

Intro

For the last 8 weeks we have been looking at discipleship as part of our sermon series. One of the ideas that has helped us grasp what the discipleship journey looks like, is this diagram that is on the screen.

The diagram helps us to see that discipleship is the process of moving to the right or towards a closer relationship with Jesus and that our movement towards the right is taken one step at a time.

So for the non-believer moving to the right in their discipleship journey means moving towards a better understanding of Jesus which hopefully that leads them to having a faith in him. For a Christian the discipleship journey is about moving towards becoming a more mature follower of him.

Reminding ourselves that discipleship is to be a one step a time process will help us this week as we look at what the bible says about discipleship in the home, because it is a difficult topic and one that we can easily think we should already be doing, well.

Now I bet you can't guess how thrilled I was to see my name on the preaching Roster next to discipleship in the home, I think I might have had a mild heart attack because I have never felt like I have done discipleship in my own home that well.

I have had more false starts than an Olympic swimmer and my lack of perseverance is next level.

At a guess, I'd say that most of us feel the same way, that even though we have a desire to do discipleship with our family, we either just don't know how to start or even how to keep it regular when it does start.

So because this is a hard topic, let me make two quick points about discipleship in the home that should help us to stay positive so we can hear what Gods word has to say to us today.

Firstly as I have said, we are all in the same boat here, we all feel like we could be doing a better job at reading, teaching and speaking about Jesus in our homes, when I say all of us, I also mean Tom, Stu and myself and what's more, it has been a common thread with everyone I have spoken to about this topic in the last few weeks, everyone has agreed that discipleship in the home is difficult.

My second point is this, regardless of what you think, discipleship in your home IS HAPPENING.

Sure it might not look like a text book example, but you can be certain that discipleship is happening.

Because discipleship in the home isn't just limited to formal reading, teaching and speaking about God's word, discipleship in the home is all of life.

It is just as much about what we do, as it is about what we say.

So before we start looking at Gods word to see what it says about discipleship in the home today, let's refine the question that we might have floating around in our minds right now, let's change it from "how do I start discipleship in the home" to "how can I make the discipleship I am already doing in my home better"?

So please keep your bibles open at our passage in Deuteronomy chapter 6 found on page 178 of the church bibles.

We will be spending most of time in this passage this morning.

So where are we in this part of the old testament?

Well Deuteronomy is the summary of Israel's history, told by Moses just before Israel enters into the promised land.

Up till this point in chapter 6, Moses has been reminding his people that God has been active in the way that he has already rescued Israel from their slave masters in Egypt and in how he has brought them all the way to the doorstep of the promised land.

But before Israel can enter the promised land, Moses needs to remind Israel that God wants them to follow his commands. Commands that go for another 24 chapters after our passage today.

And so Deuteronomy chapter 6 is just an introduction to the commands that follow on. An introduction that not only shows us how to treat the commands but also an explanation of why we have the commands.

Please follow along with me as I read these first few verses starting at verse 1.

Deuteronomy 6: 1 These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you.

This introduction into our passage today is pretty important because it shows us is that God has a good purpose for his people as they follow his commands.

Gods good purpose, is that he wants his people and their children and their children to enjoy the promised land, live a long life and to increase in number.

Now why is this important to us? Well because we need to see all of Gods commands through the lens of his intended good purpose for us as his people.

You see the commands we are about to read in Deuteronomy about the way we are to teach our children, (put simply discipleship in the home), have not been given to us by God to make us feel guilty, ashamed or incompetent, no God has given us these instructions because he loves us and wants the best for us and our families and for their families, and most of all God doesn't want his people forgetting him.

The warning

Now I think that this introduction is by itself a good enough reason for us to want to do discipleship in the home, Gods love for us is always a great motivator and we want to be obedient to him, but it might also be helpful to see what the current research says about discipleship in the home and it may even be a benefit for us to hear the warnings about ignoring this command. But first the research.

(Centre for ministry development) have done lots of study in this area, what they found was that parents are by majority the most important part of their children's upbringing when it comes to the understanding of God and coming to a faith themselves.

- Notice that although there are many influential people that help in a young person coming to faith, the most influential people are the mum's and dads.

- More than the senior minister, more than the youth group leader, more than anyone else the parent is more influential in bringing a young person into faith.
- And dads, by the looks of the research we have some work to do to catch up with the mums.

There was some very similar data done by a another organisation and they found that we may be unknowingly doing something else that could affect the discipleship of our family members

This was a statement from their report

“When a church intentionally or not, assumes a family’s responsibility in the area of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to relieve the family of its biblical responsibility”

Now it’s important to remember that these facts and even this last quote about some of the difficulties we are facing are there with the purpose of opening our eyes to a problem that we might not see coming.

Now the Israelites could have done well to see this research because they got this section of commands from God all wrong.

if you can turn to page 234 of your bibles to Judges chapter 2 starting at verse 6, or if you like you can read it from the screen.

6 After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to their own inheritance. 7 The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. 8 Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of a hundred and ten. 9 And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. 11 Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals.

Just to let you know, the Joshua mentioned in this Judges passage, is the guy who took over from Moses, he is the guy that finally took Israel into the promised land and our passage says that the very next generation after him, forgot God.

And this behaviour of forgetting God, is more common than we think, look at what Donald Carson the Canadian born Theologian observes happening here in our own generation.

“The church is never more than three generations from losing the gospel: one generation to believe it and proclaim it, a second generation to assume it, and a third generation to lose it”.

Now I get that it’s hard to see what Carson might be saying, we are a pretty active little church and it can seem like we are going ok in our little part of the world, but our society isn’t, I constantly meet students that don’t know anything about Jesus apart from what they learnt in religious education classes.

A mate of mine who runs a church down the south coast said to me a while back that when they ran a Carols event in their housing commission area one Christmas, his wife overheard someone in the crowd say “what does Jesus have to do with Christmas anyway”

And Peter Lin made a comment at the recent regional prayer meeting, he said. Just a generation ago everyone knew John 3:16 by heart, now even Christians struggle to know that verse when asked”

All this is a huge warning and reminder to us that there is a real danger in people assuming that the gospel is safe in our current generation and that we can take it easy, maybe even think that our kids faith is safe in the hands of those who lead them at their youth groups or Sunday school even.

But that kind of assuming the gospel is what we have been warned about here, the warning that it only takes a generation to forget God.

What about failure

And this raises a big question, what are we to do when things don't go well, when our own children, maybe even older children walk away from the faith.

Can I say that I think the parable of the sower from Mark 4 that Jesus tells is a helpful parable for those who feel the heaviness of a son or daughter that has turned their backs to God.

The story tells us of a farmer who sows seeds on various grounds, some rocky, some with weeds and some with soil that is fertile, the farmer sows the seeds regardless of the condition of the soil, he doesn't give up, even though he knows that some of the seed won't grow, he just keeps sowing seed.

You see failure in the parable isn't that the seed doesn't germinate and grow because it has fallen on bad or rocky soil, failure would be the farmer stopping his work of sowing seeds, even on the rocky soil.

Continuing to sow seeds even when it seems hopeless is what we are called to do as we continue to do the work of discipleship in our homes.

Even when the sting and disappointment of a loved one turning their back on God comes to us, we are called to not give up, we are called to continue discipling them.

So we have covered some ground this morning and hopefully we now understand that Discipleship in the home is God's command and probably the most important thing we can do to help secure our children's faith.

It's time to look now at the practical things that we can do to disciple our children in our homes. To do that let's look at what the rest of the our Deuteronomy passage and see what it says.

What underpins discipleship in the home

let me read verse 4 and 5 to you **4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**

About 20 years ago I used to be part of an organisation that took youth and church groups abseiling every weekend, these activities were heavy on instruction because without instruction it was just too dangerous.

So every time a youth group would turn up to go abseiling, one of our leaders would have to give the group a very careful and important first instruction.

We would say to them "unless we ask you, keep away from the edge". Now it's obvious why this instruction is important but maybe it's not so obvious why it's the first instruction, I mean there were 20 other instructions given to these youth just after we gave them this first one, we could have easily left this one till last.

The reason we gave that instruction first is because it underpinned every other instruction to come, really no point in giving the instruction about the importance of a helmet if the child is lying with broken arms and legs at the bottom of the cliff?

Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 5 is the same, it's the instruction that is going to underpin every other instruction that comes after it.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

That's the underpinning instruction which means we will want to live according to the Gospel, repent when we are wrong, persevere when life is difficult, pray, become more mature in our actions and behaviour.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Is what will underpin our ability to place our identity in Jesus and not in the things of the world, it will allow us to know God as our faithful King, it will motivate us to want to see our family saved from Hell and be brought into a relationship with the living God we know and trust.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Is what will underpin the discipleship in our homes, it's the one thing that our loved ones will see in our everyday actions towards them. And it's the first command that underpins the rest of the commands that we read from verse 6 to 9.

Please follow with me as I read them

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 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. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

As I mentioned earlier, these practical commands about discipleship in the home are an introduction to the next 24 chapters that are completely filled with the commands that God wanted Israel to follow.

The link for us as we look at these first few commands is that just like Israel, we are also Gods people and he still wants us and our children and their children to remember him and grow in understanding of what he has done for us.

That Understanding of what he has done for us comes as we read, teach and when we explain to our children the truths of the bible.

Unfortunately we find these commands hard,

- especially when we are the only one at the dinner table wanting to do it,
- they are hard when we have had a hard day at work and don't have any more energy
- and they are hard if they haven't been modelled to you before.

So what are some ways that we could make more opportunities to do discipleship in the home? because as we have seen these are Gods command to us, and we do want our children to come to a faith in him?

Well maybe we could start by thinking about some goals that are smart.

Smart goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time specific.

An example of a smart goal would be to start by leaving the bible on the dinner table to read before dinner each night, you might start by reading a few verses maybe just one or two nights a week.

It's ok to start small, make it achievable, make it specific by agreeing on what book you will read, make it measurable – ask, did we reach our goal this week, make it relevant to your children's age bracket and make it time specific this will help as you consider things such as your child's attention span and where you will find the time to do it.

We can do the same with prayer and with discussing parts of Gods word with our children.

To help us with more practical ideas for doing discipleship in the home I have organised a panel a little later where we will be able to pick up some more helpful tips on how to do the practical reading, teaching and explaining the bible in our own homes, from people that are already doing discipleship in the home.

Now the other big area of discipleship in our homes is the area I alluded to at the very start when I mentioned that discipleship is as much about what we do, as it is, about what we say.

Our final part of the Deuteronomy chapter 6 passage describes this “all of life kind of discipleship” it says.

when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The point in this part of the command is that discipleship to our children is to be every part of our lives and is not just limited to the formal moments of reading, teaching and explaining.

Discipleship in the home is the everyday stuff our children see us doing, it's the stuff they see as being important to us, it's the lives we live, it's how we spend time in the bible ourselves, it's the way we pray with them.

Discipleship in the home is modelling Jesus' forgiveness by the way we forgive each other in the home and by the way we ask for forgiveness.

You see living a consistent gospel centred life in your home is just as much discipleship, as reading, teaching and explaining Gods word to our children.

Why, because our children learn from us, remember that graph we looked at before, our children learn from us, good and the bad. That's why we are the most influential people in our children's lives when it comes to discipleship.

So what are a few things that might help us do this all of life discipleship. And please note that these ideas have been taken from the people I have spoken to over the last few weeks as well the research done in this area.

- Well firstly, remembering that our children notice what's important to us, consider what will help them in their journey of discipleship. For example they will see What's important to you when you trade church on Sunday for a sleep in or sport or even work. Our kids will notice this and take it as an example of how to live themselves, how we treat our own time reading and praying will also have a dramatic effect on the habits they start.

- Secondly consistent Gospel living isn't perfect living, life is rough sometimes and how we deal with rough times, who we turn to, will be an important discipleship moment for your child to see. Rough times may take time to get through but getting through them with God will be a really important lesson for your kids to see and learn. Its probably all too easy to wrap our kids in spiritual cotton wool, to keep them from hard things that might be or have happened to you and even your family, doing this will only set them up to think that you have a faith that is unachievable for them to live, almost un-real faith, so be real about how your life and faith work together.
- Thirdly ask for forgiveness, repent in front of your kids, show them, model to them what it should look like for them to repent and turn from their sin. Model it so they know what forgiveness looks like as they walk with Jesus. Our examples of forgiveness are vitally important for them to understand the forgiveness that he been offered to them by Jesus.
- And finally, husbands and wives you need to work together on this, whether it's discipleship between each of you or discipleship as a family, discipleship is a hard road and one that needs a lot of energy, to think the other has got it all covered is false, you both need to partner in the discipleship of your kids.

Now as we come to the end of this sermon on discipleship in the home can I leave you with this encouragement from Moses as he finishes his lengthy list of commands to his people.

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

What a great encouragement this final verse is, that discipleship in the home that we are commanded to do by God is not something out of reach, it is not in heaven or beyond the sea, today we now know that it is in our mouths and hearts and is accessible in the word that we have in our hands right now.