

## **08-29-21 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX ..... Example Time**

*Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you. 6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today? Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.*

When you hear our first lesson, it is a strong reminder that we are responsible for teaching our children and grandchildren the faith we hold so dear. It is introducing them to Jesus so that they might follow him in faith, survive persecution in whatever form it takes, and look for ways to live out their lives in mission as part of the body of Christ, the church. That's what we promise in baptism. That's what they promise in confirmation. Our promises are taken seriously by the Lord our God. V. 6 says: *Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations.* In other words, we are witnesses of what we believe with our children.

Jesus said in our Gospel reading, *"Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*" Jesus calls us to integrity and our children will see if we believe what we say and if we have a living relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives. Our behavior and speaking, our heart and priorities and our willingness to teach by action, word and story are ways they build the strength to face what the world will throw at them, its cynicism, its materialism, its self-focus, and its sin. We have the opportunity not only with our children and grandchildren but with our nephews and nieces and even, one another.

*In a survey reported last year in the New York Times, one of the main reasons young respondents give for wanting fewer children (or none at all) was a desire for more leisure time. As one young woman put it, she'd rather be traveling with her fiancé, focusing on her job and education, and "playing with her cats," than having kids.*

*Increasingly in a culture habituated toward self-interest and sexual freedom, children are viewed as curses rather than blessings, as obstacles to achieving dreams, finding happiness, and even to keeping the planet cool.*

*Against this backdrop, the Christian view of children as gifts from God is as counter-cultural as it gets. Yet counter-cultural is exactly what the Church is called to be right now, especially in how we welcome and talk about the next generation.*

*The newest statement from Evangelicals and Catholics Together—an initiative Chuck Colson co-founded with Fr. Richard John Neuhaus years ago—points the way forward. It’s called “The Gift of Children,” and it’s a bold and detailed reminder of how God views little ones. It’s also the kind of statement that’s bound to offend modern sensibilities:*

*“As Evangelicals and Catholics,” the statement reads, “we agree that a society in which nearly all fertile women are, in one form or another, rendered infertile by contraceptive technologies...reflects a profoundly disordered view of sex, children, human nature, and environmental responsibility.”*

*Increasingly today, couples are forced to justify their desire to have children, but this statement insists that parenthood is “the most natural of things.” It’s also worth sacrifices—even if it means fewer zeros on a paycheck, less square footage in a house, or fewer cars in the garage.*

*More fundamentally, the statement proclaims, the birth of a child is “charged with transcendent meaning.” Children are living affirmations that God’s creation is good, and they compel us, like nothing else in life, “to serve a future we cannot control” and to trust that God is not yet finished with this world.*

*“The Gift of Children” offers the radically counter-cultural understanding of children that is needed right now. More importantly, it’s a challenge to the Church, to conform ourselves to our professed beliefs—to bear witness, through welcoming new life, to the love of the God who gave us life.*

What happens when we don’t exercise spiritual leadership over our children? When my children were young, late elementary age, we decided to have weekly family meetings on Sunday night. The goal was to be able to air gripes, affirm good things people were doing, and play games. The kids loved it when they beat their parents in a game. We made the choice not to watch movies but to interact with each other and perhaps, that is one of the small benefits of the pandemic time.

The second thing we did is family devotions each day after supper. A passage was chosen, the person up for the night read it for everyone else. They were asked to put together a prayer based on what they just read. It was a good exercise because you had to think about what you just read. They knew they would be asked, so they read carefully God’s Word.

We, of course, took our children to church and Sunday school. Some parents leave church after their children are confirmed. The kids following their parents’ example don’t come back very often either. It’s almost like it’s a graduation from morality school or actually, from church. The only graduation any Christian will do from a spiritual standpoint is to heaven.

Another thing we did was seek pastoral counseling when they became teens and we faced an impasse. It indirectly told them that it was ok to get help when a problem seemed unsolvable.

Parents never cease being parents and I'm not talking about helicopter moms. Rather, the adult children look at how you handle problems in your marriage, in your job, in your finances, in your illness, and even how you live and use retirement. We are always an example.

Children are a gift. 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter on love, applies not only to your spouse but to your children. (Message 3b-7) *Love never gives up.*

*Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.*

*Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others,*

*Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,*

*Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end.*

Finally, parents should bless their children. I do that in prayer. My brother would lay his hand gently on his children's heads as they slept. Focus on the Family has these guidelines, saying this type of blessing comes directly from God and His design for humanity. Blessings can encompass elements of love, spoken affirmation, and unique encouragement from a parent to their children.

But what does it mean to give a blessing? What actions and attitudes combine to make this biblical tool so uniquely effective? In modern times, a father's blessing echoes the original blessing from God the Father to humanity. God intends for us to mirror one of His first blessings to Father of Israel: Abraham. Genesis 12 reads:

*"And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (vv 2-3).*

But this isn't the only place within Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament, fathers and sons give and receive blessings that mirror God's blessing to humanity. In Genesis chapter 27, Jacob and Esau compete for their father Isaac's blessing. Later in Genesis, Jacob blesses his twelve sons in unique and powerful ways. And even in the New Testament, Jesus "took [the children] in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. The key Elements of a blessing included five key elements:

1) Meaningful and appropriate Touch 2) A spoken Message 3) Attaching High value to them 4) Picturing a special future and 5) Active commitment.

Each of the elements serves a specific purpose for both the one giving and the one receiving the blessing. Let's take a look at each.

First, meaningful touch has many beneficial effects. The act of touch is key in communicating warmth, personal acceptance, affirmation, even physical health. For any person who wishes to bless a child, touch is an integral part.

Next, a spoken (or written) message is important. Today, words of love and acceptance are seldom received in many homes. Sometimes, parents assume that simply being present communicates the

blessing. However, a blessing fulfills its purpose only when it is spoken verbally. To powerfully convey intentional meaning, the words must attach high value to the person receiving the blessing.

Attaching high value comes across when you pray with your child about an illness they are facing, a problem in school, or any concern they have. To powerfully convey intentional meaning, the words must attach high value to the person receiving the blessing.

The next element involves picturing a special future for the person receiving the blessing. We can help them see a future that is full of light and opportunity. We can let them know we believe they can build an outstanding life and future with the strengths and abilities God has given them. Our Lord himself speaks quite eloquently about our future in the Bible. In fact, He assures our present relationship with him and what He has in store for us as His children. Picture such a special future for our children when we are serious about giving them our blessing. With this element, a child can gain a sense of security in the present and grow in confidence to serve God and others in the future.

Finally, an active commitment. Today, parents need to rely on the Lord to give them the strength and staying power to confirm their children's blessing by expressing a similar active commitment. They, too, have God's Word through the Scriptures as a guide, plus the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Why is active commitment so important? Words alone cannot communicate the blessing; they need to contain a willingness to do everything possible to help the one blessed be successful. We can tell a child, "You have the talent to be a very good pianist". But if we neglect to provide a piano for that child to practice on, our lack of commitment has undermined our message.

When it comes to spending time together or helping develop a certain skill, some children hear, "Wait until the weekend". Then, it becomes, "Wait until another weekend" so many times that they no longer believe the words of blessing.

Some active blessing Steps for Parents in an active Commitment include:  
After you give a blessing, checking in with your child; provide opportunities for your child to live Out their blessing. Support the value and future that you envision for your child and remind them of how God loves them and will continue to support them. Within Scripture, the blessing was everything for a child. It is one of the primary vehicles to take God's love and pass it on to the next generation. (End of Focus article edited)

I started with our first lesson for today from Deuteronomy. The writer said: *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.* God gave us children as gifts and He has given parents to the children as gifts as well. John wrote in his first letter (4:7) *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* Finally, we need to pray to be faithful followers of Jesus in how we do family, looking to God's Word and blessing one another. Amen