

## Parenting for Years

Jamin Roller - April 26, 2015

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Hey guys, good morning. I'm Mr. Jamin. If you would, turn with me in your Bibles to Deuteronomy, chapter 6. We only have these Family Worship Weekends a handful of times each year. I'm grateful for them. I love that we do them. If you're new, this is not what every weekend looks like. If you come back next weekend, it'll be very different.

I think one of the things that's really special about it for our campuses, while we are the youngest campus of The Village's five campuses, we have the second most amount of children, the second most amount of families. So next to Flower Mound, we have the most kids in Little Village and Kids' Village every Saturday and Sunday.

What I know about us, about our attenders, our members, is a lot of you are parents, but not just that. A lot of you are parents of young kids because of the ages of Little Village and Kids' Village, so we have a lot of families here. You parents, you're all very in love and multiplying, which is great. Praise God. In light of that, what I want to do is consider two passages where the Lord instructs us in regard to parenting, and I want to do so within a certain framework.

A couple of months ago, our campus pastor, Hunter Hall, was preaching, and at one point he made a comment about parenting. He said, "The days are long and the years are short." It hit me on the cusp of my oldest turning 4, so I found that statement profoundly true, because I'm standing at my 4-year-old's birthday party thinking, "There's no way. This is impossible. He can't be 4. I don't even remember him being 3. I remember him being 2 for sure, but I don't remember him being 3."

My time with him is a breath. In that, realizing that the years are short, realizing the brevity, my hopes for him, my desires for him, my hope for the future is just so pure and righteous and eternal. I realized I am a more faithful parent when I focus on the fact that the years are short versus focusing and dwelling on the days being long. When I am thinking of the long game and thinking eternally

and thinking about the brevity, I'm more faithful and more committed and just a better steward of what the Lord has given me.

There's something that's implicitly Christian about that, because as Christians, we live our lives in the present based on what we know to be true about the future. We steward the gifts God has given us, the talents, the challenge, the mission God has given us... We steward it now based on knowing that one day in the future we'll give an account. We are faithful in trial and faithful in temptation and faithful in suffering because we have a hope in the future. We live today based on what we know to be true about tomorrow.

So there is this eternal-type mindset we have as Christians, and I think based on these Scriptures we'll look at in a few moments, we are to have this eternal-type perspective in raising, rearing, and caring for the kids the Lord has given us. So let's look at these passages, starting with Deuteronomy 6, verse 4.

**"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding 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 up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."**

Deuteronomy 6, starting in verse 4, is a foundational passage for the people of God in the Old Testament. It's called the *Shema*, which *shema* in Hebrew just means hear or listen. It's this call to worship. It's twofold. The first part is a confession. The confession is this. It begins by saying, "The Lord is our God. The God of the universe has a special and unique relationship to us that is different than the relationship he has with the rest of the earth."

Then not only is the Lord our God, but the Lord is one. That doesn't mean God is one, speaking of his Trinitarian nature, although that's true. What it means is God is one. He's all there is. He stands alone as the one true God. All of the surrounding nations have a claim that their deity exists or that they worship *this* god or *this* thing or *this* image. All of those claims to deity are false and bogus, and we know there is one God, the one true God, and he is all that's worth living for.

Because the Lord is our God and he's the one God, we respond to him in a very specific way. We love him with all of our heart and all of our soul and all of our might. All of our being is devoted and surrendered and submitted to this God who is our God, the one God. The overflow of that kind of love is that we teach that truth. We teach those convictions. We pass them on to our children.

But it doesn't carry just the idea that we teach it to our immediate family, to our kids. The idea is you're teaching it to your children in such a way that they're teaching it to *their* children in such a way that they're teaching it to *their* children, so you don't just have a family who believes, but you have a whole lineage of faith, a whole family tree of those who would say, "I love the Lord, the one Lord, the only God, with all of my heart and all of my soul and all my might."

For some of you, that's the kind of lineage you live in biologically. We stand on this side of the cross, so what the people in the Old Testament looked forward to in Christ's coming we look back on, his death and resurrection. Our confession is that Jesus is all. Jesus alone saves. We know and follow him, and he has made us right with the Father. That's our confession.

Some of you are in that kind of lineage, where you're in here, and you came to faith because your mom and dad believed and taught it to you, and in God's grace he saved you, and *their* mom and dad believed and taught it to them, and so on and so on. Others of us would sit here and say, "My family name is not a good one. If you look back through our lineage, if you look back up into my family tree, it is riddled with dysfunction and abuse and addiction and could overall be characterized by a rejection of the one true God, by a lack of love with heart, soul, and mind."

You're sitting in here today, and you say, "You know what? But I want *that*. I want that kind of lineage. I want to be this line of demarcation, that if you were to look at my family history, there would be a moment where those kinds of things stop and the honoring of the Lord, the obeying of the Lord, the righteous living begins, and that line of demarcation is me and my family and the faith the Lord has given to me that I then pass on to my children who pass it on to *their* children who pass it on to *their* children."

What Deuteronomy is going to say is there's a very specific way you do that. There's a very specific way you instill that kind of faith in the generations that follow after you. Verse 7 says, "**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 up.**"

What's the point? That encompasses every movement of the human experience, except for swimming. The idea is that in everything you're doing, walking, lying, rising, sitting, you're talking about these truths. You're declaring the truth of who God is and what God has done. If I were to summarize that in a modern context, the point is your faith is an everyday reality, not a weekend event.

It's not something you just enter into and exit out of depending on the context or the seat you're sitting in or the people who are around, but it's something that has so gripped your heart it permeates every aspect of your existence, and it's always on the front of your mind and the tip of your tongue.

Wherever you land on that spectrum, everyday reality to weekend event, no one will expose that in us like our kids. It's a very vulnerable thing to ask your kids. "What does Dad talk about most? What do you think Mom and Dad care most about? Based on what we say, based on what we buy, based on how we act, what do Mom and Dad care most about?"

Ask your kids, "What's the sermon you most often hear preached that's reverberating off the walls of our home? Is it the school sermon? Is it the work sermon? Is it the money sermon? Is it the Jesus sermon?" Here's what we need to know. Nothing will make Christianity more unappealing than for our kids to see us dichotomizing between real life and religious life.

Nothing will make it weaker to them, more unattractive and unappealing, than for them to see us making a distinction between the way we live when we're in a sacred setting versus the way we live when we're in a secular setting. "This is what we do around *there*, and this is what we do around *here*." The other side of that coin is nothing will make Christianity feel more like home for our kids than for them to see us radically committed to the gospel of Jesus both inside and outside the walls of the church.

That's not always pretty. It's not always this watershed moment. I took my son on a hike a couple of months ago, and we were at a park just north of my house on this trail. People mountain bike there and trail run and walk and everything. So I'm walking along with him, and we get to this fork in the trail, and there's a sign there. There's an arrow pointing one direction and an arrow pointing the other direction. One direction is the easier path, and the other direction is the difficult path, the hard path.

My son Asher and I sat down on this log and had a conversation. I said, "Hey, here's what's going on. Here's what that sign means. What do you think we should do? Which way do you think we should go?" He said, "Dad, we should go the easier way." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because it's easier." I felt so intelligent. Four years of Bible college.

I said, "Well, I understand that, but here's the thing. Jesus was once given a choice. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, and he was given a choice to take the easy way. 'Just worship me, and you can have all the kingdoms of the world. You can take the easy way out.' But Asher, Jesus chose to go the hard way. Why? Because he loves us, and he loves the Father. We follow Jesus, and we live our lives for Jesus. So what do you think we should do?"

He thought about it. He looked at me and said, "Dad, I think we should go the easy way, because I don't want to die on a cross." I thought, "Fair enough. I mean, I didn't really pack for that." The point is not that it's always going to be some sort of home-run conversation. The point, though, is that it could always *be* a conversation. It's always something that's on the front of our minds and the tips of our tongues that is working itself out, so our children see we're thinking about it every day in every aspect of our comings and goings in life.

Then don't miss verse 8, because verse 8 is an important piece of understanding this and navigating through this. He says, "**You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**" This is not for the watching world. In other words, this isn't the modern equivalent of the Jesus fish on our car.

It's not so that other people see and say, "Oh, okay, they're a Christian." The idea is that it's on our wrists. It's on our foreheads. It's on our doorposts. It's ever before us so that we remember. Why? Because we're prone to forget. We're prone to be pulled away from these truths. We're prone to forget there is one God who's the one true God.

We are broken, and our nature will sometimes manifest itself in us worshipping lesser things, chasing false gods. It's the wrestle of the Christian life. Implicit in this is the reality that we *are* going to fail and we *are* going to fall and we *are* going to need to confess and repent, and our children desperately need to be brought into that wrestle. They need a front-row seat to watching Mom and Dad fall and get back up, fail and repent.

Some of the most meaningful moments for me as a kid were when my mom and dad would apologize for something. Like when my mom would come into my room and say, "Hey, I spoke to you in this way, and I'm sorry." Or my dad would come in, and he would say, "Hey, you observed this about me earlier, and I need you to know that was not righteous, and I'm sorry. It offended God and it offended our family, and I repent. I apologize."

It was meaningful to me because, first, it made me feel loved. It's relationally healthy to have that practice. But I also identified with that, even as a kid, just being broken and having a broken heart and identifying with the fact that they were showing me there is space in the Christian life to fall and get back up. They mirrored that in their life.

More than I needed my mom and dad to *be* Jesus, I needed my mom and dad to *need* Jesus. I needed to see them demonstrating that in their repentance, in their apologies, and demonstrating the fact that Mom and Dad are not my savior. There's a far better Savior, the one who saved *them*, the one *they* follow.

So in this modeling for our kids, in it always being on the front of our minds, the tip of our tongues, we also need to know we welcome them into the character, the pattern, just this rhythm of repentance, where they see it's okay to not be perfect. It's okay to be broken. It's okay to mess up. Let's look at Psalm 127. Deuteronomy 6 gives us this behavior as parents, this eternal type of model for parenting. Psalm 127 gives us this picture of who our kids are to us, of what the intention is for them.

**"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep. Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."**

Someone asked me after last service what that means. It's the Bible giving you permission to throw your kids at people. **"They will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate."** We read the whole psalm for a reason. On first glance, it might seem like it's two different psalms. "Unless the Lord builds the house..." That's like a construction worker psalm. Then "Children are a gift." That's the parenting psalm.

In reality, these psalms together highlight one truth, and that is all human toil, all human effort, is worthless unless it's blessed by God. That's the point. We are missing it unless we see our work and our city-building and our leadership as being dependent on God, from God, and we miss it as parents unless we see our children as gifts from God. That's what they are. They are a gift from the Lord given to us that we might steward as an act of worship unto him.

There are a couple of dangers when it comes to parenting. Instead of seeing our gifts, there's a danger that we see our kids as god and make them god and center our lives around them to where they determine the climate of the home. Instead of us seeing them as gifts and worshiping the Giver, we see them as that which we should be worshiping, and we place our children as the uppermost in our affections and allegiance.

One of the signs that our kids are god is when authority in the home becomes disordered. Instead of it being God, marriage, children, it's children, and then everything else in whatever order. Then when they're god, we start saying yes to things God has already said no to. When children sit in that place in the home... Whatever is uppermost in affections, whatever is uppermost in submission, in devotion, everything else after that is dispensable. Everything else after that becomes something you could potentially sacrifice on the altar of whatever the greatest thing is.

So it's for the man who says, "You know what? I might not be a very good husband, but I'm a really good dad." It's impossible. It's a contradiction. Why? Because you are the one your sons are looking to to learn how to treat a woman in the way you treat their mom. You are the one your daughters are looking to to create their expectation as to how they should be treated by a man by the way you treat your wife. They're not mutually exclusive. They're integrally connected.

When the child is god, everything else is dispensable, and authority in the home becomes disordered. They run everything. There's another danger, and that is seeing our kids as a burden. Our culture propagates this. Our culture, Hollywood, the media is pitching this idea that the greatest season of human existence is when you are young, first job, in college, have nothing tying you to anything. Very low commitment. You can spend money how you want to spend. You can spend time how you want to spend. Then you get married, and you get to travel.

Then all of a sudden, children come into the picture, and you have these little humans who are oozing from every orifice on their body, and it's just this buzzkill. It takes your time, takes your

money. It's just this drain. The idea, then, is that children are this burden. They're just a task. They're just something I'm now responsible for.

The sign that children have stopped being a gift and started being a burden is that our provision for them becomes predominately physical. Pay the bills. Feed them. Don't invest emotionally. Don't invest spiritually. Just do the bare minimum of what it takes to keep them alive. The school can educate them, the church can indoctrinate them, and I'll write the checks.

Writing checks is easy. Knowing your kids takes work. Hearing their heart takes work. Knowing how God has wired each of them differently and what they need takes work. But it's worth it, because they're not a burden; they're a gift. God has given them to us as a gift. The sign we're seeing our kids as a gift is that we steward them in a holistic way. Not just physically, but we steward them mind, body, and heart. We give an account for all of those.

The youth pastor is not going to stand before God and give an account for your kids. The children's minister is not going to stand before God and give an account. We are going to stand before God to give an account for our own children. The responsibility of discipleship falls on us first. So part of the evidence that they are a gift and we're seeing them as a gift is that we are taking responsibility for those things. It's going to create in us this appreciation for the Giver of the gift.

If somebody gave you a brand new car, like a 2016 whatever...tax title and license...they just gave you a brand new car, one of the ways we would all know a year from now how appreciative you were for that gift is how well you took care of the car. If it's trashed out and there are stains everywhere and you never got the oil changed, it means you really didn't appreciate the gift and didn't appreciate the giver of the gift. But to take care of it and steward it well is a reflection of honor and appreciation to whoever gave you that thing, whoever gave you that gift.

Similarly, the way we steward our kids is an act of worship unto God as appreciation. "God, you entrusted me with this. You gave this to me." The difficulty is that so often familiarity is the enemy of appreciation. Once we get used to something we no longer appreciate it as much. I went to Israel a year ago, and we spent six days in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is gorgeous. It has incredible architecture and incredible buildings, and the remains of the temple are still there. It's just incredible.

When you get there, you just walk around, just looking up, taking pictures of everything, and writing notes about everything. There's this awe, and you're just kind of mesmerized. Yet there's a

group of people who don't care anymore, who are not mesmerized: the locals. This beautiful cathedral in front of me... To the guy walking on his way to his job, it's just the building he passes every day on the way to the market or on the way to the bus or on the way to work.

Familiarity often starves out appreciation. So part of the work for us, as parents, is to be diligent to protect that, to not get used to that, to remember what it was like to hold that child for the first time and be filled with joy and awe and a little bit of terror and appreciation for what the Lord has done, in every single season.

Right now I'm in a sweet season with my kids. It's a chaotic season, but it's a sweet season. My oldest is 4. My youngest is 18 months, and anytime I leave the home or return to the home is an event. Anytime I go to work there's a funeral. It's like freaking out and crying and weeping and gnashing of teeth and like, "How could you?" I'm pulling out of the driveway like, "Why do I do this? Why do I go and provide for them?" I just feel horrible about myself.

But when I come home, they're waiting at the door, and it's a party. I open the door, and it's like, "Dad, look at this thing I drew. You're not going to know what it is. Look at this mess I made." There's just this elation. It makes you feel incredible. It's a shot of confidence. It's not always going to be like that. When my son is 16, I'm going to come in and be like, "Hey, buddy," and he'll be like, "Sorry, Dad. I have to shave my beard."

Each season is unique. Each season is special, and we honor God when we show our appreciation in our stewardship and in our thankfulness to him for these gifts he has given us. Now there's something that's difficult about a sermon like this in a room like this, because there's such a myriad of different circumstances represented in these chairs.

For some of you, your kids are gone, and maybe they're not following the Lord. For some of you, there's a lot of regret centered around your parenting. Your kids are still in the home, and you've done a lot wrong, and you would say, "All of the things you listed, I'm not currently doing those things very well," so there's a lot of regret, a lot of guilt, a lot of shame. Others of you desperately want kids and, for whatever reason, it hasn't happened yet. You've struggled with infertility. You've struggled to have children.

In light of that, let's not miss this point. *The gift is always intended to point back to the giver.* God gives children to draw attention to who he is, his character, his nature, the way he relates to us.

Whether you have children or not, you have a Father. Whether your earthly father is a good dude or a bad dude, your heavenly Father is perfectly righteous and full of love and grace and compassion for you. Maybe you don't have kids or you're struggling to have kids, but you *are* a child.

In Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus uses this illustration, where he says, "What father, whose son asks for a piece of bread, would give him a stone?" Jesus' conclusion to that is, "If you, being evil, can give good gifts, how much more will your Father take care of you in heaven?" If God is perfect, how much better will he do at parenting us, comforting us, leading us, loving us, than we who are evil even do loving our kids?

So if you're in here and you're hurting, what father in here, whose child was all alone hurting, would leave them in isolation versus going and comforting them? How much more will God comfort you in your time of hurt, be with you in your time of need? He might not give you the answers, but he *will* give you himself, which is better.

Then of you who might be riddled with regret, riddled with guilt and shame, what earthly father would want their child beating themselves up over past mistakes? How much more would your heavenly Father delight in coming and showing grace and mercy to you and reminding you that Jesus paid it all?

As a good heavenly Father, he would come in and remind you, "Don't carry a weight that has already been lifted, and don't try to pay a debt that has already been canceled." He loves you. You're forgiven. Walk in the freedom your heavenly Father has purchased for you at the death of his own Son, because he loves you.

Then for us as parents, knowing that's God's heart and knowing our hope is to model God's heart for our children, may we remember that they are gifts to us and may we demonstrate our love for the Lord with heart, soul, and might in everyday life, keeping in mind that our time with them is very brief because the years are short. Let's pray.

Jesus, we love you. We thank you for your goodness and your grace, your mercy in our lives. You are a good Father. For the boy or girl, man or woman, struggling to believe that, I pray you would overwhelm them with the truth of who you are, your character, your love, your grace.

For the mom or dad who would feel like things aren't going very well and they need direction, I pray you would overwhelm them with forgiveness, that you will meet them in that place, God, not to shame them, but to shape them. Thank you for all of these boys and girls, God, just the joy of life, just the gift they are to their families and to this church. We love you, amen.

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