

## **"Lasting Impressions"**

*(Family Matters part #6)*

### *Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

[title] Good morning. This is an incredible morning, and it is so good to be with you in God's house. Turn to your neighbor for a moment and tell them, "Remember, God is for us, not against us."

Would you pray with me? God Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth and all that we see, look into our hearts and minds this morning. Help us to see ourselves and those around us as you see us. Help us to experience you on a very personal level, through your Son Jesus Christ, so that we may impress your Word on our hearts and teach it to all those around us. For it is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

I have four words for you this morning: pencil, orange, ruler, glasses. I'll explain why in a moment.

[accident] When I was 18 years old, I had my first serious car accident. I hit a patch of black ice, flipped the car completely over, and walked away with only one scratch. Side note: Seat belts save lives! Don't ever let someone ride with you who won't wear one. If they think you're being rude, tell them, it's the pastor's fault. I was the one who told you.

Even with that one scratch, I was pretty shaken up. In fact, I passed out in the emergency room, and had to be transferred to a bigger hospital to make sure I was all right. The doctor was concerned I might have had a concussion. So he told me four words, and about 2 minutes later, he asked me to repeat them.

OK, time for our first test. What were the four words I told you? Anyone? Pencil, orange, ruler, glasses. Good job.

The funny thing is, almost thirty years later, I'm not really sure those were the four words he asked me to remember. But I very clearly remember that car accident. We know that emotions are linked to memory. The stronger the emotion involved in the event, the more likely we are to remember it. That is why I'll never forget my accident. I almost died. That's a powerful emotion.

[remember] How do you remember things? What strategies do you use? Do you sing songs, like "Days of the Week," and The Alphabet song? That was how I learned the books of the bible, by the way.

What about our children? Students, do you have to remember things for school? Your lunchbox? Your backpack? Your musical instrument? Parents, can you guess how many times you've had to drive those things up the school after they forgot them? (Another side note: I don't believe in karma, but I am definitely paying forward all those times my parents had to deliver my stuff to me.) What about your lessons? Do you have to remember spelling words, math facts, and historical events? How do you learn these things? It's easier to remember if the teacher makes the lesson fun, maybe with a song or a game.

[secret] This morning I want to let you in on a big secret most teachers already know: the secret to memorization is repetition. Learning something by heart takes practice. As the expression goes, "You either use it or lose it."

[Moses] So let's talk Sunday School and Bible trivia for bit. According to the Bible, who led the Israelites out of Egypt? Moses. After leaving Egypt, how long did the Israelites travel through the desert? 40 years. Do you remember any of the miracles they experienced? The pillar of cloud and fire, the manna (bread) from heaven, water from a rock, all the deep-fried quail they could eat...OK, it wasn't deep-fried, but it was tasty. Of course, the biggest miracle of all was how God delivered them from the Egyptians by parting the Red Sea.

I ask you to recall (or learn) those details because it sets the scene for our scripture today, Deuteronomy 6. Here's what's happening: the Israelites are all set to go into the Promised Land, when God pulls them up short and says, "Moses is not going in with you." Can you imagine how they felt? It's like learning your favorite teacher will not be coming back to school this fall.

Their great leader, Moses, has one chance for a final speech, one last chance to make an impression on them. Basically, the whole book of Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell speech, his commencement address, and he does his best to make the most of it.

[scripture] The core of this speech is what we read in the scripture today, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It actually has a name: The great "Shema" (Sheh-MAH). In Hebrew, *shema* means "to hear" or "to listen." Every practicing Jew says this in their daily prayers. It goes like this:

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

That is a pretty important command. This is something we all want to remember. Jesus even knew this command. Jesus says in Mark 12:30, the most important commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."

[world] Even though we aren't Jewish, the Shema is still foundational to our faith. Every other command from God flows from the Shema. If we love God with all our heart, soul and might, we obey God's commands and live to please God. Why do we worship? Because we love God. Why do we support the church? Because God loves the church. Why should we love our neighbor and especially our enemies? Because God loves all people. Why do we trust Jesus Christ? Because God said, "This is my son, whom I love. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5) If we love God, everything else naturally falls into place.

Moses knew that the Israelites were in danger of forgetting. Really, they could forget crossing the Red Sea! On they settled in the Promised Land, they were in danger of becoming too comfortable. And this is not limited to the Israelites. This is true of every church, even ours. Comfort deadens our faith. Comfort kills discipleship.

[church] Struggling churches today don't have a financial problem or a membership problem. They have a memory problem. They have forgotten how good it is to love and obey God. We have forgotten, in the midst of our wealth and comfort, that the church was built by sacrificial love and faithfulness, starting with the death of Jesus on the cross and continuing to missionaries, preachers, and worshippers who took great risks and gave of their own money and time to create a space where their ministry could touch the world.

Christianity is all about making disciples of Jesus Christ. When we commit to that vision, we take huge risks, like inviting strangers to be with us. However, no one is a stranger to God. Everyone is loved by God; some people just don't know it yet. It's up to us to tell them. If we love God, then our calling is to share with them the gospel in creative ways.

[verse] *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

[verse] Look at the very next verse, verse 6. "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts."

Question: whose hearts? The parents' hearts. It's not until verse 7 that Moses says to teach them to your children. If you're going to teach your child something, you have to know it first. Moses tells the parents: talk about it. Tie it on your wrists and on your foreheads. The Israelites took that literally. They used phylacteries, little boxes of scripture they could wear as bracelets and headbands. They would hang little scrolls on their doorposts. You could open them up, and you would read this verse:

*[verse] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

What do you hang on your walls at home? What do you wear on your clothing? Take a look. Does it help you remember God in your daily life?

[child question] At the end of this chapter, in verse 20, Moses says, "When you children ask you the meaning of these commands, tell them why." (my paraphrase) Notice he uses the word "when", not "if". How will they ask about something they are not exposed to? My children have never asked what the Taj Mahal looks like. They never had a reason to. If we don't talk about these things at home and while traveling, at morning and at night, our children will never ask, because they won't have experienced it. If you never talk to your children about God, someone else might, and who knows what they are going to say! From whom do you want your children to learn?

*[verse] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."*

[infant baptism, UMC logo] We should all expect, every Sunday, to learn something. We should come to worship, every Sunday, knowing that our lives are meant to glorify God. If parents impress these words on their own hearts, their children will see it. That's one of the reasons why I am a strong proponent of infant baptism in the United Methodist Church. I love to see parents make a commitment on behalf of their children. I also love serving communion to whole

families. It gives us the opportunity to all make the same commitment. We are all in this together.

*[verse] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

[Jesus] Friends, don't forget how good salvation in Jesus Christ is. Don't forget all that God has done for you and continues to do for you. Don't become so comfortable in your faith, in this promised land of grace, that you forget the most basic thing: stay in love with God.

They say you only get one chance to make a first impression. Moses had one chance at the end of his life. His life and words stand as testimonies to us today to continue that legacy. The good news is, with Christ, we always get a second chance to make a lasting impression.

#### Memory Verse:

Deuteronomy 6:6: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts."

#### Reflection Questions:

1. How good are you at you memorizing things? What methods do you use?
2. Why is it important for parents to first memorize and apply God's Word for themselves, before they teach it to their children?
3. Find out when (or if) you were baptized. Who was there? What commitments were made, and by whom?
4. How can you let God's Word make a lasting impression on your heart?