

Today we continue our series called Base Camp: Essential Tools for the Journey. Our topic is The Family. To get started I'm hoping you will give me some feedback. Some of you just shout out the names of some of the model parents you have read about in the Bible; those great examples of healthy functioning families that we follow as we seek to build our families. Just speak out. Don't be shy. Fire away!

What's my point? There are not a lot of good parenting and family examples in the Bible. What about Adam? He threw his wife under the bus, and his oldest son murdered his younger son. What about Noah? He had a drinking problem. What about Abraham? He offered his wife to another man to get out of a pickle. How about Mother Rebekah? She schemed with her son Jacob to deceive her husband Isaac. What about Jacob's sons? They sold their brother Joseph into slavery. How about King David? He had an extramarital affair and his son ended up started a mutiny against him. Okay, well, there is always Mary and Joseph. That's not fair; their son was the incarnate God and they still lost him in the temple!

What's my point? Families are messy, chaotic and sticky. There is a degree of dysfunction in every family. One thing I know about my own family, that with all my parent's good qualities and with all their flaws, I know that they were substantially better than their parents were at raising them.

Then there are those family dynamics that just don't add up. We see attentive parents, prayerful parents, principled parents and still their kids struggle. There are some of us here this morning that relate to what the father of the prodigal felt. There are some of us here today carrying open wounds left from the emotional and physical abuse they suffered under their parent's roof.

But I want you to know that as we continue the journey of the Christian Life, God wants to equip us to engage your family. To learn about the fatherhood of God. To learn what it looks like to instruct, encourage, nurture, and show your family the grace and mercy of God. Your family is likely messy, chaotic, and sticky, but there is hope for them.

Remember God created marriage and family for His purposes. If you look through the history of God's story in the Bible we see that God used families—messy, chaotic, and sticky families—to carry forward His redemption story from one generation to the next.

Our text this morning comes from Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. We are in chapter six. By the time these words from Moses were recorded, he was an old man and near death. To the people of Israel, Moses was their father, their patriarch. To their children, Moses was a super hero.

Moses was taken up to the top of Mt. Nebo, east of the Jordan River in what's now in the country of Jordan. I can imagine him looking out to the west and with his weakened eyes he would look down on the Jordan River flowing into the Dead Sea. And beyond the Jordan River he would see a land, a rich land—a land described as flowing with milk and honey—the Promised Land. Moses could only see the land, but he would never walk on it. But he knows his children will, and his children's children will and hundreds of future generations will call that new wonderful land home.

This final instruction is to be Moses' legacy. He is telling parents, "Remember the goodness of God. Remember to tell your children about the goodness of God because they will need regular reminders because, I am warning you, your children will quickly forget the goodness of God in this rich new land." Moses provides us principles to follow so we too might leave a legacy to our families that our children will want to remember and pass on to their children, and to their children's children.

Build a Family They Will Want to Remember

Let God be God and Trust Him

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
(Deut. 6:4)

Scholars refer to this verse as the "Shema." It was to be recited and repeated often. It remains a foundational creed today. Moses is saying, "Hear O Israel, When your family is in crises. When your children put themselves in places you cannot control, remember to put God first. Let God be God." When it comes to navigating life with our families, we too need to remember that the "Lord our God" is in control and He has a purpose. And we especially need to remember this when our journey with our family gets messy, chaotic and sticky.

Also, I think Moses is saying this to us: "Hear O Israel, does it really matter how much your kids know about math and science, or how good their grades are, or what schools they attend, or how much money they make, if they don't first know God?"

Moses knew that the next generation was going to be blessed with wealth and prosperity in the Promised Land. Moses feared that future generations might know material blessings beyond their dreams, but never really know the God who provided those blessings. Here is the reality: What is temporary has a way of crowding out what is eternal. Moses knew that the battle to win the next generation was going to be the battle to win the heart. That is why he tells them to fight for relationships.

Fight for your relationships

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (v. 5)

Why didn't Moses say obey, fear, or follow God with all your heart, soul, and strength? The Israelites were likely wondering that too. This clear command to love God hadn't been emphasized in their teaching so far. In fact, there were very few references to loving God up to this point. There was a lot of teaching about God loving people and about people loving people, but not about people loving God.

But now, Moses who had actually lived the Story of God, and who understood better than anyone else the Law of God, the culture, and the right religious practices, says love God with all that is within you. And with this command, Moses changed the way the people were to think for all future generations.

This command to love was Moses fighting for the next generation's relationship with God, and fighting against external religious rituals and habits. Moses is saying, to build a legacy for your children worth remembering, your own highest priority must be to love God with everything you have. That is what you need to do, and what your kids need to see.

We can pass down to our children our rules, our religious practices, and our doctrinal truth. But if we pass them down without them being made alive by our genuine compelling love for God, we are simply passing on dry religion. And you know what? Our children will see the difference between dry religion and a passionate relationship with God. And they will reject us for our dry religion.

Did Julie and I have rules and responsibilities for our kids at home? Yes. Did we try to explain why we had a specific rule? Yes. Did they always understand? No. Did they always follow? No. Were there appropriate consequences when they didn't? Yes. Did my kids see that my love for God and my love for my children were the foundation for my rules? I hope so.

My success in this messy, chaotic and sticky thing called family stems from the state of my own heart. My relationship with my children, and with my wife, and with my aging parents depends on the state of my heart for God. Moses picks this up in verse 6.

Make the journey personal

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

We can't pass on to the next generation what we do not have. While I still ask my children what they are becoming, I must ask myself, What am I becoming? It's an overused phrase but it's true. "Some things can't be taught; they just have to be caught."

Our children need to see us struggle for answers. Face our weaknesses. Deal with real problems. Admit when we are wrong. Fight for our marriages. Fight for our kids. Resolve personal conflicts and honor our parents.

Children need to see their parents make their own relational, emotional and spiritual health a priority. If it's not personal for us as parents, it is unlikely to become personal for them. So how do we help it become personal for them?

Create a consistent rhythm for your family

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 door frames of your houses and on your gates. (verses 7-9)

I love this descriptive writing. Moses is saying teach them through the natural way life happens. Parents, we understand there is a rhythm needed to make a family work. That is why we put newborns on a schedule. That is why schoolteachers have a structure to their classrooms. That is why families establish traditions.

We consider the power of sitting down to meals together without the distractions of TV to connect and teach values. We consider the power of travel and having adventures together as families as ways to observe and interpret life and God's creation. We consider that maybe the most beautiful time to engage our young children is when we are tucking them into bed because at that time they feel safe and become vulnerable to share the intimate things in their hearts through evening prayers.

Moses' point is to use the rhythms of daily life to communicate to our children what matters to God. Most parents ask which is more important: quantity or quality of time. Moses is saying both.

And there is another part of this that I wouldn't have thought to bring up 20 years ago. Every year between Christmas and New Year's Julie and I try to attend our college reunion. This past reunion we were thinking about how our reunion conversations have changed over the past 30 years. In the early years, we talked about our careers and sports. A few years later we talked mostly about child rearing, then later at reunions we talked about the challenges of parenting teenagers and paying for college. And 30 years later what did we talk about at our last reunion? We talked about our recent colonoscopies and cholesterol levels!

But we also found as we went around that every one of us was dealing with a new type of family issue that was a challenge. This new issue was our aging parents. Our parents, who were at one time our protectors our providers, and now slowing down, needing care, becoming sick. Our parents, who we remember to be of sound mind, now making decisions out of character. Our parents, who we remember defending the castle and slaying dragons, now so unsure, vulnerable, even fearful.

And it hit me. My kids watch how I love my aging dad. It's right for us to back up on chapter to Deuteronomy 5, where Moses gives us the 10 commandments. And commandment number 5, which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai says:

Honor your parents as you want to be honored

**"Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you."
(Deut. 5:16)**

We are to honor our parents, not just because it's better for our parents, but because it's better for us too. Some of us need to remember today that we are to honor our parents even when there is not much to honor them for. This idea of honoring our parents comes with a promise. Scholars call this a proverbial promise. It isn't a guarantee that children who honor their parents won't die young or have struggles in life, but it's a general principle that those who honor their parents will be better for doing it.

The apostle Paul weighs in on this in his letter to the Ephesians in the New Testament.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (Eph. 6:1-3)

After instructing children, Paul moves to instructing fathers. This was a big deal for our guys at Men's Fraternity to apply this.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (v. 4)

Paul is saying, "Don't irritate your children beyond measure. Paul is preaching restraint to dads who would come down too hard. Paul is saying. Parents, remember the grace and mercy that God has shown you. You go and show likewise.

How do we wind up exasperating our kids? We make promises we don't keep. We nag our kids to death. We always find fault. We micromanage them and continue to do so through their adolescent and teen years. We can put a lot of pressure on our kids to perform at high levels in school. We can project an image that all is well at home, but the reality is that our home life is a

train wreck. We have the tendency to play favorites. We can be inconsistent in enforcing the rules at home.

Our kids are resilient and forgiving, but with continual exasperation they will lose heart and come to resent us. Tim Kimmel wrote a book called *Grace Based Parenting* that has helped me learn the importance of grace in how I parent.

Build a Family on the Foundation of Grace

Give your child the freedom to be:

»Different

Do we see the value of recognizing that our kids can be different from us and different from one another? Do we give them the freedom to be goofy, quirky, and unique? Julie and I knew that our girls were going to have different personalities before they were even born. Julie said they felt so different in her womb. Our oldest was doing somersaults; our youngest was chilled. And they remain very different today, so we learn to accept and celebrate their differences.

»Vulnerable

We know our children are maturing works in progress. What our kids care about when they are 12, which seems so important to them, may seem so trivial to us. But for them to be able to talk to us about their crushes, their geometry, their missed layup in the game, they deserve and need our full attention.

I remember up through most of high school I would go into my mom's office after school and talk with her about a lot of things. I realize now that I took her away from valuable time at her typewriter that she needed to write her books. She probably would have sold a lot more books if she weren't such a good parent allowing me to be vulnerable.

»Honest

Parents, there will be news you don't want to hear that will come from the mouths of your children—messy, chaotic, and sticky things. Does your child feel safe to be candid with you? I remember a few years ago one of my daughters told me I was judging her. That hurt. But she was right. But then do I feel safe with them? It was difficult for me, and humbling. I asked her to tell me when she felt I was judging her so I could understand what I was doing to her. And she told me.

»Make Mistakes

Parents who are full of grace make sure their kids know that there is always that safety net no matter their sin, or bad decision, or painful mistake they make. Grace-filled parents will leave their porch light on for any prodigal who returns.

I have received great counsel from people at CPC regarding my messy, chaotic and sticky family. At CPC we believe we are created to live in community. And these community relationships

become vital for us when it comes to needing encouragement about our family issues.

The last point we need to make is this: Because family is messy, chaotic, and sticky, we can widen our support and get encouragement from our church.

Widen Your Community of Support

Hear, O Israel: (Deut. 4a)

Moses asked the entire nation of Israel to support this task of Building Families worth Remembering. And to me that means that we have been given the mandate to invite our dedicated CPKids staff and a bunch of dedicated CPKids volunteers who love God and love families to invest in our families on this campus. We are blessed to be able to widen our community of support.

I want us to close by celebrating something. Today, I am happy to say, we have a student ministry now staffed with full-time

gifted people who love God and love families. We are blessed to have Michelle Rompel as our Middle School Director. Have you met Michelle? She is sharp. And today I am privileged to introduce to you Ben Melli and his beautiful family. Ben has accepted the call to serve as our Student Ministries Pastor and today is his first day.

+For this sermon I was inspired by a helpful book we have been reading as a staff. It's called *Think Orange, Imagining the Impact When Church and Family Collide*.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.