

Today, in the simplest terms, we should be focussed on children, whether it be Sunday School programs, youth groups, and other things that we do for the sake of our children, and for the sake of passing the faith that is ours on to the next generations, to make sure that it not only continues, but that it would prosper and grow. Should it always be our hope that our kids have deeper faith than we do? That should always be our goal.

About 15 years ago in September, something happened that I never imagined could happen. I teach Introduction to Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, and we read the Bible a lot. My kids read out loud for the sake of the class, a lot. One young lady, probably 20-years old or so, raised her hand to read a passage. I asked her to read a specific passage, and she read the wrong one. What was the problem? I made an assumption, and that was that everybody knows how a modern English Bible works, with chapters and verses and all that. I assumed that everyone who can read can look up a Bible verse. What I did not expect was that I would have young adult students who had never opened a Bible once in their lifetimes, and had never touched one, and that they wouldn't know how to make sense of Bible chapters and verses. Isn't that an amazing thing? We can no longer assume that everyone knows how to even navigate through a Bible. Most children today know nothing about the Bible, and most know very little about this thing we call Christianity. That should be a sobering thought for us.

To me, the scripture lesson for today is the big key. This passage from Deuteronomy happens to be the most important passage of all in the eyes of the people of ancient Israel. This is called “The Shema.” Shema is a Hebrew word that means “listen.” The passage is recited all the time by Jewish folks. For them, there is nothing more important than this. Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheynu, Adonai Echad. Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.

It goes on, of course. And it gives specific instructions of things that must be done. It is actually very emotional. We are commanded to love God, to love God, with all our heart, our being, and our substance. But then there is another big command... **KEEP THESE WORDS IN YOUR HEART, AND IMPRESS THEM UPON YOUR CHILDREN AND TALK ABOUT THEM WHEN YOU ARE AT HOME AND WHEN YOU ARE AWAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU RISE.**

Not only does it say to **IMPRESS THESE THINGS UPON THE CHILDREN**, but even when to do it. When exactly is that? When you are at home, or not at home, and when you get up, and when you are going to sleep. When do we do this? In our modern way of speaking, this is what we call “24 - 7.”

We must ask, for the sake of our children, and for the sake of our Faith how we’re doing on this. Think about it. It has long been said that **faith is like a chain**. Every link is needed. And all it takes is for one link to be broken for the entire chain to be lost. We are the ones who need to link the faith we learned from

those who came before us, to those who come after us. It is that simple. But how are we doing?

George Barna, a man who has a lot of wisdom to offer our churches these days, George Barna has some crucial things to say about what happens to our children today. His research organization has studied the behavior of folks in churches in the US for the last 30 years. And he has found something frightening today: when asked about who is responsible for the spiritual and moral development of their own kids, most parents in churches today say “Well, as parents we should be responsible for the moral and spiritual development of our children.” But when these same parents are asked how it is going, they usually say “We don’t have a clue, and we cannot do it.” Very often, churches will jump forward at this time and say “We will teach your kids these things!” In some ways, that makes the problem worse. If we have your kids for 1 or 2 hours each week, out of 168 hours, can we really have that much of an impact? Barna says something that we must have the courage to hear: **PARENTS MUST PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN.** Parents must be spiritual and moral role models for their kids. How are we doing?

Maybe in the good old days, parents did a better job of this. In some ways, they probably did. Families were more stable, there were fewer divorces and broken homes. There was more time of being together. Kids were in things like Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and 4-H far more than today, where sports dominates

everything. Today we have fractured families, and it is rare to have everyone together around a table for supper. We know all that. But how on earth do we change it? Who has the power, who has the control? We do. We live as we choose. What in life can we control? Only one thing... ourselves, and nothing else.

Parents in particular, grand-parents too, what kind of role models are we for our kids and grand-kids? That is where we start. I'll never forget a day in class when I was a student. My teacher spoke of how much he wished his son would study the Bible, and care about matters of faith. He said he tried to bribe his son, threaten his son, shame his son, and beg his son. These things never worked. What was his solution? He made sure that every night after eating dinner, he sat at the kitchen table, and he studied the Bible. He realized that all he could really do was study himself, and hopefully his children would see that it was something that was important, and maybe that activity would be copied by the kids.

George Barna has simple advice for churches: He says that we need to be the best friend and resource a parent could ever have. We need to help the parents know how to set the example, and be the role model. Parents, I challenge you to one small thing: Today, when you sit down to eat, if you don't already, say a prayer before you eat. Say it for your family. This is a little place to start. Can you do it? Will you do it? Maybe some other things can begin that will shape our kids. In the meantime I hope that as many of us as possible will come downstairs to welcome the Confirmands today when we finish in here. Adults,

what examples will we set for children and grandchildren? Set an example for them by being in Church. We were told long ago that we must impress certain things upon our children, and that chains cannot be permitted to break or become weak. May God bless us and guide us as we impress our faith upon our children, LaDor VaDor, from generation to generation. AMEN.