

# Unexpected | Week 5

## Parenting

*Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor*

The early morning hours of March 7, 2012 will forever be seared into my memory. At roughly 3:30 am, just four hours after taking a Benadryl, I was suddenly awakened by the bathroom light. As my eyes slowly focused, I realized my wife was standing just feet from the bed. That's when she spoke the words I had waited nine months to hear.

“My water just broke.”

Still high on antihistamines and a fair amount of adrenaline, I quickly grabbed the suitcase she had packed a few weeks earlier and threw on the closest t-shirt and pair of pants I could find. While she rushed to fix her hair (because priorities, right?), I loaded up the car. Before I knew it, we were speeding down an empty expressway. It took a few moments to process the magnitude of what was soon to come, but that inevitable realization eventually settled in.

“Before the sun rises and sets again tonight, I will hold my son. I will be a dad.”

Sure enough, after 13 hours of fruitless labor and an emergency C-section, our notoriously stubborn Caleb let out his first cry. The sheer emotion of the moment was enough to make me forget that I was watching surgeons operate on my completely conscious wife.

As the nurses wrapped Caleb up and placed him in my arms, I was beginning my first day at the sweetest, most frustrating, and eternally significant job of my life – *parenthood*.

Parenthood is an incredible blessing but an exhausting task. The call to “make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19)” ultimately begins in our own homes. As parents, we have the opportunity to lay a spiritual foundation in our kids' lives that hardly anyone else can. Doing this involves much more than reading devotionals and praying with them before bed each night. This kind of discipleship is baked into the mundane, everyday moments that slowly shape their hearts. It happens in the random car-ride conversations, at the dinner table, and during the sleepless nights when they're sick and miserable.

Want to see the next generation rise up and love God with all their hearts? It's growing up down the hall from your bedroom. If you're the parent of an infant or toddler, a member of that generation might just be drooling on your shoulder right now. Got a middle schooler? You might just be smelling the next generation's dirty laundry at the moment.

The call to raise this generation to love Jesus doesn't begin with their Promiseland teachers on Sunday morning or with the pastors in our church. It begins with you. That very calling is what we'll explore this week from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

If you're not a parent, or your kids are grown, you may be wondering what this week's lesson has to do with you. As part of the body of Christ, each of us should be praying for and supporting the parents who are bearing up under the awesome responsibility of raising up the next generation. As you read through our study this week, ask the Spirit to show you some ways that you can help lift their load. I know that all of us with kids at home, whether we are drowning in dirty diapers or teenage angst would appreciate your love, prayer, and support.

## Day 1

As we dive into our focal passage for the week, it's important to understand its context. The word Deuteronomy means "second law." This book is the retelling of the Law, a final reminder by Moses to the nation of Israel before they begin a monumental campaign that the generation before them failed miserably to even begin.

The Israelites are standing on the cusp of the Promised Land, gearing up to conquer the much stronger and more impressive Canaanites who proudly call it home. Moses is addressing the people one final time. When he finishes his address, he will quietly climb Mount Nebo where he will give his last breath.

The great leader who led the prior generation out of Egypt will never experience Israel's new home. Instead, he will hand the baton over to his protégé, Joshua, who will lead them across the Jordan River, into the land God had long promised them.

The book of Deuteronomy is a reminder of God's strength and his faithfulness. It's a call to obey God and trust him to come through. As Moses retells their story and gives them the final charge, he addresses the importance of fearing God and teaching the next generation to do the same.

### Read the Word

#### Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV)

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord 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. And these words that I command 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

## Reflect

- Growing up, what was your parents' view of God? How did it shape your own?

## Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Dear Father, thank you for the child(ren) you've given me. Thank you for awesome responsibility of raising them to love you. Please give me the discernment to recognize the heart-shaping moments in their lives and the wisdom to lead them well. Help me to parent with purpose.*

## Day 2

*Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor*

Ever since he was old enough to begin interacting with us, Holly and I have been constantly amazed at Caleb's brilliance and quick wit. Our first-grader's lack of filter, adult-like mannerisms, and strong opinions keep us laughing. They also keep us on our toes. It's hard to have a wit like his and not get yourself in trouble every now and then.

As with all kids, there are times his mouth has gotten ahead of his head. When he's frustrated, he's very good at expressing it. And that's where the roughest part of his personality often rubs against of the roughest part of mine. His anger at a toy that isn't working the way he wants or frustration toward us when we tell him it's time to get ready for bed brings out my dark side.

This dynamic isn't the result of my natural bend toward deference and level-headedness. It's because he got that temper and frustration with perceived injustice from me. His sullenness brings about flashbacks of me at his age. He received those aspects of my personality both genetically and by observing me in my less refined moments.

It's a difficult reality to face as a parent. What you model is what you get. The clearest lessons our kids observe come from what they see. You can't sell what you aren't willing to buy. If we're going to raise up our kids with a healthy love of God, we must possess it in ourselves. It starts with us. That's why Moses begins his words on parenting with a personal command.

## Read the Word

**Deuteronomy 6:4-6 (NIV)**

*“Hear, O Israel: The Lord 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. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.*”

## **Reflect**

This declaration of God’s oneness is the centerpiece of The Shema, a daily prayer ritual practiced by modern Jews. It’s an affirmation that Yahweh is the one, true God. This truth ran counter to the practices and understandings of other cultures in Moses’ day. This worship of one sovereign God made them truly unique to the world around them.

If he is the one, true God, he should enjoy our undivided, intentional worship. He deserves every part of us. This includes our *hearts* – our affections, longings, and desires. It involves our *minds* – our thoughts, meditation, and focus. Finally, it encompasses our *might* – our energy, strength, and perseverance. It’s a wholistic, all-in worship that involves every part of who we are.

This understanding and love of God is meant to be passed down through the generations. One generation’s failure to observe this could easily lead to the next generation’s failure as well.

It’s a reality Moses knows all too well.

The people he is now preparing to enter the Promised Land aren’t the ones he led out of Egypt. Moses’ generation, the ones who crossed Red Sea on dry land in Exodus, have now passed. They once stood on the edge of the Promised Land as this one does now. They had their chance to inherit the beautiful gift God had prepared for them. They could have raised their kids in a land they called their own. They could have been a generation who was born in slavery but died in a place of freedom. But their view of the one, true God was too small.

The book of Numbers records the tragedy. When they arrived at this spot decades earlier, God told Moses to have each of Israel’s twelve tribes appoint one scout who will cross into the Promised Land and explore what God was about to give them. He wanted them to see its stark beauty and natural resources. He also wanted them to see the people who they’d battle against to enjoy it.

When the scouts came back, their report was terrifying. They told of its beauty, but also told of the powerful people who currently occupy it. It was a war the weary, wandering people knew they couldn’t win. They went into mourning and broke into open rebellion. They became angry with Moses for leading them to such a beautiful land that, in their eyes, could never be conquered. By the end of it, God condemned the people he had just led out of Egypt to a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness. They didn’t believe he could come through. As a result, they’d never experience the life they were promised. Instead, it would fall to their kids.

Only two men gave the minority report that day – Joshua and Caleb. These two recognized the challenge ahead, but also recognized that the one, true God was much bigger. Of the twelve scouts, they were the only two to get it. They tried to convince the people that God was bigger

than the task ahead - that he was fighting for them – but no one listened. Moses' generation had failed Joshua and Caleb's generation. They feared their challenge instead of their God. As if invading a new land isn't hard enough, Joshua and Caleb's generation must now do it knowing that their parents didn't even think it was possible.

As Moses now prepares Joshua and his generation for the battle in Deuteronomy 6, he wants to make sure they truly "get it." To conquer this land, they must realize that they worship the one, true God. They can't just intellectually agree with that statement. They must stake their lives on it. In contrast to their parents, this truth must be written on their hearts.

This generation can't fail like the last one did. The legacy of their people depends on it.

Israel's story leading up to this moment is a vivid reminder that the growth of the next generation ultimately starts with ours. We have an opportunity to demonstrate true faith in God, but it can't be faked. It has to be real for them to grasp it and pass it on. Failure to do so sets them on a spiritually precarious journey.

- How well did your parents model a true understanding and love of God? How did it shape your own?
- How can you personally grow in your relationship with God so your children are better poised to follow him?
- If you are not a parent, or your kids are grown, how can you model a deep trust in God to the next generation? What failures of your own generation are you praying the next generation avoids.

## Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Dear Lord, thank you that you're the one, true God. I confess that I don't always recognize it. Please forgive me for making you too small in my own eyes. Help me place a greater faith in you and model it well for my children.*

## Day 3

*Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor*

Yesterday, we looked at the importance of intentionally worshiping God and looked at the failure of Moses' generation to truly internalize the truths they had been taught. This failure leads Moses to reinforce the Law to the next generation in the book of Deuteronomy so they don't repeat the mistakes of their parents. At its core, this episode is a reminder that the discipleship of our children begins in our own hearts. We can't fake our faith and hope it's real to them.

Today, we look at the focal point of this week's passage – the importance of diligently training our children to know God, love him, and follow him.

## Read the Word

### Deuteronomy 6:7 (NIV)

*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.*

## Reflect

My passion for the Church and my love for communications dates all the way back to my high school years. (I know, I was really cool.) Going into my junior year, I scored my first internship in the Communications department at a very large church in North Dallas. It was my first time working in an office. I was thrilled with the simple things like having my own computer and official email address. I loved sitting in meetings and seeing how everything worked behind the scenes. But I also had a lot to learn.

Early on, I distinguished myself as a hard worker. I always got my projects done on time and did them well. But I consistently missed an important, final step when they were completed. I never told my supervisor! I would work 2-3 days on my tasks but never let anyone know they were done. As a result, she would get frustrated and wonder why my work wasn't done. When she'd call me on it, I could always produce a good, final product but her satisfaction was always tainted by the frustration of having to ask for it.

Apparently, it's not enough to work hard and never let anyone see the great job you did. You've got to share it with others so that it can benefit the team.

The same goes in our parenting. As we've already explored, it's important to write the truths of God on our hearts but it's also important to instill it in our children. We must make sure they see what has transformed our hearts in order to experience it themselves.

Moses commands the Israelites to teach them *diligently*. In other words, do it over and over again. Marinate each moment of the day in the truths of God's power and love. Take advantage of every opportunity to make sure they know who he is, what's he done for them, and that he wants invites them to experience him.

When you wake them up in the morning, remind them of the one, true God.  
When you tuck them in bed, remind them that he loves them.  
When you're eating lunch, remind them of what he's done for them.  
When you're sitting around the house, remind them of his unfailing power.  
When you're in the car, remind them that he's there.

In today's culture, it's so easy to outsource our parenting. We're blessed to have teachers, coaches, church leaders, and tutors to help us raise them well and make sure they're equipped for the world ahead of them. But these people can't replace what happens in the home. They can supplement our role as our kids' primary developers, but they can't do it for us.

It falls on us to openly demonstrate God's love for them and it should infiltrate even the smallest, most mundane moments.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how well are you modeling God's truths to your kids?
- How can you be more intentional in daily life to help them see God's love and salvation in you?

### Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Father, thank you for what you've done in my life. Give me the insight and intentionality to demonstrate your love to my kids. Give me the courage to declare it with my lips. I pray they will see you in me. Change whatever must change in my heart so they can. Amen.*

## Day 4

*Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor*

In the world of mass communications, the most critical tool an organization or company possesses is their brand. When the public thinks of branding, they think about things like the iconic Nike swoosh or the Apple emblem. If you hear the name of a major corporation like Coca-Cola or McDonalds, their logo almost instantly comes to mind.

But that logo is only part of an organization's brand. Great brands are defined by the little things. They have rules about which words are okay to use in communications and which ones aren't. They follow guidelines about fonts, colors, and how the logo can be placed in an image. Great retailers even mandate the way their employees dress. You've likely noticed how Chick-Fil-A workers always say, "my pleasure" when you say "thank you." Next time you walk into Target, watch how they never refer to you as a customer. Instead, you're a "guest." Even those small, scripted interactions are part of the way the companies define themselves. Attention to these obsessive details is what makes their brands great.

Why? Because it's the repetition of the little things that reinforce big realities. Great marketers know that, and it works the same way in our parenting.

After commanding the people to write the truths of God on their hearts and teach them diligently to their children, he reminds this generation to reinforce them through the little things.

## Read the Word

### Deuteronomy 6:8-9

*You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

## Reflect

The Israelites took this command very seriously. In the early second century B.C., the people were known to wear “phylacteries,” small boxes or metal cylinders that were bound to their foreheads or arms by straps. Inside the boxes were parchments with excerpts from Exodus 13, Deuteronomy 6, and Deuteronomy 11. Some modern Jews even do this today.

Several years ago, my brother visited Israel on a multi-week trip for one of his college courses. When he came back, he brought with him several mezuzahs. These were small but beautiful decorations that could be hung on the doorframes of the home with the truths of Deuteronomy 6 inscribed on them.

As Christians, we’re not sinning by not wearing black boxes on our foreheads or hanging mezuzahs on our doorframes. Our spiritual maturity isn’t defined by the amount of spiritual bling we wear or splash on our walls. But the sentiment behind these commands still rings true today. We should reinforce the reality of God’s power and love in every aspect of home life. As we explored yesterday, we do that through the little moments with our kids, but we can also sprinkle them in our home environments.

I’ve seen some families put up decorations with the values of their home, which are rooted in Scripture. You may already write Bible verses on sticky notes you place on the dashboard of your car or on the bathroom mirror as a daily reminder. When I was in college, my mom would even send me Bible verses in her occasional care packages as a loving reminder that she’s praying for me.

This command supports the much broader point – don’t forget the one, true God in your home! The most important thing we can pass down to our children is the truth of who he is and what’s he’s done. It should be a daily reminder that permeates every aspect of life together. God wants us to be intentional about making sure the next generation truly understands his power and love. We shouldn’t miss even the smallest opportunities to do that.

- How does your family incorporate God’s truths into your home’s environment?

## Pray

If it's helpful, use the following to begin your own prayer time with God.

*Dear Lord, keep the truths of your power and love at the forefront of my heart. Help me not to forget who you are in my day-to-day life. Give me the wisdom to reinforce it wherever possible with my child(ren) as well.*

## Day 5

*Matt Morrison, Communications Pastor*

It's Friday! How has this week's reading impacted you? Today, spend some extended time in prayer and consider your next steps in following Christ.

### Reflect on what you've learned

Start by reviewing this week's verses.

#### Deuteronomy 6:4-9

*"Hear, O Israel: The Lord 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. And these words that I command 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

How does this week's study hit you? Do you feel affirmed in the daily practices in your home or do you feel a sense of conviction?

When Noah, our youngest, was born, life quickly kicked into a higher gear. It wasn't helped by the fact Caleb, our oldest, started Kindergarten and I began my position at Christ Fellowship just weeks later. The addition of elementary school life and sleepless nights with a newborn threw us into absolute survival mode.

As life gets busier and busier, it's easy to focus on simply getting through the day. In the process, we can easily neglect the larger mission in our parenting. We can ignore the small moments that allow us to convey God's truths with our kids. We can allow the habits that reinforce him in our daily lives fade away.

## Pray

If this week's study feels convicting, spend some time praying with your spouse about how you can better write these truths on your hearts and pass them on to your kids. If you're a single parent, enlist some of your brothers and sisters in Christ as prayer warriors on behalf of you and your kids. Don't let guilt or shame take over. If you've been failing in this area, it's never too late to get started. Even if your kids are grown, remember that our God is full of grace and his power to redeem knows no end. Pray that he will work in the hearts of your children, whether they are 2 or 22, 14 or 44.

If you're not a parent, what mom or dad can you be praying for? Take some time today to pray for them based on what we studied this week.

### **What's Your Next Step?**

- If you've been failing in this area, what has been preventing you from taking the necessary steps before? Consider asking God to work on your heart.
- Think through a few steps you can take as early as this weekend to begin reinforcing the gospel in your home.
- How can you and your spouse hold each other accountable as you grow in this area?
- How can you pray for and support moms and dads in your life? Particularly those who could use some extra support? For example, is there a single mom you can reach out to? Do you know a family with a special needs child who could use some help? Pray for the Lord to open your eyes to the families around you that you could love and serve.