (*Christianity Today*, January 2010) p.23.

²Fields, p.24.

³Fields, p.27.



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Teach Your Children Well Deuteronomy 6:1-9

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In her article the *Myth of the Perfect Parent*, Leslie Leyland Fields shares her insight into what she identifies as the "prevailing parental panic." She begins the article by telling of a story about a conversation she had in Guatemala with a pastor who had spent his life ministering to the poor while raising five children. As they spoke to one another, Leslie asked the pastor to give her some advice on raising children. Since his children were all grown and he was such a devoted Christian man, she assumed that he would have some good advice and maybe even a formula for raising children. However, the pastor's response was just the opposite. He commented that he was not one to give advice. He went on to say that one of his grown children was suffering from addiction. Another was in the middle of a failed marriage. He went on to say that he had been a failure to his mother. He had recently been reading the journals of his mother and he had concluded that he had never lived up to her expectations or her prayers for him. He concluded that not only had he failed, but he was certain that she had died believing that she had failed as a parent.¹

We live in a time of prevailing parental panic. We are obsessed with doing everything right in regards to raising children and we are worried that if we make one mistake, then everything is lost in regards to our children. The book stores are filled with books that address this fixation. There is *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, which asserts that parenting has become an attempt to extend oneself as a parent in the life of our children. The article *Child Trap in the New Yorker* chronicles the success driven extremes of what

they call over-parenting. In response to these types of books, there are books which are confessions of parents who simply say they cannot do it. Books like *The Confession of a Slacker Mom*, *The Three Martini Play Date* and *Bad Mom* are filled with witty observations of their negligence of mothering responsibilities.

In Christian circles, we too are overwhelmed with the responsibility of parenting. Our goal, as Fields articulates, it is to have our children "turn out." We want them to have our Christian faith and values and grow up to be church going and God honoring adults.²

Yet, statistics tell us we are failing. It is reported by the Barna group in 2006 that 61 percent of all evangelical teens are now disengaged and spiritually inactive. The Life Way organizations study shows the same results. In their study 7 out of 10 teenagers who worshipped in high school have stopped worshipping by the age 23. What are we doing wrong? Is it that we have failed as parents? Is it that we have given up? Is it that for all of our efforts and worry we still cannot make a difference? What can we do? How can we teach our children well?

The passage we read today is a familiar passage about passing on the faith. The passage we read from Deuteronomy 6 is the instruction from God through Moses to be diligent in passing on the commandments that God has given to his people. They are instructed to impress them upon their children. They are to talk about them when they sit down, when they walk, when they lie down and when they get up. They are to tie them as symbols on their foreheads and hands, as well as write them on their gates and their doorposts.

This command gives us insight when it comes to our task of parenting and raising children. Let me mention three things for us to consider from this Biblical

instruction. First, we must realize that every moment is a teachable moment. Faith is not merely passed on and taught to our children one to three hours a week at church. The teaching of our faith to our children must be something that happens everywhere and everyday.

The Lord begins with impress these commands on your children. The word impress is sometimes translated inscribe. The picture is of someone who has a chisel and is taking the painstaking time and energy to chisel into stone the commandments. Parenting has never been an easy task. It takes intention and it takes time and energy. Just like someone would chisel an inscription into stone, parenting is not a science but an art. To chisel into stone takes a "feel." It is something you learn over time. The artisan must know by experience the quality of the stone. He must know from experience how hard is too hard, or how soft is too soft to tap the chisel to where no impression is made into the stone. In the same way, parenting is an art that we mature into. We learn on the way and by faith and grace we become parents that are faithful and pleasing to God.

The Lord says we are to impress the commands upon our children when we sit down and when we walk along the road. The terms sitting and walking encompassed all of life. Every activity of life is represented in that phrase. So whether at home, work or play we are to look for teachable moments with our children. The second term is when we lie down and when we get up for a new day. That term speaks to the totality of time. No matter what our activity or the time of the day, or for that matter the time in the child's life, we are to be impressing God's commands upon our children.

Every moment is a teachable moment. So, when our children come back from school with a complaint about another child, that is a teachable moment about how we learn to forgive others and even love and pray for those who persecute us. When our child is dealing with wanting something and it does not fit into our budget this month, this is the time we talk about the difference between need and want. We have a conversation about what is important in life and how we use our resources. When our child has been rebellious and broken the rules of the household, it is a time when we teach our children there are consequences to our actions and although there are consequences, our love for them is unchanging. It is the time our children learn that discipline is a form of love as well. So, we teach our children not only at church but as we ride in the car,

as we sit down for a meal, as we help them learn to react in mature and responsible ways. Every moment is a teachable moment especially when it comes to sharing our faith with our children.

Here is a second thought from this command. Every moment is a teachable moment, but no moment is a teachable moment if we as parents do not have an authentic faith. As much as God is instructing us to be aware of teaching moments, a faith that is not authentic cannot be passed on. The phrase in the command to tie these commands on our forehead and hands is an instruction about sharing our faith with others. It is an instruction to let others see our faith and how we live our faith. Yet, the most important instruction for passing on the faith is the first line. The commands are to be on their hearts. Notice that the commands are to be on their hearts before they are to be impressed upon the next generation. Parents, we cannot pass on a faith that is not real. Our children can tell if our faith is authentic or not.

Robin's dad used to do a skit when he would lead conferences at Ridgecrest and Glorietta. It was called washing an elephant. There would be three participants chosen from the audience and they would be taken away where they could not hear. The audience would be told I am going to teach them how to wash an elephant. The first person would come on stage and Bob would demonstrate how to wash an elephant. Then the next person would come on stage and the first participant would have to try and copy what they watched Bob do, never knowing exactly what he had done. The process continued until the last person, of course, was doing things that looked nothing like washing an elephant. The purpose of this skit was not only to have a good time and laugh, but to demonstrate how hard it is to copy the life of another and how hard it is to pass on information including our faith.

Sometimes I wonder if our children are left to wash the elephant themselves when it comes to our faith. How can we expect them to learn to pray if they never see us praying? How can we teach them to forgive if all they hear from us are words of bitterness and revenge? How can they learn to take a step of faith when we lack faith? How can they learn to be generous when we spend our lives hoarding our resources for ourselves? How can they learn to take the lead in the church when we choose not to use our gifts in the church? Every moment is a teachable moment, but no moment is a teachable moment if we do not live an authentic faith.

The third thought from our text, in my opinion, is the most important one. The measure for the Christian parent is not success but faithfulness. This is the word of grace for us all. The command is about being faithful. Notice how it is written. The instructions are as we walk, and when we lie down. The instruction is about being faithful in every part of life. This instruction is about being faithful. What difference does it make if we change our way of thinking from being successful to being faithful?

First, when we are faithful we begin to look at children the way they are described in scripture. In the 1920's a well accepted idea was developed that every child was a complete result of their psychological experience. This was described as Psychological Determinism. The concept was that every child who had the same experience would become the same type of adult. In addition, it was thought that you could help determine a person's occupation, interests etc. by simply programming them psychologically.

In the late 20th century, Christian teachers and parenting experts Christianized this concept by suggesting that every child was a blank slate on which we could write, or a blank tape or DVD on which we could record. The concept was that if you did these things, and followed these rules then you would have this outcome. Thus, children were merely computers to be programmed. The result is that we do not view children as they are described in scripture as uniquely and wonderfully made. Using the Proverb that says train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. We created a whole Christian parenting concept that misused this Proverb and created an unreal and unbiblical view of parenting. We need to be reminded that the Proverbs are not promises, but observations by the wise Solomon. The proverbs are more maxims than formulas. Thus, this proverb has created an unbiblical view of parenting by Christianizing psychological determinism. The Bible filled with second generation fall out. Where the parent follow the Lord and was pleasing to the Lord, but their children were wicked and turned away from the Lord. In fact, Solomon himself had issues with his family.

When we realize that our task is faithfulness and not success, we begin to learn to parent with grace and to view each child as a special creation who God loves and has created for his purposes. We know that each child is fearfully and wonderfully made. Each child will need parenting that responds to their

uniqueness. We are learning that children not only are affected by their psychological influences, but by genetics as well. We don't have to understand the science behind this to know this is true. All we have to do is look in our own families to notice how different two children from the same gene pool and the same parenting can become two very different people.

Now this does not mean we cannot learn from other parents, we can.

We are called not to be successful, whatever that might mean, but we are called to faithful.

When we are faithful we not only see our own children as unique, but we also begin to view other parents and children differently. When we understand that children are different, then we are freed from judging other children and other parents. Each child is fearfully and wonderfully made. They are unique individuals who are special in God's eyes. But here is something we need to realize, in the kingdom of God our child is special, however so is every child. In the kingdom of God my child is unique, but so is every child. In the Kingdom of God my child is chosen by God for a purpose, but so is every child. All of a sudden when we choose faithfulness and not success as our model, we view every child differently.

A lady named Jennie tells a story of her six grade daughter and her struggles at church. Her daughter Julia was struggling making friends and with her own identity. One family in the church labeled Julia "demon possessed." Whether this was said in jest, the sting was still real. Jennie comments some people in the church had already given up on my daughter and she was only 11 years old. Their judgment was not only on my daughter, but me as well.

My friends let's come to grips with this concept. My parenting task is different from yours. We might face some of the same challenges, but my child is not your child. My child's personality, aptitude, intelligence, spiritual journey and emotional intelligence are different than your child. When I come to realize this, something wonderful happens. I begin to be released in my own parenting from trying to find other successful parents, and I can begin to ask of myself, am I being faithful as a parent to my child? The other thing that happens is that I learn how to love all the children within my church and no longer judge other parents, but come alongside them with love, grace, encouragement and prayer.