Training the Next Generation
“Standing true in a post-truth, post-Christian society” series – principle 2
Deuteronomy 6:1-25

It was special to be away with some of my extended family that I don’t get to see very often because they live in different areas of California. Plus two of those three nieces & nephews have had kids I have never met. They were all going back to a place in Florida that was very meaningful to my brother Ned before he died 10 years ago. They also asked my sister and I (and any of our families) to join them for part of the time. It was great because everyone seemed to genuinely want to be there, each had already made personal sacrifices to get there so they were willing to put the good of the group first and there was no major relational drama. Since there has to be drama somewhere in a sin-filled broken world, that was reserved for travel & other things no one had any control over!

When we get out of our comfort zone or common routine, it allows God to have more opportunities to show us things we would not see otherwise. That is one of the reasons that retreats, major conferences, special intense church focuses or a week at Christian summer camp can have such strong effect. It is NOT that everything has to go positively at these times because we serve an amazing God! He is the only One who can bring good out of any situation!

So how are we looking at the future, especially when stress, discouragement or being overwhelmed unnerves us? A very funny exchange on the way back to Vermont reminded me of one of the common Leisa and I had gotten up early on Tuesday morning to fly back to Vermont from Orlando Florida. The plane we were to take from Orlando to New York was coming in from Boston which meant they had to get up VERY early Tuesday morning – like 2 or 3 am. So I watched as these people got off the plane. On the one hand there was joy & expectation as they left the cold & work of Northeast to come and relax in the warmth of the south for a break. On the other hand, they were seriously sleep deprived! Then, I heard these words from a mother to her grade school aged son, “What made you think that the plane would drop us off right at Disney?” It took me a moment to process that since I had never heard anyone say those words before? “What made you think that the plane would drop us off right at Disney?” But then it was if the Lord said, “Isn’t that how most people go through life? We have these unrealistic expectations and they bring discouragement & frustration where there can be joy, positive expectations and clarity to the sacrifices we need to do!” This little boy had already woken up very early, waited in TSA lines and had couldn’t run around the plane – shouldn’t everything else go easy after this effort or sacrifice? Why shouldn’t we expect life to just drop us off at the front gate of Disney when we get on a plane in Boston? 😊

We have just started a new teaching series to help us in our own unrealistic expectations of what it looks like to live a meaningful & significant life for Jesus in a culture that is turning farther from His values. Rather than spending most of our time identifying what is going wrong around us, we are looking at the counter-cultural approaches God calls His people to in those times.
PROPOSITION: In a society of educated ignorance and blindness, we will train our young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of Christian truth.

I. Facing an unknown future

Here in the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites also face an unknown future with plenty of worries for the future. 40 years before this, God had freed them from slavery – a dramatic show of His love and grace. But most of the people let fear, temporary discomfort, selfishness, and difficult challenges around them consume them so they constantly grumbled, & disobeyed, focusing on themselves & their perceived problems instead of walking in gratitude, faith and the fear of the Lord. By the time of Deuteronomy, a new generation has arisen and the old has died! The challenges that unnerved their parents and grandparents were still there, plus they had the experience of how easy it was to turn from the freedom that comes by obeying & serving the Lord. So Moses gives five, long, last teachings of what they should do (and the attitudes they should keep) in the days ahead so they remain faithful to the true God of this universe.

A. Can we overcome enemies (will church/faith disappear)?

The first problem they faced was whether they could overcome their enemies and their powerful resources like walled cities when they were just ex-slaves who had wandered around the desert for 4 decades? This isn’t much different that than the concerns many Christians in our day are starting to feel as the reality of how much our American culture is turning away from Biblical Christian truths is being recognized. Rather than physical “walled cities” and stronger weapons of war that the Israelites faced, today the powers we face come from popular opinion, educational establishment, political leaders, and all kinds of popular media.

Can our faith – can the local church – can Biblical belief overcome the enemies that are around us whose strength is increasing? And that is not even counting how the demonic on the outside and sinful nature on the inside multiply that strength?

B. There are bad influences that can ruin future generations!

That leads to the second major problem. Even if we have some temporary spiritual, cultural or moral victories, will these last? Or will the negative influences around us, ruin future generations? The Israelites were entering a culture which would tempt them to leave their trust in one God & start trusting in religious rituals done to other gods. The different cultures in that land would encourage future Israelite generations to just look for the minimums they can do for God so they can keep everything else for themselves. In other words, just like today, culture will encourage God’s people to start doubting God’s life giving instructions in the Bible. The minute they go into the Promised Land, they will face more & stronger temptations than they felt isolated in the desert. (Just so we don’t forget, they will also find many more blessings!)

C. It is more difficult to obey God in this new environment!
Then there is a third major problem that arises from going into an unknown, new future which is not-in-line with the Bible – there are so many new challenges, with those blessings, that will make it more difficult to obey God. Will their success, ease & abundance lead God’s people to forget Him, doubt the goodness of His word or compromise His commands – just so their lives will continue to be easier or more prosperous? As culture is changing around us, we face similar challenges today as there are fewer parts of our culture that encourage us to hold God’s eternal truths. We don’t like being mocked, laughed at & degraded. It hurts when people say holding to the Bible^ is very harmful to the future. What is the more positive action and perspective that God gives us so we may have more confidence in Him and in His process, rather than worrying about how things look around us?

II. Personally commit to God’s ways

Deuteronomy 6:1-6, 20-25

God told Moses to instruct the people to train their young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of God’s truth. When you and I get overwhelmed with the opposition around us, there is a positive (don’t make it reactive) – there is a positive response we are to put our time and effort into. In a society of educated ignorance and blindness, we will train our young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of Christian truth. Interestingly, that teaching starts with our personal example rather than a class, a seminar or curriculum. We must personally commit our lives to the Lord’s ways.

A. Personally live our beliefs

Deut 6:1, 3, 4, 5, 6

- V1 – “These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe…” Teaching others starts with us personally committing ourselves to live those truths out in our own lives regardless of the opposition of the culture around us.
- V3 – “Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you …” Obedience to God’s ways are to be a priority for us. If we are always looking for an easier way or what is the least we can do or rationalize what we do, we aren’t carefully living God’s ways, but we are living our own desires.
- V4 – “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.” In a time when most of the rest of the world believed in many gods, the Israelite people were to stand in a counter-cultural way knowing there is only One true God.
- V5 – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Those personal beliefs we teach future generations need to come out of our own true belief. They come out of a genuine love relationship w/God.
- V6 – “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.” We need to be personally committed to living them out in our daily life whether people are watching or not! When someone wants me to do something, the first place I look is whether they are ALREADY sacrificing for that area. We live in a day where people want change, but are unwilling to sacrifice for it. They want others to do it. That isn’t powerful or effective.
B. Believe they are the best for us and future generations

Deut 6:2, 3, 24-25

If we want to influence future generations, we need to personally be living out God's truths in our own life first. We need to put personal effort, sacrifice and priority into doing these things. But we don't stop there, we also want to grow in our confidence that God's counter-cultural truths and ways are the best FOR US and FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

- V 2 – Why are we learning and then obeying God's commands, decrees and laws? READ v 2. We are doing it so future generations will be positively influenced and also carry out God's commands ways in their own lives. These are so we and they can enjoy life for the long haul.
- V 3 – Why are we to be careful to obey God's word? READ v 3. There are much greater blessings that come from obedience to our Lord then if we don't.
- This is all repeated and added to in vs 24-25 - READ

So we want to not just do the outward actions of obedience, but we also want to grow in our appreciation that following God's ways will bring the best long term good for ourselves, the culture and future generations. When we gripe or complain carrying out obedience actions or we constantly look for short-cuts, then we send a mixed message to future generations. In simple terms, we want to constantly be looking for positive reasons & long term results for the counter-cultural sacrifices God is asking us to make today! One way I personally do that is to look for something that instruction of God protects us from AND a positive long term blessings God gives us from the obedience. I don’t see this can happen without an appreciation of history – in the Bible, in our lives and in the generations of Christians who have gone before us.

C. Testify to God’s great work in our lives and church

Deut 6:20-24

The third aspect that is SO important in personally living out our faith is to regularly talk about (fancy word, “testify”) to God’s great work in our lives and Christian groups we are a part of. READ 20-22. V 20-25 is worth a whole sermon but for time’s sake let me just say it is incredibly powerful when we not only believe good will come out of obedience, but we also gratefully talk about what we have seen God do in the past.

III. Impress God’s truth on kids

Deuteronomy 6:7-19

So if WE get overwhelmed by the direction our culture is going, WE want to personally commit to training our young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of Christian truth. That actually doesn’t start with words or even the kids, but it starts with us. God gives His people a number of positive ways to respond to the frustrations around us which will have far more powerful effects than worry, fear, or hiding. Next step? Impress God’s truth on kids

A. Talk about God’s truths around kids

READ Deut 6:7. Talk about God’s truths around kids. Personally living these truths is NOT enough to help others, because our actions can easily be misunderstood or
misinterpreted. In the early 1990's one of the ladies in the church shared an unusual thing that happened to her. For about 10 years she had tried to be a silent witness to her sister who did not believe in God – showing sacrificial love, being gracious & compassionate, living out God's values. The sister never asked any questions or made any comments. Then one day this lady from the church connected those sacrifices she had been making to Jesus and what He did on the cross for her. Her sister's reply, "Oh, all this time I thought it was because you married the right guy!" In other words, NONE of her actions actually pointed to Jesus because there were no words given to connect the two. You can NOT share the good news of Jesus without words! Just ask Francis of Assisi who regularly and boldly shared the message of Jesus as he sacrificially showed incredible love & compassion to others.

Talk about God’s truths around kids. READ Deut 6:7. Impress translates a Hebrew word that seems to mean "repeat," or "say again and again." The picture behind this word is a stone cutter taking a lot of effort to etch something into a hard rock so the message will be there for a long time. We want to be regularly talking about Jesus & His ways to young people. Use all different times – when you are home after work & school, when you are eating, when you are in the car or walking, before you go to bed or when you wake up! Don’t shy away from controversial issues or it will be the culture who is impressing its message on the kids around you.

B. Have visible reminders of God’s truths
Verse 8-9 adds the value of VISIBLE reminders of our faith and scripture. READ. You may have seen a small box on the door frames of a Jewish house or a box on the forehead or forearm of a Jewish person during a special festival. In similar ways, Christians have worn crosses, put fish symbols on their car bumpers and put plaques with Bible verses on the walls of their apartment. There is nothing magical about these religious symbols. They are simply a visible reminder to the truths you are repeating over and over to impress on the next generation.

C. Practice gratitude and thanksgiving (thanksliving)
A third very practical way to impress God’s truth on future generations is to personally practice gratitude and thanksgiving to God. Some of you may remember the new word Pastor Mark and Mike Uthmann made up to reminded us of this truth – "Thanksliving". Let’s regularly practice thanksliving where thankfulness to JESUS is a regular part of everyday life. Verses 10-12 warn of the danger of God giving us abundant gifts. We can start to forget their real source. True thankfulness and gratitude to God not only keeps us from greater selfishness, materialism and greed, but it also reinforces the goodness of God’s truth to younger generations!

D. Fear the Lord over others
A fourth very practical way to impress God’s truth on future generations is to genuinely “fear God” over all others. READ v 13-15. This is genuine fear – but that fear is not of God’s person. It is simply a genuine fear that arises when we put our
wants or other gods before God & His true ways. This protects us and brings great long term blessing! You want to feel fear, guilt and shame when you start being tempted to sin so you don’t go on the sin. That is positive, life-giving and leads to a really significant life.

*We also don’t want to “test” the Lord.* READ v 16-17. We test the Lord when we see how close we can get to sin & expect Him to stop us from sinning, or when we take foolish actions and expect God to rescue us or when we complain about what we have to go through in our lives when God is actually using those things for our own good! When the next generation sees genuine fear of the Lord – not superstition, not trying to manipulate God, not that God puts us on a performance basis – when the next generation SEES genuine fear of God when we walk towards sin, but great freedom, joy and love in our relationship with God it makes a strong long term statement of the trustworthiness of God & His promises. READ v 18-19!

IV. Concluding illustration

In the late 1980’s God opened my eyes to a powerful illustration of this. First some context: Before the 1960’s the Bible was read and prayers said regularly in public school classrooms. Then starting in the early 1960’s there was this huge push to take out any talk about Jesus, the Bible or prayer from public schools in the name of “separation of church and state”. This, of course, was a very new interpretation of the first amendment since our country’s founders specifically put those things in schools. The result was very frustrating to Bible-believing Christians who warned that it was going to have major negative consequences on society especially in morals, marriage, addictions and relationships. So in the late 1980’s, I took a month to investigate and I found documentation for 15 to 20 key areas of life (like divorce, crime, murder, addiction, babies out of wedlock, cheating) that had risen steadily for the 18 years since prayer & Bible reading was removed from schools while in the decades before that action no rise in these negative areas was for more than 3-4 years consecutively. Clear, objective evidence. So I put together a sermon with more graphs and overheads than I had ever done. *(That took me another month)*. I fully expected that my conclusion would be to reinforce the cry of the time which was we needed to bring the Bible and prayer back into public school to turn culture around.

But that is not what happened. Instead God led me to a very different application. We were mostly young families at that point with kids grade-school and below *(we had just one teen and his parents didn’t come to church)*. Having fired everyone up in the sermon so they were expecting I would encourage some outward action to force prayer and Bible reading back into our public schools, I simply asked how many parents prayed with their kids before they went to school. Guess how many raised their hands. Almost none AND my hand would not have been up if my kids would have been going to an outside school at that time. While we regularly prayed with our kids at meals, before bed and in Bible stories, it never occurred to me to pray with my kids before they walked out to school. That radically changed our family practices for the good. Either Leisa or I would pray every morning with our kids before the bus came or when we were driving them to school. In fact, even in high school, if we reached the first traffic
light in the city and had not prayed yet because of distractions – my girls would simply say, “Dad, we haven’t prayed yet.” And those prayers were far more focused on Jesus, protection & the actual challenges our girls faced that day then those nebulous, wimpy prayers made so no one was offended or those Bible readings which then were turned into universalism. YES I was frustrated with how our culture was going and felt somewhat powerless to change that. Yes I was upset others weren’t doing more. But what God did for me, is what God instructed Moses to teach the people with his final words – when we are frustrated or fearful about the world future generations are going to inherit, we are to put our energy into training the young in the freedom, knowledge, and power of Christian truth. That starts with us living it out, being convinced of the wisdom of God’s ways, then reinforcing it over and over. Let’s keep overcoming in the power of Jesus!