

Family Discipleship - Milestones

REVIEW: We are closing out our section of discipleship focused specifically on the family today. Over the last several weeks we have looked at Deuteronomy 6 as to how it relates to discipleship. We said that there were three circles visible in the passage. Go ahead and turn there Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (p. 182). The first circle (v. 4-6) we talked about is us. It is our relationship with the Lord that matters most. The other circles fall apart because the first circle is so important. We are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength.

The second circle is our families (v. 7-8). We will review that in a minute. The last circle was the community (v.9). We have not talked about the community because we have been focused on the family.

We have talked about issues of time, and moments so far. With time we said we needed to be consistent. By that I mean that you don't view spiritual development as a one time conversation and all is well. It is something that is done consistently over time - a regular part of life in the household. It is even not "plan a day of the week and always do family devotions that day." It is regularity, so that it becomes part of the life blood of the house. Our time as a family should be clear, speaking to them in a way they understand. Time should be creative - work to make it fun, memorable for the kids. Creativity is why adults love the children's sermon better than the regular sermon. I could deliver the sermon of a lifetime, and adults are still thinking, "that was the best illustration of hand in the glove and being used by God." Finally, we talked of some ways the church would like to try to aid you in your time. Remember God even said that time is "as you are living life" - so driving to or from school or practice, use those moments to remind them of the gospel.

Last time, a month ago, we talked about the moments of life, and using them for talking about the gospel with our family. We talked about being observant - paying attention to what kids are like, and knowing how to work with their personality. I have this with the youth group. Every kid is different. What works well with one kid does not work so well with another. It's my job to seek that out and use that for God's glory. We also need to be prepared - we spoke specifically about knowing the nature of God and godly character. Finally we talked about being genuine - we are not using the Bible to control. We love the kids God gave us.

INTRO: Today we finish up this section with milestones. We will get into that, but before we do, I want to circle back and re-emphasize one thing.

- I. We are all discipling people
 - A. We have hit on this a few times through the series, but whether we realize it or not, we are making disciples

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1. This is an inescapable truth
 2. The question is what are you discipling them toward
 - B. For example, as your child is growing up and starting to watch sports with you on TV, your kid becomes disciplined quickly
 1. Junior cheers for the red and silver college team during football season - and gets “the look” and the talk
 - a) Son, we don’t cheer for those people in red and silver south of us
 - b) In this house we cheer for the Blue and Maize
 - c) The if they still cheer for the wrong team, we think we brought the wrong child back from the hospital
 2. Or maybe worse they do cheer for the blues and maize, but you are “Go Green” family all the way - that could start WWII
 - C. But you are discipling your kids into something
 1. You are teaching them right from wrong - “In this house we do this...”
 2. You are teaching them what is most important in life - simply by the way you live life
 3. So by how you live life, would Christ be most important?
 4. This goes back to that “setting the spiritual temperature” in the household
- II. Moving on to milestones, milestones mark significant events - especially the work of God in the life of your kids
- A. As we put this all together, being intentional about the conversations, being clear, having fun, using tools from the church, being observant, and prepared, we mark the big moments in our kids lives
 - B. Marking
 1. God has wired us to be rememberers
 - a) When you get a group of friends together, storytelling will be a part of the event - regardless of the event
 - b) And you can almost watch people ready to jump in on a conversation with their memory that the previous person’s story brought to mind
 - c) This is true in all cultures - we are story telling people
 2. Here is the crazy part, when it comes to God, we too quickly choose to forget
 - a) Look at the people of Israel - God gets them out of Egypt, by incredible means, they are at the Red Sea and they complain they are going to die
 - b) God opens the Red Sea for them to escape - they praise God for like three days
 - c) And then they start again, “It would have been better Moses if you had just let us die in Egypt! At least there we had food, and shelter”

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- (1) Forgetting they had whips hitting them
- (2) And brutal conditions
- d) Are we any different?
 - (1) God does incredible things on our behalf, and we forget about them the minute something doesn't go the way we think it should
 - (2) I told this story before, but being in DC on a mission trip in 98 degree heat, painting inside a building in the stairwell near the ceiling, had to be 110 degrees in there
 - (3) By the time we finished, I came outside and it felt like the air conditioning had been turned on - just from a simple breeze - and I am praising God for the breeze
 - (4) Come home a couple weeks later, riding my bike, turn a corner to ride into the wind, and start cursing my life because of this headwind - forgetting God's grace with the same wind
3. Here is one thing God has Israel do for marking significant events - they build an altar or special pile of rocks
 - a) It is a way to remember the goodness of God
 - b) And that is what we are looking for in discipling our kids - milestones in their faith
 - (1) Examples: baptism, their first Bible, their first communion
 - (2) Spiritual highlights
 - c) And making these things into milestones does not have to be complicated
 - (1) Take them for a special dinner
 - (2) Take them on a trip - it doesn't have to be Hawaii, it could just be to see the Red Wings play
 - (3) It can be as simple as a hand written letter
 - (a) I have one letter my father wrote me that I have kept - it tells of how proud he was of me speaking at my grandfather's funeral
 - i) It is a letter that just thinking of it brings tears to my eyes
 - ii) It is a letter that is hard to read. Dad has been gone 12 years now, but that letter is still so filled with emotion
 - (b) On the final night of a mission trip we do a time of encouragement on steroids - we spend extra time making sure everyone has been encouraged in specific ways
 - i) On those nights, I try (assuming I have the time) to write my encouragement to the kids I have for that special time

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- ii) My hope is that the hand written letter (and my hand writing leaves much to be desired) will serve as a milestone for them and a cherished memory
- iii) Probably not at the level of my father's letter to me, but at least some kind of special milestone for them
- d) I have heard of people doing something like this at a significant age like 13, 16, 18 - you pick what you feel is good for your family
 - (1) Inviting the people that have been helping to shape your son/daughter to a coming of age party
 - (a) Ask them to encourage them in specific character qualities that they see in your child
 - i) They can tell a story of seeing that quality
 - ii) Even give warning how that quality could be twisted and used by Satan if not careful
 - (b) Have a cake, pray over your child for the future
 - i) Talk about what is ahead for them
 - ii) What this next stage of life might look like
 - (2) There are so many ways you could take something like this
 - (3) Another good milestone in your child's spiritual life - we usually talk on God's design for sexuality every other year with the students and then have a purity commitment ceremony
 - (a) Excellent way to encourage your teen
 - (b) Let them know how proud you are for making that commitment
 - i) Tell them you are there to help them see that commitment through
 - ii) Tell them that your love for them is absolute and not based on the commitment
 - (4) The point is to celebrate certain milestones in your child's life
 - (a) And not everything needs to be a milestone
 - (b) Nor does every milestone need the same kind of attention
 - (c) The reality is, you are the expert on your child
 - i) The only Person that knows them better than you is God
 - ii) So do what is right for you and your family
 - iii) In the handout with this series there are further book suggestions
 - (1) One book is called *Spiritual Milestones* by Heritage Builders
 - (2) Something to consider as your kids grow, if you have grandkids

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- C. So that is marking - marking what is happening, but there is also making milestones
1. Marking looks back at what has just happened (baptism, communion, spiritual development)
 2. Making looks ahead to create desire
 - a) In other words, giving kids something to aim for
 - b) What is the next step, how should they be growing?
 3. You are probably doing this and not even aware of it
 - a) When you encourage you son to hold the door open for their sister, you are saying, "This is how you treat the women in your life"
 - b) Every time you encourage your daughter how a man is supposed to treat her, you are preparing her for finding a quality man
 4. This to me was shocking when I read it
 - a) Al Mohler (President of Southern Seminary) said that in 1960, the majority of young adults, by the time they reached 30, had accomplished the five standard milestones of adulthood
 - (1) They are: completing school, leaving home, getting married, having a child, and establishing financial independence
 - b) In 2000, according to the census bureau, less than half of young women have reached these by age 30, and less than one third of young men
 - (1) So what we are seeing in a lengthening of adolescence
 - (2) We have 20 to 30 something boys and girls
 - (3) There can always be outside forces that you may not be to control
 - (a) I had to move back to dad and mom's house at age 27
 - i) There were clear goals established
 - ii) There was an understanding of what was expected of me, having moved back into their house
 - (4) What is disconcerting is the 20 to 30 somethings that sit around dad and mom's house and play video games having little to no motivation to get up and become full adults in the sociological sense
 5. This is making - setting goals for our kids so they understand what the next step for adulthood looks like
 - a) Having them make the bed, giving them chores - The truth is you could do those things, dad and mom
 - b) The reason you don't, the reason you fight with them about cleaning their room is because you love them, and you are attempting to instill in them the hard work and discipline it will take to succeed at anything out there in the world

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- (1) Do you understand that teenagers?
 - (2) Dad and mom don't really care THAT much about the condition of your room (well maybe a little), they care about your character, and that you have the skills beyond just making the bed to the self discipline, and hard work
6. You know what happens with the younger kids ministry, and at youth group
- a) The younger students see how much I rely on the older ones
 - b) They see how much freedom I give them, how much responsibility I give them, and that gives them goals to shoot for
 - (1) They think, "Oh, Pastor Keith just tossed the keys to John Bourque and asked him to get the room ready for a game. I want Pastor Keith to trust me like that"
 - (2) Without saying a word, I have given them a goal to shoot for
- III. One of the struggles of our church, and dare I say many churches, is the choice between a very programmatic approach to family discipleship and ministry vs. a family centered approach
- A. A programmatic way to do this is: you brings the kids and drop them off and the church fills their head with knowledge and they become godly people
- B. A family centered approach is: there are things for kids and students to attend and learn at church, but the church wants to support you in your role as primary discipler
- C. I believe that the faster the pace of society is, the more the church needs to work toward a family centered form of discipleship and ministry
1. Honestly I believe that this is the way God planned it
 2. The church has never been meant to be to primary means of family discipleship (as we have seen in Deuteronomy 6)
 - a) That is the family's role
 3. The church has always been designed to be the aid to the family
 - a) We come alongside the family
 - b) We help break down the theology into bite size pieces and help you dad and mom, look like geniuses to your kids
 - (1) And in the process, dad and mom will learn and grow themselves
- D. Here is what this translates into for ministry from the church
1. We need more people willing to help write simple sheets to help dads and moms in their goal of discipling their children
 2. We need people willing to teach a class for parents on how to disciple their kids
 - a) Fill it with resources for parents

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- b) Help equip parents with strategies for growing their kids in Christ
- 3. We as a church need to help parents to succeed at home in their goal
- E. I am sure that I am making this sound like if we do these steps our children will be little angels
 - 1. Never an argument again
 - 2. Never a blow up in the car - all is right with the world
 - 3. Think again
 - a) Discipleship is a slow messy process
 - (1) This is where you cannot become discouraged
 - (2) Discipleship is one of the most inefficient processes in existence
 - (3) But it is also one of the most glorious
 - b) I promise the first time you get a page to ask some questions of your kids about what they learned you will get about three questions in before you hear, "He's touching me!" or "Leave me alone!"
 - (1) Or any variation of screaming or complaining at one another
 - c) The goal is not to get through all of the questions on a sheet
 - (1) The goal is to begin the conversation about Christ
 - (2) And then to be consistent in keeping that conversation at the front of what you do as a family
 - (3) Its like antibiotics, they work over time - it's not one pill and you're cured
 - 4. Too many parents think that to be parent of the year the scenario goes something like this
 - a) Walk up to you kid, because you have noticed they are not quite themselves, and ask them if they are okay
 - b) They then gush out everything that has been wrong and say, "Dear father, please teach me from your vast storehouse of wisdom how life is to be lived."
 - c) Hate to tell you dad, mom, that is a rare thing
 - d) The goal here is in showing the love, so that they know you notice that something may be off in their heart
 - (1) They probably don't understand what is going on in themselves
 - (2) But now they know you stand at the ready to help
 - (3) And please no prisoner interrogation techniques - like you have to get info out of them
 - (4) Let love, and consistency work over time
- F. What I want us to understand as we finish up this section of the series, discipleship is all of our business
 - 1. For dads and moms in here, your first discipleship priority is not your children - its you

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- a) That is that first circle - love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength
 - (1) Which means get involved in a Life Group, Men's Bible Study, Ladies Bible Study
 - (2) Do that for you so you are growing
- b) Then, and only after you have been working on your own heart are the other circles possible
2. Then dads and moms, your next discipleship priority is your children
 - a) My father accepted Christ when I was about 16
 - (1) He always thought he knew Christ before
 - (2) But one day in 1987 he heard God calling him clear as day
 - b) It was the cutest thing because my dad got himself a devotional that he would read
 - (1) He would come running out of the room and say things like, "Did you know that Noah's ark was as long as three football stadiums?" Then he would run back to the room
 - (2) We would all smile because here is a man growing in his thirst for knowledge, and thirst for Christ
 - c) Even in these moments, it was dad's way of discipling his children - sharing what he learned as he learned it
 - (1) It didn't matter that I already knew about Noah's ark
 - (2) He was so excited to share about it
 - (3) That was his discipling method
 - d) Dad, mom, you need to find your own discipling method, spurred on by your own growth in Christ
 - (1) We often use this verse differently, but it applies here too: "The mouth speaks what the heart is full of." (Luke 6:45)
 - (2) When our hearts are full of Christ, we can't help but run out and tell the family about our new discovery about Noah's ark, or some other passage of Scripture
3. I don't just want to make this sound like this is just for dads and moms
 - a) Grandpa, grandma - you need to be in this too - you have wisdom that can't be found in other places
 - b) This is for all of us because we are a spiritual family
 - c) We are all discipling those around us - but are we discipling them toward Christ?
 - d) Do they see in us that love for the Lord with all we have
 - e) Whether you have kids or don't, whether they are grown and out of the house, you still influence people, you influence your spiritual family

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- f) So how are you doing for discipleship?
- 4. Dads and moms, what this will take is consistency over time
 - a) As you go, look for ways to incorporate the gospel in your conversations with your kids
 - b) Be creative, use your knowledge of your kids to aid you in how to best help them grow
 - c) But most of all dads and moms, be intentional
 - (1) There was a heavy set gentleman that came here to church
 - (2) He became intentional about exercise and losing weight - last time we saw him he had lost 100 lbs, and had a goal for more
 - (3) Spiritual growth is just like exercise - it must be intentional
 - (a) Intentional for yourself, dads and moms
 - (b) And intentional for your family