

How do we pass the faith on to the next Generation?

(#7 in the series, "Faith and Life Questions")

Deuteronomy 6: 1-9; Matthew 28: 16-20

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Talk about it! Certainly, passing the faith on to the next generation is not something that just happens by osmosis. To pass on to our children-- that faith really matters, requires us to model it but I believe also to talk about it. Children need to know that it makes a difference in our lives and is vital to life! I remember my father was good at passing on the faith. He did it so well by telling faith stories. He would tell stories with a Christian theme and at the end he would be moved by it – often his eyes would well up and a tear would roll out of the corner of his eye.

In our scripture reading from Deuteronomy 6: 1-9, Moses is telling the people of Israel to tell their children to follow the commandments of the Lord. Then their life will be fruitful and life will go well. Not necessarily that they will be successful, in worldly terms, but they will be 'successful' because they know Christ's love. In verse 4 we read, "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.**" In a time of prosperity in the new land of Canaan, the people could easily forget the Lord and be attentive to things of the world. Moses wanted to instill the vital importance of not being distracted away from God. We have an affluent culture in Canada which is certainly a blessing that most people do not struggle with poverty. However, it is actually more important to be intentional about passing on the faith in a comfortable cultural context because of all the competing lures of consumer society. How are we modelling and articulating to the younger generation that the Lord is God and God alone?

The instructions on how to make God first in one's life is all encompassing! "**You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.**" Then Moses emphasizes that this is not just a sermon you can think of as 'food for thought', and forget about until the next one – No! "**Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.**" In other words, as parents and adults it is important that you keep your personal relationship with God strong as you pass the faith on to the next generation. Moses continues with the imperatives – "**recite them to their children and talk about them when you are at home, and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise!**" Faith in God and God's love is the most important thing you can pass on to your children! Talking about God's wonderful creation and giving him thanks is always appropriate – every day! You can do this in prayer with your children/grandchildren. Every day, in giving thanks in prayer for the food we have been provided with is basic training for remembering you are not alone, but known and loved by God.

These instructions are very important and necessary, but how do you do it? Do you just go up to children and youth and talk about the love of God and the importance of God in your life? I think we know that working intentionally at developing relationships with our children and with other children in the church is an important step in being influential in their faith life. Get to know the children first by saying hello and engaging them in conversation. Teaching Sunday school or helping in the children's and youth ministry is an effective way in developing relationships with children.

If you have not done this before, starting to engage with younger people and children will take you out of your comfort zone. If you are not doing ministry out of your comfort zone, you need to ask yourself why. Jesus certainly took himself out of his comfort zone. In your discomfort, remember that you are not alone. The Holy Spirit promises to guide your words and your actions. Though you may be afraid of doing ministry in unknown territory, the love of the Lord will sustain you if you trust.

Passing the faith on to the next generation is serious business. It is actually a command from Jesus! Jesus commissions his disciples in Matthew 28: 16-20 when he said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.*” As passionate followers/disciples of Christ, we are to do the same. Are you doing it? Certainly, some have strong gifts of evangelism, but all of us can build relationships and share Christ’s love in word and deed. We can do it because Jesus helps us: “**And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.**” That is the most reliable support ever!

We all know that you cannot give away what you do not have. It is important to have faith if you are to pass it on. In terms of your own faith, how deep is your love for Christ? Or, do you take this wonderful gift of his love for granted? I remember my dad’s faith was contagious because it was authentic. It was a joyful faith which celebrated God’s gift of life and the unconditional love (grace) of Christ!

In a visit with one of our older congregational members this week, she shared how her parents were faithful in passing on the faith to her. She shared her delight in God’s wonderful gifts in her life. She said to me, “You know that I say this prayer every morning?” She recited it. I wrote it down.

*“Thank you Lord for this new day I am grateful to be in it.
Grant me the strength to cope with things better
And help me to be considerate and thoughtful
of others’ needs and feelings.”*

What a healthy way to begin the day! You start with the right perspective that you depend on God’s grace and gift of life each day! This prayer takes the focus off our self and on to God and others where it belongs! In our consumeristic culture, we (and the next generations) need such a prayer to be reminded daily that it is not all about us!

In our affluent society, faith is too often viewed as one of many options in life. Friends, do not forget about God – it is so easy to take God for granted, especially in our comfortable culture! In our culture we have to be more intentional about passing on the faith. The words of Moses are clear that passing on the faith is in the fabric of daily life – an essential ingredient to life. Jesus’ commission to all his disciples (including us today) is to do the same in the power and love of Jesus. Let’s not merely think about it, but do pass on the faith to the next generation! Let’s encourage one another to this end. Let’s pass it on. Amen.