

Good morning! Sorry, I was just checking my reflection. Making sure I looked good for you. That's what we typically do with a mirror, right?

But, you know, a mirror is a funny thing. It does reflect your exact image, yet often when we look at it, we think we look different than we actually do.

So, what are we actually reflecting?

As parents, our kids are often our mirror. (And while I'm primarily speaking of parents in this conversation, all of this applies to whomever you influence. Even you kids, this can apply to you and what you reflect to your friend.)

When our daughter, Becka was about 4, we went to Target to Christmas shop. The whole family was there. While we were shopping, I found something I wanted to get Becka for Christmas but I didn't want her to know it, so I sent my husband to buy it then go to the car while Becka and I "shopped around" in another part of the store. When he let me know he was finished and was in the car, I told Becka it was time to go. I told her that Daddy had already gone to the car. We walked outside the store, and there on the sidewalk, in the front of Target, Becka stopped, put her little hands out, and in a very frustrated voice said, "I cannot believe it, we didn't buy a thing!"

I thought, oh no, I've created a monster! What have I reflected in my habits, that she believes we have to buy SOMETHING every time we go to the store? She was reflecting what she had seen in me.

A very highly quoted passage of Scripture that parents love to rely on is Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it."

You may ask, "So, if I make them behave, then they'll love God forever, right? The Bible says so." That is not what that verse says. That was a guideline reminding parents to know their child and train them in the way they are "bent" or according to their personality, not about correcting their behavior.

But we focus on the "the way he should go" to mean "how they should act" and place all our energy on behavior. Which mind you, there is also scripture that says, "Spare the rod, spoil the child." So, teaching them proper behavior is a biblical. But there must be so much more.

Our focus as parents must be on the bigger picture, not just on making our kids do the right thing in the moment.

How do we do that?

Turn to Deuteronomy chapter 6 with me. Now a little background here. God had freed the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and performed countless miracles as through Moses He led them toward a land "flowing with milk and honey" that he had promised would be theirs.

But despite all the miracles, the Israelites didn't have enough faith that God could provide what they needed to safely enter the land, so they wandered for 40 years until an entire generation that lacked faith had died off. So, before Moses died, he gave them the law a second time, to a new generation who needed to hear it and be reminded. That's what Deuteronomy is—the giving of the 2nd law.

So, in the first 5 chapters, Moses reviews the laws given at Sinai. Then, in Chapter 6, verse 6-9 we read this:

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

"But wait, you just said behavior is not the only goal, right?" Yes.

But right before verse 6 is verses 4-5. **This command comes first.**

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart and with ALL your soul and with ALL your strength.”

These two verses became Israel’s motto if you will. They recited them every morning when they got up, and every evening before bed. They called it the Shema – which means to hear...because remember, they didn’t have the written Scriptures at this point. Everything was passed down through oral tradition...so they had to HEAR.

How were they to love the Lord their God?

with ALL your HEART – *(the essential most vital part of something)* –

***Our love for the Lord should be at the center of everything we are.**

with ALL your SOUL – *(actuating cause of an individual life)* – it’s what motivates us.

***Our love for the Lord should be the motivator of our life.**

with ALL your STRENGTH – *(power of resisting attack – impregnable)*

***Our love for the Lord should never be overpowered by our love for the world.**

THEN impress them on your children.

THEN talk about them ALL the time...at home, in the car, at the park, at breakfast, at dinner, when you tuck in your kids.

THEN, write them on the doorframes of your house and on your gates so when people come over, they know coming up the driveway that your house is a house that reflects Christ, when they ring your doorbell, they know you love Jesus, not just because of the door mat says “Jesus Lives Here” or because of the plaque that says “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” you have hanging, but because EVERYTHING you do prioritizes who Jesus is in your life.

One very encouraging time in my parenting was a conversation I had with my oldest son when he was in his early years of college. I asked him what it was that kept us close and kept him from turning away from all that we had taught him. His answer was, “Mom, you and Dad were always the same. You were the same at home as you were at church. You lived what you believed.”

Our kids are watching us. You must live and breathe Jesus, and be the same everywhere you go, at home, at church, and, YES, even in the car!

Your Love for the Lord should be such that everything you do REFLECTS who you are in HIM! And reflecting Christ includes reflecting His grace.

Dr. Howard Hendricks says, “You teach what you know, but you reproduce what you are.”

Hear that again!

“You teach what you know, but you reproduce what you are.”

Parenting is not about telling your kids all the right things to do, its about **influencing** your kids by living a life that reflects Christ.

How do we live a life that reflects Christ? “Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your strength.”

You want to see Jesus reflected in your children? Then you need to reflect Jesus in your life. The old saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” could not ring truer here.

So, I go back to the question that I asked at the beginning: **What is it that we are actually reflecting?**

As we move into the Parent Dedication ceremony, I want to define Parent Dedication as this: **Dedicating yourself as a parent to intentionally influence your children by reflecting Christ in your own life.**

Let me introduce you to our families who will publicly be declaring their intent to be reflections of Christ to their children today.

Video – parents enter the stage

Parents, today you are taking an important step in raising your children to be Christ followers. So, I will ask you a few questions and you respond by saying “I will.”

- Will you choose this day to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength? (We will)
- Will you accept responsibility to be your child’s primary faith trainer and impress the truth, love, and grace of God on your child as you live life together? (We will)
- Will you love your child with the unconditional love of Christ? (We will)
- Will you faithfully pray for your child to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? (We will)

Now, as the church family, will you stand and join me in making this commitment to these families:

As the body of Christ, the church family, we commit today to praying for each of these families, to encourage them in being reflections of Christ in their own lives, and to living as examples before them, and to partnering with them in leading their children into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Congratulations parents! Please bow as I pray for these families.

Pray to close.

MIKE HEINZ – SENIOR SENDOFF

Great job taking the step of dedicating your children to the Lord! And, thank you congregation for your support of them. My wife and I have had three since coming to Fellowship. <<Something in the water?:-)>> and have benefited from the loving influence of the body of Christ here. We too know what it’s like to have kids in diapers today but many of us here can testify that it goes so fast and feels like they will be receiving diplomas tomorrow. In addition to celebrating our little ones we also celebrate our big ones as we commission our senior students this morning.

My name is Mike Heinz and I serve as the youth pastor here.

Whereas Kristi said your life is like a mirror, I’m saying your life is also like a movie. I’m not talking about all the drama, mystery, romance, struggle, winning though it has all that jazz... I’m talking about the credits! Yes, the credits. My wife, Sarah and I sit through the credits like some of you here. Why? Because there just might be a bonus clip:-) <<Avengers>> We have no idea who any of those people are but they matter to the director. One day the credits will run on the movie

of your life. Who will be in your credits? For me it will be people like my wife Sarah Heinz (more impact than I'll ever know), Merilyn and Harry Heinz, my siblings, Kevin McKee, Todd Hinkie, Gary Brandenburg, Mark Watson, Clayton and Anne Hayes, Leslie Rortvedt, Chris Young, Chad Evans, many of you here today. It's my good friend Christen Leblanc who ran into the burning building of my depression when I was not fun to be around...lowest point in my life in college...to sit and help me back to health. People whose loving influence has shaped me like my mom who constantly prays for me and counseled me through some recent times of trouble. Whose loving influence has shaped you? It's a love that could only come from our great God as many can testify about here today.

The scriptures tell in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love!" And, that "we love because He first loved us!" And that in His extreme/vast/perfect love there is no fear. Since we are made in God's image, this extreme and sacrificial love shows up in us. We gather here and all across the world in Jesus-following congregations because of God's great loving influence on us. And, in the movie credits of your life God be in there as... what?
liberator/author/creator/designer/perfector/shepherd/healer/counselor/loving heavenly father

My wife Sarah and I have a consistent prayer that God will place other adults in our kids' lives who will love them like us... their mother and father. Like God, their heavenly father loves them. In the movie of their lives the credits will include so many teachers, coaches and leaders like Ashley Johnson; Scott/Becky Palmer; Nita Brewer; Jill Smith; Stephanie Phelps; Kelly Hornsby; Kelly Milazzo, Judy Smith etc. You can think of someone right now who would make the movie credits of your life in this way. These are people who matter to you - - - and you matter to them. They had a loving influence on you. Our grads have many they could name. It's the support system they have had up this point that they will have to rebuild in the next phase of life.

One of the challenges we gave our grads was to consider "what do you want your life to say?" They came up with a word/definition/verse and visual. It's just a small way to get them thinking forward. Scripture tells us; "God's banner over us is love." When people look back over the movie of your life, what will it say? Like the title of a movie... Extremely loving or extremely harsh? Someone who demonstrated God's kindness or one who was apathetic or cruel? One who was thoughtful and generous or one who was selfish and stingy? What will it say because it's going to say something. You are going to be an influence on others in one way or another. You get to decide if that influence will demonstrate God's loving influence or not...

It's great to think about who will be in the credits of the movie of your life...but where will you be in the credits of someone else's life?

In just a minute we are going to celebrate communion. Our grads are going to actually serve it to show how they are going to take God's love out to the world. Before they do let's pray for them...come on up here...grads, parents and their youth leaders. I often think about God's love and the cross and can lose perspective...take it for granted. But my kids help bring a whole new appreciation that I wouldn't have otherwise at times.

My son asked me one time if I'd run into our house if it was on fire. I said; "there is nothing in there valuable enough to die over." He said; "what if we were in there?" Without hesitation I said... "oh,

in that case it could be engulfed and I'm coming for you!" This is the love God has put inside of us! I'm convinced it is part of the Standard Operating Procedure we have from bearing his image. It is a raging fire that cannot be quenched as evidenced in Jesus. Romans 5:8 says; But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

He ran into the engulfed burning building of our broken and sin-cursed world by going to the horrific/excruciating death on the cross. His life for our life laid down in sacrificial/extreme love like no other. (turn to the seniors) Seniors, may your influence as followers of Jesus demonstrate this love! (turn to the congregation) Young adults, families and seniors, may your influence as followers of Jesus demonstrate this extreme love!

PRAYER: Romans 8:38-39- Father, your word tells us in Romans 8:38-39; "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.." Father, may they know this and accept this and rest in this and take this love to the world. Help them make a mark of loving influence on those they encounter and work for and serve in the years to come. Lord, will you help us get right with you in our heart as we take communion and remember the sacrificial love of Jesus. Amen.