



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST[®] CHURCH

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06

Ancient Words for Modern Day Parents



Deuteronomy 6:4-12 (NIV)

4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

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

10 When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, **11** houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, **12** be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The people of Israel are standing on the verge of the Promised Land and Moses is delivering a repetition of the law and exhortation to the people of Israel. In this passage he is concerned about faith, and faith transference from one generation to the next, and is instructing the people of Israel in what practical steps they can take to provide the best model for faith transference to occur.

The first thing that we as parents need to remember is that there are no guarantees and there is no such thing as a perfect family. Nor is family defined as a Mum, a Dad and two point five children.

Hear,

The Hebrew translation for hear/listen is "Shema". This passage is the passage that Jesus would have learnt first and repeated first thing in the morning and last thing in the evening as He retired as all practicing Jews still do. Observant Jews consider the Shema to be the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism, and its twice-daily recitation as a *mitzvah* (religious commandment). It is traditional for Jews to say the Shema as their last words and for parents to teach their children to say it before they go to sleep at night.

O Israel

Notice that Moses is addressing the whole of Israel, not just parents with children. "Hear O Israel means that the whole church needs to take note of these principles. The saying that "It takes a village (Church) to raise a child" applies here. Children need parents and grandparents, uncles and aunties and mentors of their faith community to show them what faith and following God looks like. In fact recent research from Lifeway Research (2010) finds that teens who had at least one adult from church make a significant time investment in their lives were more likely to keep attending church. More of those

who stayed in church – by a margin of 46 percent to 28 percent – said five or more adults at church had invested time with them personally and spiritually.

Children will remember the people in their faith community and how they treated them far more than what they learned and it is in fact these mentors that surround our children with a “cloud of witnesses” that provide anchor points for them to grow their faith.

The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

The understanding of this passage lies in the idea that Yahweh is the one God, He is our unique God and is the one and only one that you need for your life now and for eternal life. He is the way, the truth and the life. (John 14:6) The idea of “our God” also implies a relationship, which for the people of Israel would have implied the great saving acts of God on their behalf thus leading them by grace to the shores of their promised land.

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

To the Hebrew, the heart was the place of the intellect, equivalent to what we would call the mind (inner being) used for reasoning and rationale. The soul refers to the whole of the person, the unity of the body, breath and mind. It is not some immaterial spiritual entity it is you, all of you, your whole being or self. In other words, Moses is saying that we are to love God with our whole intellect and being. Everything we do, everything we say and everything we think is to focus on our Love for our God who is the one for every aspect of our lives. However it does not just stop there. We are to love him with our Strength, which translated means exceedingly, greatly and tremendously. In other words we are to love God with everything that we have.

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

Unless we as parents embrace a relationship with God that encompasses every part of our life, our children are not going to embrace our God. A number of recent studies suggest that our children are more likely to embrace the faith of their parents. (For example see Smith and Denton (2005) *The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Teenagers*) This is the good news but it can also be the bad news. You can't take your children on a journey unless you are on that same journey yourself. Many of the children who leave the church leave because of hypocrisy. When it comes to faith, the commitment of parents is hugely important as children need to observe their parent's faith as a lifestyle throughout the week. They are very quick to recognise a faith that lacks depth and true meaning and are fast to distance themselves from it. Faith does start at home but it can also end there! (*Faith Today, Hemorrhaging Faith*, 2012)

Impress them on your children

The word for impresses means like a stonemason carving an inscription onto stone. This carving is continuous and does not stop. The job of impressing "these things" on our children is never done, it is continuous and regular and tedious but the long-term effect will be rock solid. Not many parents actually find the time to impress these things on their children. We live in a busy society where our children have many of the things they want (toys and electronics) but not much of what they need the most, which is quality time with their parents. *"When children are asked what they want most from their parents, the answer is often more of their attentive and unpressured time. If parents could realize that that's what kids want, they might create more opportunities for family bonding."* (Susan Sachs Lipman, 2012 *Fed up with Frenzy*)



Talk about them when you sit at home

Moses now begins to describe how to impress the commands of God on our children. He begins by describing four different times encompassing all actions of our entire lives. This includes our quieter moments along with our action moments. It also should be on our hearts last thing before we lie down and first thing when we wake up. During the rhythms of their day, if families can find one event or moment in their busy schedule to point their family to the things of God is far more important than what happens at church because incarnation trumps proclamation. (Kurt Brunner and Steve Stroope, 2010 *It Starts at Home*)

Not many families find the time to sit at home anymore, especially around a meal table, yet the preparation, eating and clean up after a meal are all important rituals for families to do. Studies have indicated the benefits experienced by families who eat a regular family meal together that is interruption free. Families that do this discover that children achieve better grades as school and are less likely to be involved in at risk behavior's such as drug/alcohol and sexual experimentation and values and family stories are more likely to be passed on. Family relationships are also strengthened. See <http://www.casacolumbia.org> for studies on the importance of family dinners)

and when you walk along the road,

In today's society this is called drive time. This is great captive audience time to spend with your children. Our children need nosy parents who know what is happening in their lives and if we can successfully remove the multi media that has been invading the car lately and find time to talk, we can find a few moments to impress the things of God on our children. An intentional trip in the car can be a time to find out what your children are reading, googling or watching and to help them discover the things of God in all they are doing. Drive could become an important moment in yours and your child's live as you snatch a moment here and there during the rhythm of your day.

When you lie down

The bedtime rituals are also an important time in the rhythm to impress the things of God on the hearts of our children. This twilight time when the day is ending is a good time to debrief the things that have happened during the day with your children and forge strong connections with them. This is also a prime time to read and tell stories to your children. Children need to hear the Bible stories, Stories about the early church, stories about your local church, stories about your family and stories about you. As children hear these stories not only do they begin to understand the values, but they also begin to find their place in the stories. Stories also give them the weapons and tools they need to defeat the “dragons” that threaten their well-being. There are many dragons that threaten our children in this age. (Sarah Arthur, (2010) *Defeating Dragons, the Importance of Story in Faith Formation in Shaped by God*)

and when you get up.

Again as your family begins their day is a good time in the day to point them to God. This can take the form of a short family worship where you can share a thought and biblical text with your family, pray with them and challenge them as they begin their day. Another important aspect of family faith life is that of family worship. In value genesis studies (*Value Genesis II Adventist Study* 2002 and 2011) this family activity was seen as important when done in a shared manner, focused on the needs of the children in the family and creatively practiced. Value Genesis discovered that frequency is not as important as meaningfulness and relevancy when it comes to family worship practice yet despite the benefits of this practice, less than half of families experience any form of worship throughout the week.

The use of four different times here stresses universality. Just like there are four kingdoms in Daniel 2 to express the totality of our worlds history and then the Kingdom of God filling the entire world, these four times emphasise that God doesn't just want these four times, He wants every time and all time. God wants our 24/7 time. He wants to go with us every day and wherever we go.

We are sometimes in danger of separating our Sabbath time (Holy Time) from the rest of the week (Secular Time) but God wants to permeate all our times and all our rhythms.

Tie them as symbols on your hands

Moses now gives another set of four ideas to help impress the commands of God on our children. God doesn't just want all our time he wants our actions, thinking and all that we own as well. He wants us to live in a total covenant relationship with him. This is because faith is caught by our Children and cannot be taught.

Actions do indeed speak louder than words and service to others really does make a difference. Diana Garland in her book, *Inside Out Families*, (2012) discovered a strong correlation between faith formation and spirituality. Families that find ways to serve together, grow closer to each other and closer to God. When Jesus was asked about what must be done to inherit eternal life by an expert in the law Jesus answered by quoting the Shema and then said that the second is like it "Love your neighbor as yourself" Jesus showed the difference that can be made in people's lives as we serve them but more importantly the difference it makes to those who serve.

And bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

God wants our actions as well as our thinking and remembrance. He also wants our homes and possessions. Do the things we find in our homes reflect the things of God, does our morning time, and the things on our coffee tables, libraries and walls reflect the things of God? What do the pictures and symbols on the walls of your home tell your children about God and who He is.



When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Moses is telling the people that they are going into a land flowing with milk and honey. In this land they will become part of a consumer society where it will be easy to forget the things of God and His great acts in salvation's history. Australia is the lucky country. We have everything we need too and it is easy forget the things of God in our fast paced consumer driven society. Mammon is a powerful god to serve, and the power of acquiring "stuff" seems so fulfilling. Why is it so much easier to spend four hours at a shopping centre than two hours worshipping or doing acts of service with our spouse or with our children? What damage does this drive to possess do to our marriages and to our parenting possibilities. We know that we want to raise our kids free from the power of media and affluence, free from the power of cool, but the draw is so strong to fit in, to be a part of it, to feel included that it forms us even as we are willfully trying to resist." (Trevecca Okholm, 2012, *Kingdom Family*)

We too are on the shores of our promised land and all that eternity offers. We too, in our consumer driver hyper society need to be careful that we do not forget the great saving acts of God in history but more importantly in our lives. When we keep our focus on God and His Kingdom, we along with our families will grow in our faith. And it will go well for us and our family in our spiritual journey.

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.