

On Guarding Your Heart

Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Luke 2:41-52

September 23, 2018
Faith Community

Today we have the third of a four part series of presentations about this church's logo. It's out there on our building, big enough for everyone traveling Ten Mile to see. It's on our stationery, our newsletter and our weekly bulletin. It's deceptively simple, which all good logos should be, but in reality is full of wonderful symbolism. All four parts of our mission statement are there:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

So far we've looked at the flower and the cross. Today is the heart. There are four of them, actually, one of which is highlighted in today's bulletin, and also plays a key role in today's Scripture.

Moses had lived a long and intense life. It was a life filled with fear and courage that resulted in depths of despair and mountaintops of triumph. His relationship with God was sometimes tumultuous but always passionate. All loving relationships have their rough patches, and this was no exception, but the love always prevailed.

Originally Moses wanted nothing to do with leading the people out from slavery. Now he was quickly approaching the end of his life, and all of that was behind him. The people were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, and Moses, the one who was used of God to secure their freedom and had led them on their forty year journey, would not cross the Jordan River with them.

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy is filled with Moses' final words. These are his instructions, his cautions, his warnings and his encouragements, all of them focused on the God who loved them:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 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. Tie

them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Our Jewish friends call this passage the ‘Shema.’ It’s the Hebrew word for ‘hear,’ and it begins the passage. In other words,

Listen up!
Pay attention!
This is so very important!

What follows are the nuts and bolts of life itself. Friends, I challenge you to spend time with this passage, one of the most precious in all of Scripture. When you do, be sure to use the ‘homemade chicken soup’ method I shared with you last week:

Anticipate
Prepare
Savor
Enjoy
Digest
Reflect

I challenge you to commit this passage to memory, and here’s a way to help you bring that about. Try this:

Love the Lord your God with all your

***Heart
Soul
Strength***

The Hebrew word for ‘heart’ here describes the seat of emotions and passions, even the center of courage and moral character. In other words, this is a very big deal, friends.

We’re called to ‘impress’ this love on our children. The word used here means to ‘point,’ to teach diligently and incisively.

“Just as words are cut into a stone tablet with a sharp object, so the law should be impressed on the hearts of the children of every generation.”¹

¹ Complete Word Study Dictionary H8150

Now before you get too freaked out over such an expectation, I think the passage goes on to show us the best way to do it:

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (v. 7)

In other words, make it as natural a part of life as anything else. Everyday conversations. Let the children you care for see how you deal with the daily issues of life. Let them watch you pray. For that matter, teach them to pray by praying with them.

Every now and then I hear parents say how they want their kids to make their own decisions as to faith commitments. It's a wonderful attitude, of course, it's what we want, but the problem comes if those same parents don't model a healthy faith commitment of their own. When that happens, the kids may hook up with the most brightly wrapped package out there, which may in fact be an unhealthy choice. So,

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Make it as natural a part of life as anything else.

When I'm ready to drive to Novi at the start of the day, or when a need arises, or we're especially grateful, Fran and I will pray together. When my three year old granddaughter visits and sees this about to happen, she marches right over and we form a circle and have at it.

One of my daughter's great talents is her ability to produce kidney stones. Sometimes they're of such quantity or size that they have to be surgically removed. One day she had to be hospitalized, and she and her husband Jordan called and asked if I could meet them there and take Millie home and watch her. Millie was two years old at the time.

I got to the emergency room first, and when they pulled up I could instantly see that Krista was in horrific pain. So I gathered up Millie, and home we went. Shortly after we got there, I noticed that she wasn't herself. Her toys were of no interest and neither were her coloring books or pretty much everything else. So I asked, "Millie, are you worried about Mom-Mom?" She nodded her head. Then I asked if we

should pray for Mom-Mom? She paused for a moment and then said, emphatically, “Pay Mom-Mom.”

So I moved over to where she was, sat on the floor and took her hands in mine. I said a prayer and then asked if she would like to pray. And she did! I have no idea what she said, but she wasn’t talking to me anyway. My two year old grandchild prayed.

And Moses said,

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Make it as natural a part of life as anything else. Everyday conversations. Let them see how you deal with the daily issues of life. Let them watch you pray. For that matter, teach them to pray by praying with them. No fancy language. Just be real.

Now this doesn’t apply just to parents and children. All of life is encompassed by this wonderful passage. So here’s another way to pull it off.

The passage goes on to say this:

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (vv. 8-9)

This was done through little slips of paper on which were written passages of Scripture, like the one we’re looking at today. They were placed in slam boxes that were literally tied on peoples’ hands and wrapped around their foreheads. To this day you may see them worn by orthodox Jews. They’re called phylacteries. The same thing is done when boxes are placed along doorframes of houses. When you enter a home with one of these mezuzahs, you touch it and pray for a blessing on the house. It’s all designed to keep Scripture close

Did you know that you have a phylactery? I bet every one of us here has one. We call it a cell phone. I have four different complete translations of the entire Bible downloaded on this thing, and when I’m on Wi-Fi have access to countless more in any number of languages. It’s all free.

Friends, we tend to make these things more complicated than they need to be.

No polish or professionalism or fancy language is necessary when you pray together or on your own or with kids. Instead, make it as natural a part of life as anything else. Be yourself. Be real. That'll make more of an impact than you can possibly imagine, on you and those around you. It'll even shape the heart, the seat of emotions and passions, even the center of courage and moral character.

Friends, as you continue to lift your Pastor Nominating Committee and look ahead to the arrival of a new pastor, this is what you need to be about. Building, growing, strengthening, becoming more like Jesus in your character and in your emotional and spiritual maturity.