“What is our responsibility to the next generation?”

Deuteronomy 6:4-25    March 30, 2014

(All scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible)

When our oldest son was about 2 years old, he was playing at a mini-play land at the local McDonalds. All of a sudden, an older boy started bullying him. He wouldn’t let Chris leave the structure. When I heard Chris’s cry of distress, I was out of my seat with a sharp, “Hey, what is going on?” That got the other kid’s dad’s attention. He quickly called his son off and the situation was resolved. That kid’s dad was a lot bigger than me. Normally, I’m a chicken. I’ve always backed away from a fight. But this time, something was different. Instinct took over. I was going to protect my kid. That instinct is innate in most parents. We know that we have a responsibility to watch over our kids. Just as we have a responsibility to physically care for our kids, so we have a spiritual responsibility for our kids. And this is not just for parents, but our entire faith community at North Pointe has a responsibility to impart our faith to the next generation. Just as we’d do anything we could to get our kids food, clothes and shelter, so we should do whatever we can to get them an understanding of God. I’d like to take a closer look at that responsibility this morning. If you have a Bible, please open it to Deuteronomy 6. We’ll look at this passage and consider the question, “What is our responsibility to the next generation?”

Our passage opens with these words.

4 “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!

Scholar William Craigie points out that this verse speaks to the uniqueness and unity of God. In regard to the uniqueness of God, there is no one like Him in the universe. At the time this was written, God had just delivered Israel from the pantheon of gods in Egypt. The Lord overpowered all those gods. In our culture, we tend to elevate our entertainers or athletes or politicians to a god-like status. We need to know there is no one like the Lord. Our kids need to know that there is no one like the Lord. At an early age, they will be enticed to make sports or popularity or pleasure their god. We’re responsible to demonstrate to them that God is unique. In regard to the unity of God, when He spoke there was no one to contradict; when He spoke there was no one to revoke that promise; when He warned there was no one to provide refuge from that warning. God is united on all fronts. There is no conflict in the Godhead, He is One.

Verse 5 talks about our relationship with The Lord our God.

5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This injunction to love is based on God’s reaching out to the people through His covenant with Abraham. And for the people who first received this message, the injunction to love is based on God’s deliverance of them from Egypt. In the same way, God’s injunction for us to love Him is based on what He has done for us. He has demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. First John 4:14 says that we love God because He first loved us. God’s call is
that we love Him with our whole being. The book of Deuteronomy is a call to obey God. This call to obey is based on a love relationship with God. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses had just finished giving the Ten Commandments. Look what he says about the commandments.

6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

Moses desire was that the people think and meditate on the commandments in the context of God’s love so that their obedience would be a joyful response of understanding rather than a formal unloving legalism.

Then Moses gives the adults the responsibility of telling their children.

7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons 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 up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

They are supposed to immerse their children in what Moses is teaching. And what is Moses teaching? He is teaching an obedience to God that is rooted in love. Moses isn’t calling for a grudging obedience. He is calling for a joyful obedience that is rooted in a love for God. He is calling for a joyful obedience that is founded in an understanding of what God has done for us. What is our responsibility to the next generation? God calls us to teach the next generation to live in God’s love.

I think one of the best ways to teach our kids to live in God’s love is to tell our kids our story. My boys know my story. My dad controlled with anger so our home was not a safe place. As a result, as a young adult, I was unhealthy in my relationships. Over time, I learned to let God fill my longings for love and unacceptance. My kids know my experience of living in God’s love. Parents, do your kids know your story of living in God’s love? Do they know what verses have ministered to you? Do they know the circumstances of your desperation in which God met you?

As a church we want to supplement what is going on in your home. And we want to touch the kids who are here who haven’t had much parental input about living in God’s love. Teaching kids to live in God’s love presupposes at least two things. First, they understand God’s Word. This means we have a responsibility to teach them God’s Word in an age appropriate way. Second, we are teaching them God’s Word in the context of a loving relationship. When I worked in campus ministry, I met scores of college students who knew God’s Word. But they had learned God’s Word in a harsh, authoritarian environment either in their church or home and they wanted nothing to do with God. This responsibility to teach children to live in God’s love starts with the family. But it doesn’t end with the family. Moses is telling the nation of Israel collectively, “You teach all your children to live in God’s love.”

As a church, we can apply this principle to our body. Just as the nation of Israel had the responsibility to teach their children to live in God’s love, we have the same responsibility with
our children. This responsibility starts in our families, but it doesn’t end in our families. We have a number of kids who attend Sunday school who aren’t taught anything about God and His love in their families. Last summer during a VBS class, my wife, Hope, was sitting next to an elementary age child while Dave Winter was teaching the lesson. The little girl leaned over and asked Hope, “Who is Jesus?” Either the Bible is never opened in their home and / or they know nothing of a loving environment. We want to provide that place for our kids. As I mentioned last week, God has given us a season of growth as a church. We want to provide a place where our kids can grow in God’s love.

As we move forward, we want to ask you to consider investing in reaching children at North Pointe. But to do that we need to increase our monthly giving. Let me show you a graph of our expenses and income for the last year. (Show graph.) As you can see, income is running about $500 ahead of expenses. We’re trusting God to raise an additional $5000/month to invest in people to oversee children’s ministry and to help install a new check-in system. As we move forward, costs and income will be about the same. I’m asking those of you who are not giving to start giving on a monthly basis. I’m also asking those of you who are giving to consider increasing what you give. You will find a card on your seat. Would you take this card home and pray about your decision? Once you know the Lord’s leading will you put your increase down on the card?

As we move on in our passage, God warns the people not to forget Him, when they inherit the blessings that He will give them. Look at verses 10-12.

10 “Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which
He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and
splendid cities which you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things which
you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees
which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, 12 then watch yourself, that
you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the
house of slavery.

Isn’t that the challenge we face? We forget the Lord, especially when things go well. Our children will face that same temptation. Especially if they experience success in sports or band or dance or academics, they might not think of God. We have the responsibility to remind them of the Lord.

In verses 13-15, God warns about putting other gods before him.

13 You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by
His name. 14 You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who
surround you, 15 for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God;
otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will
wipe you off the face of the earth.

We are far too sophisticated to bow down to wooden idols. But we’ll make idols out of sports, dance, band or academics. We’ll put them before God. And our kids can make that same
mistake. As parents, we have the responsibility to remind them that God is a greater priority than their activities. As a church, we want to create a children’s ministry that is so relationally compelling that our kids want to be there. We want a children’s ministry that our kids choose over other activities. In verses 16-19, God gives the people further instructions about following Him.

In verses 20-25, God returns to talk specifically about our responsibility to children.

20 “When your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?’
21 then you shall say to your son, ‘We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 Moreover, the Lord showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; 23 He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He had sworn to our fathers.’ 24 So the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. 25 It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us.

These parents could have easily told their children, “Look what we did. We overcame the armies. We conquered the land.” But that is not what God told them to do. They told their kids of what the Lord did for them. Why? Someday when these kids face obstacles to following God, they will recall what the Lord did for their ancestors. And they will trust God.

Notice the connection between understanding God’s faithfulness and obedience to God. God’s faithfulness empowers us to obey Him. If our kids understand God’s faithfulness, they will be more likely to obey and follow Him. For if they truly believe that God will provide for them, they will be less likely to steal. If they truly believe God will meet their need for intimacy, they will be less likely to have sex before marriage. If they truly believe that God will meet their need for significance, they will be less likely to do reckless things in an attempt to make them popular with their peers. Thus, we have a responsibility to teach our kids to live in God’s faithfulness. What is our responsibility to the next generation? God calls us to teach the next generation to live in God’s love and in God’s faithfulness.

Part of teaching the next generation to live in God’s faithfulness means that we have experienced God’s faithfulness ourselves. Are we allowing the Lord to lead us into circumstances in which we are dependent on Him? Perhaps the Lord is calling us to take a step of faith in our career, or our finances or in our relationship with our parents or neighbors. Are we willing to take that kind of step in which we are dependent on the faithfulness of God? Will we have a personal story of God’s faithfulness in our lives to share with the next generation? Then, can we connect God’s faithfulness in our lives with the promises of God’s faithfulness in His Word? One of our faith steps was leaving our job in Arizona without having secured a job someplace else. At the time our boys were four and one. Our kids know that story of God’s faithfulness in our lives. If we can, we have something of great worth to offer our kids. If our
kids can learn to live in God’s faithfulness, that will serve them better than a 32 on the ACT or all state in volleyball or being most popular in their class.

We are asking you to partner with us in teaching this next generation to live in God’s love and faithfulness. Perhaps you could be part of this work by investing yourself in working in children’s ministry. We’ll have someone at the spotlight booth to talk more about working in children’s ministry. As I mentioned earlier, a second way you can be part of this work is by investing mostly in children’s ministry. Would you use the card to pray through your decision? Then return that card to us by April 13.

When I was a kid, I rooted for the Detroit Lions of the NFL. One of my favorite players was Mickey Zoftko. What he did was so dangerous that it is now illegal in the NFL. He was the wedge breaker on the kick-off coverage team. When the receiving team caught the kick, they formed a 3-man wedge in front of the man with the ball. Zoftko’s job was to run full-speed down the field and launch himself into the wedge. He often had to be helped off the field. He never made the tackle. He never got any glory, but he gave himself up so his team could gain a few yards of field position. In the same way, God is calling us to sacrifice so we can pass the Gospel on to the next generation. We are laying down our time. We are laying down a night out at a restaurant. We are laying down the purchase of some new clothes. Why? We want to see the kingdom of God go forward in the lives of a few kids. What is our responsibility to the next generation? God calls us to teach the next generation to live in God’s love and in God’s faithfulness. God calls us to teach the next generation to live in God’s love and in God’s faithfulness.