



Family Discipleship

Deuteronomy 6:4-25

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Just recently I finished a book by the Historian Carl Trueman that I found to be the most helpful book I read in 2020. The book, which I have here, is called *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. In it, Trueman aims to trace a philosophical history of the modern understanding of identity. What does it mean to be *self*? He recounts the thoughts of many thinkers and traces many themes to answer this question, and some of those we will come back to later in this series on the Gospel for Life, but right now I want to focus on one particular feature of modern thinking that Trueman points out in his book. Following the work of philosopher Charles Taylor, he recounts how modern Western culture has shifted in the way the world is ordered by defining the relationship between what is called *mimesis* and *poiesis*.

Put simply, these terms refer to two different ways of thinking about the world a *mimetic* view regards the world as having a given order and a given meaning and thus sees human beings as required to discover that meaning and conform themselves to it. *Poiesis*, by way of contrast, sees the world as so much raw material out of which meaning and purpose can be created by the individual.¹

In other words, you can define the two ways of seeing the world like this.

Mimesis: The world is given order and meaning which I must conform to

Poesis: the world is formless and I can craft it's meaning and order

To illustrate this, consider the work of a farmer in medieval Europe. Agricultural technology in his day leaves him completely dependent on geography and seasons. He cannot shape the weather to grow whatever he likes, he must live with the fact and conform to the fact that he can't have certain crops all year long. But today, that is not the case. Technological advances in genetics and increased knowledge of fertilizers and pesticides mean that we can essentially craft and fashion our environment to grow whatever crop we'd like, wherever and whenever we would like. This does not make technological advance evil, it simply shows us that it is easy to imagine we live in a world where we can be whoever we want and fashion meaning and purpose in any way we want.

¹ Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 39.



Now, you are already asking: is this a philosophy lecture? No, it's a Christina sermon, and today we will be going to Deuteronomy 6 to ask the question: what does the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have to say about the way we raise our children? But here is where I find the concept of mimesis and poiesis so interesting: this is a message that is being disciplined into our children in full force.

The reason I say that is because we find poiesis in its simplest form in children's literature and tv shows and movies. No longer does the fantasy we consume point us firstly towards virtue, but towards self-acceptance and self-definition. For a young girl to desire to be princess is not to showcase modesty and wisdom and care, but rather to be seen and bowed to and doted on. Our children are taught that the world is anything they make it, they are given choices to decide how to shape and form their worldview before they have any tools to do so. More children than any other point in history are taking hormone blockers, identifying as transgender, or even no gender at all, changing the natural course of puberty with their parents praise and consent.² Notice the impact on education: If the world is formless and in need of meaning and order, then Education, we could argue, should be geared not towards correctly teaching and forming to see children what is true and good and beautiful, but coddling and affirming their inner, unformed sense of what is right and true.

All of this creates, as C.S. Lewis has famously coined, "Men Without Chests", children who have head knowledge and emotional feeling, but no compass, no truth, no heart which guides their head and hands in the right place. Trying to raise children in a solely poietic world, says Lewis, is like castrating them of virtue and asking them to be virtuous.³

What I am trying to say is that without our help, our children are being disciplined, trained, and raised in a way that may not only be incompatible with the reality of a God-formed world, but may actually be antithetical to it. And the reason you should care is because Deuteronomy 6 tells us, whether you have children or not, that if you are part of the family of God, it is your duty to help disciple the next generation, not by teaching that the world is formless and they are it's crafters, but by teaching them the right ordering of reality as revealed by God.

It's our duty as the church to be teachers, not because following Christ creates that burden, but because the gospel of Jesus breaks into our stubborn minds and hearts and causes us to love the truth of God so much that we can't help but pass it on to our children.

It's this passing on of the truth, of how God has ordered and inserted meaning into the world, that we will call today *Family Discipleship*. More on this later, but don't check out now if you do not have

² <https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/transhood>;
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics>

³ "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful." C.S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man*



children. The church of God is called by God the family of God, and so whether you like it or not, by being united to Christ and joining this local church, you do have children, and the discipleship we are partaking in is the discipleship of the family of God, not the family of the Bixler's or the Price's or the Arharts, or any family in our church.

So let's define our terms, shall we? **What is family discipleship?** *The means by which the family of God collectively passes on right doctrine, right living, and gospel history to the next generation.*

Passing on right doctrine to the next generation (1-9)

The reason C.S. Lewis called modern education in his day the development of "men without chests" is not because education lacked claims of truth or reality, such as the facts of history or the realities of mathematics, but because he believed education had begun to substitute the objectivity of truth for the fickleness of emotions. The "chest" that is missing, according to Lewis, is the ability to not just note something as factually true, but as morally and aesthetically good, no matter how it makes you feel. Education should be about identifying and teaching to value those things which are objectively true, not just factually true.

The book of Deuteronomy sets out to accomplish this goal for the nation of Israel. Deuteronomy, we might say, is God's *textbook* as he teaches the Israelites what it means to be in covenant with him. It is full of instructions and sermons and documents outlining what the Israelites should believe and do, about what is truth and what is for their good. And here in chapter 6 we find some of the clearest instructions in this textbook, beginning in **verse 4**. Where does our family discipleship begin? Where does our instruction of right doctrine begin? It begins here: with the nature of God. The doctrine of our family discipleship then is first *theocentric*, it has God as its beginning and middle and end.

"Hear this", the text says. This is the "Shema", repeated daily by Jews all over the world, it means in Hebrew "listen". What it means is "this is truth. Not just your truth, but objective truth." The Lord who we worship, Yahweh, is our God. And this Yahweh is one. The phrase "one" here implies two sense. First, *uniqueness*. There is one God like our God, he is supreme over every god of every other nation, there is none like him. The second sense it gives is relating to the *unity* of God. God is one: he is not divided, there are not several interpretations of him, there are not several ways to get to him, he is not going to change or suddenly become something different: no, he is one.

Teaching our children right doctrine doesn't begin with teaching them how to live. It doesn't begin with explaining to them the reasons for believing that God exists. In other words, where we start as we teach the children of the church is not with arguments, but simply with reality. The Lord is God. It's why the first few question of every catechism, including the one we recited today, deal with the nature of God. Right doctrine is theocentric, it says that the first and highest and truest reality we can place under us is that God is uniquely who he says he is. He is the creator, sustainer, life-giver. No other god comes above him or exists alongside him. Family discipleship means we



have to pass on to the children of our church a giant God-ward vision for the world. We have to teach them just how majestic and mighty and glorious Yawheh is. Family discipleship is theocentric.

Family discipleship is second fueled by love. This is a doctrinal point we find in **verse 5-6**. The heart, for the Hebrews, is the seat of the man. It's the "chest" to use Lewis' analogy one last time. What is the primary doctrine we are to teach our children? That we not only worship and revere and bow down before and live under the rule of God, but we *love* God. We love God not just like we love things we possess, or even our own family, rather we love God with everything: our whole heart, our whole soul, and our whole might. Jesus himself says that this command encapsulates every other command of God. In this one piece of doctrine we can teach our children volumes and volumes of theology. God is one, and God is lovely, worth loving with all you are.

All doctrine and all truth should lead us here: to the loveliness of God in Christ. Teaching your children about God is worthless if it does not lead you and them to love him. Do we want the children of our church to know the truth? Do we want to disciple them into what is true and good and beautiful? Then here is the way: if you love God with all you are, down into the very depths of your heart, then you will teach them to do the same. Our children need to see us worshipping in love, they need to see our spiritual disciplines done in love, they need to see our love for neighbor and for city, for brother and sister in the church, they need to see our passionate devotion to things of God, the way it makes us joyful and hopeful in every circumstance, how it brightens our day and lights up our night. To love God is to make disciples who love God.

Lastly, our family discipleship is all-encompassing. The doctrine we teach our children is not just taught through catechism time, it's not just taught during equipping hour on Sunday, or when you sit down to read a book. It's taught all the time. Notice the command in **verses 7-9**. The doctrine of the loveliness of God is not something that is to be repeated every once in a while. It's a "whole-reality" kind of thing. It's the lens and the framework by which we live and breathe and receive our identity. And in order to fight against a world which seems to tell us that truth comes from within us, not from without, we need to be taught about God all ways: when we sit, when we walk, when we lie down, when we rise. So serious is this idea that Israeleites literally bound the word of God to their forehead and wrote about the doorposts of their home.

So often our response to the idea of family discipleship is "when will I have time to teach the children of the church? I don't have the resources, I don't have the capability!" And my question for you is: do you have a chair at home? Do you have a bed? Do you ever walk anywhere? Do you ever drive in your car? Teach them there! Parents, your everyday is your biggest weapon in your discipleship. And those who are not parents, I kid you not maybe you should consider baby-sitting more, bringing children of the church into your home to sit them on your knee in that chair in your house and tell them that God is one and God is worth loving. Maybe you should consider buying a car seat for your car, so that every once in a while you can drive around some kids who are not yours and sing together in the car of the love of God. Passing on doctrine to the next generation is less about content and more about persistence. It's less about proficiency and more about availability.



Family discipleship is passing on right doctrine to the next generation. It's about teaching them who God is, showing them the love and loveliness of God, and doing it in all of life. And when we get that right, when we begin to teach the truth, then we can teach our children what truth does. It changes us. Right doctrine creates right living. Family discipleship, then, is passing on right living to the next generation.

Passing on right living to the next generation (10-19)

If there is anything we learn from Scripture, it's that there is no division or dichotomy between what we believe and how we act. Our doctrine seeps into life, our orthodoxy influences our orthopraxy. To fail to live out what you believe means that you are deceiving yourself and don't really believe it. Because right doctrine leads to right living. Oftentimes we are wary of training up the children of the church into right living, and that perhaps has some merit, since there are plenty of young men and women who reject godly living after being taught what to do their whole life. But I think a rejection of Godly living by older children actually has at its root a rejection of Godly doctrine first. So if we are teaching our children the truth of the loveliness of God, we should be afraid to teach them how to love God.

In our text, that teaching centers on two realities. First, *humility*. Teaching children to be humble may sound like an insurmountable task, but we have some help here in verses **10-12**. Hear Moses is asking Israel to look around, to notice when they enter into prosperity of the promised land. When they step into relative comfort, when they receive the blessing of God, they must not be driven to pride. Why? Because all the good they have is not their own. God gave it to them, God brought it to them, they are stewards of God's blessing.

Teaching our children humility looks similarly to this: reminding them of the authority of God. What they possess, what they wear and eat and where they live, is not their own. The fact that they have parents who love them, that they are being taught the gospel by their church community—it's all of grace. See, the key to teaching humility to the children of the church is by modeling gratitude for God's work. It's by holding your life loosely. Here is where this hits parents the most: the very thing we want to acknowledge is *ours* is our children. We want to control everything about them, and form them into our image. They are ours. But the truth is, they are not ours, they are God's. If by your actions and control and anxiety of your child you're telling them "you are mine", how can you expect them to ever acknowledge in humility God's undeserving grace? One way to begin to teach your child humility is by releasing them, bit by bit, into the sovereign hands of God. And often that means bringing in others into the room, other members of the church. It means bringing your children to equipping hour, even if you'd rather spend that time with your family, because in doing so you are telling other brothers and sisters in the church: my children are the Lord's, and you have a part to play.



Secondly, teaching right living is about *faithfulness*. **Verses 13-19** show us this. What right teaching in Family Discipleship does is it models to our children a faithfulness to God and a desire to kill our idols. It means that we cannot teach them to be faithful and committed followers of Jesus for the rest of their lives unless we show that Jesus is actually better than our desires, our comforts, and our idols. Again, one of the biggest idol you can lay down as a parent to teach your children is your children themselves. But it may also be your job, or your success. Providing plenty of monetary means for your children is worthless if all you are doing is showing them how to worship money. Better to be poor, hungry, and faithful, than rich and idolatrous. As a single or couple without children, teaching faithfulness may look like sacrificing more of your time and your freedom.

In all of this, we model to the children of the church how we trust God and not test God, as we are told in **verse 16**. Testing God in the context of family discipleship means we use morality as a means to coerce our children. We put God to the test when we use his truth and commands as a way to get what we want, whether that is better behaved children or at least just the appearance of better behaved children. But faithfulness looks like teaching our children to obey because of God's loveliness, not because of our pride. It means teaching them to obey because it is for their flourishing, as **verses 18** reminds us. Part of family discipleship is passing on right living to the next generation: centering on humility and faithfulness.

Up to this point this may be one of the most practical sermon I've ever preached, but I'd like to remind you that true Christian preaching is not primarily about practicality, it is about heralding good news. So let's ask again: what does the gosle have to do with family discipleship? Well, here is what I contend: even if you pass on solid doctrine and model right living to your children, without being fueled by the story of the gospel, your discipleship is empty.

Passing on gospel history to the next generation (20-25)

What right doctrine points us to is not just abstract truths about God. It points us to the good news of the incarnate God who lived and rose and ascended. And what right living does is not just teach our children how to be good boys and girls, but models to them the realities of a life that has been transformed and made new by the power of Jesus Christ who lived, died, rose, and ascended. Even on the front side of the cross, Deuteronomy 6 recognizes this. I love this exchange in **verses 20-21**. When we teach the children of the church right doctrine and right living, we inevitably will get that question that every child loves to ask: "why?".

This is what the hypothetical of verse 20 is pointing to, it's asking "Why should I believe that God is with loving? Why should I obey God? What is the point, what is the meaning, what is the motivation?" First, notice how this exchange i like a catechism, in question and answer. But notice the answer to the why of family discipleship: it's a story.

Children love stories, we all love stories. We love the thought that we might be swept up in something bigger than ourselves, a fantasy that is really true and real. And as the church, we have



the opportunity, the joy, and the honor of inviting our children into the greatest, truest story, the story of the gospel. Notice what this story says.

First, we were slaves. We start with a recognition of our own state in **verse 20**. The people of Israel were slaves to Pharaoh, but our children are slaves to sin, just as we once were. It grips them, even in their seeming innocence, from the moment of birth. We don't have to teach our children to sin. And they need to know this. They need to know that they are slaves to sin, they need to feel it. They need to know that mommy and daddy are sinners, that we were once just as stuck as they were. They need to hear from our college students and our single men and women just how lost you were before Christ. They need the fears and frustrations and sadness in the world they feel is the result of something not being right. Teach them that history, because it's gospel history. It's part of good news, it's the bitterness that makes redemption sweet.

Second, He brought us out and brought us in. The next step in teaching gospel history is teaching redemption. Look what God did in **verses 21-23**. He brought us out from slavery and brought us in, to his heart, to his family, to his Son, to his inheritance. The good news of the gospel in its simplest form is news of redemption from slavery to sin. It says to our children that our history is as a freed people, a people given all sorts of grace, a people welcomed to the table. Tell them, teach them, that the only way to get out of slavery to sin is by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Tell them that when we take the supper every Sunday we are feasting at the table of God, freemen and women who have been brought into the throne room by Jesus to sit with him. Teaching them in worship that we are singing songs to Jesus because of how we took away all the sadness of sin and death. Tell them the gospel history of God's people.

Thirdly, All who trust in Jesus are righteous. The last part of gospel history is in **verses 24-25**. We are told that the reason there are rules and laws in God's kingdom, the reason there is need for obedience, is for our good always. It's for our preservation. We teach the gospel to our children which says that obedience is required for righteousness before God. We teach them that we cannot stand before god without righteousness, without obedience, without works. But, here is what is so important. Our parenting and our family discipleship must be all of grace. We teach them that the righteousness that is for us is not our righteous acts or our obedience, but Jesus'. We forgive when they fail, we confess when we fail, and all the while we point not to our good deeds or theirs, but towards Jesus'. The gospel story which we are swallowed up in only goodness if both us and our children have a far better righteousness that we can conjure ourselves. And in Christ, we do.

This is our history, the history not just of moms and dads, but of the church. Here is good news: the gospel story is simple enough for our children, and it's what you need. Unless you're shaped and formed by this simple story, you will never be able to give our children the grace they need to trust Jesus and see Jesus and love Jesus with all their heart and soul and strength. May every time you teach a child in this church the gospel, you believe it for yourself.

Let me end with some pastoral charges in light of Deuteronomy 6.



The Church's Role:

To *Empower* Family Discipleship

Volunteer to teach children

To *Protect* Family Discipleship

Volunteer to help the families in your CG

The Parent's Role

To *Lead* Family Discipleship

Make Intentional Time

Make Intentional Traditions

To *Model* Family Discipleship

Practice Outward Rhythms

Practice Everyday Moments

