

Deuteronomy 6:4-9
"Shema"
WRCoB 10.08.23

Morris, an 82-year-old man
Went to the doctor to get a physical.

A few days later
The doctor saw Morris walking down the street
With a young, beautiful woman on his arm.

Still later, the doctor, again saw Morris and said
'You really are doing great, aren't you?'

Morris replied, 'Just doing what you said, Doc
'Get a hot mamma and be cheerful.'

The doctor said
"I didn't say, 'Get a hot mamma and be cheerful.'
I said, 'You've got a heart murmur; be careful.'"

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Hearing is pretty important in verbal communication.

Hearing is also really important for brain development.

In a NYT article entitled, *Turn the Page, Spur the Brain*.

It found that reading to children, even infants
Was crucial for brain development.

Allowing children to watch videos or TV
Rather than reading to them
Decreased children's imagination.

They're not having to imagine the story [for themselves]; it's just being fed to them.

Children who were exposed to hearing a story
 Showed more brain activity
 Than those watching videos or TV.

In short, verbal communication makes your mind and heart do the work of grasping and imagining the story for yourself.

Those of you who read to your children
 Whether you know it or not
 Do them a tremendous favor.

Not only in helping their brain's develop
 But providing a nurturing environment for them.

A bedtime story read out loud is a great family experience

Reading a good children's Bible out loud
 Will give them a good biblical foundation
 And generate interest and imagination.

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Hear, O Israel, our Scripture begins
 The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.

Our Scripture Lesson
 In fact the entire book of Deuteronomy
 Is thought to be Moses' final instructions.

After 400 hundred years of slavery in Egypt
 Moses led his people out of captivity
 Toward the land flowing with milk and honey

40 years later they stand on the shores of the Jordan
Ready to enter the Promised Land.

But Moses would not enter Canaan.

God forbade him to enter
Due to his lack of trust in the LORD

And so, he reminded the people of Israel
Who they were and whose they were.

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Today's reading is one of the more important passages
In the Jewish Torah, our first five books of the Bible.

Shema (HEAR)

Shema is the Hebrew word for "hear"
The first word in the passage

It has become the title of this passage
Which the Jewish people consider a sacred prayer.

Every faithful Jew learns to recite the *Shema*.
At the beginning of every worship service
And every morning and every evening.

It's like the Catholic's "Hail Mary,"
Or the Protestant's "Lord's Prayer"
A constant reminder to put God above all else.

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Jesus, raised in a Jewish home
Was taught the basic tenets of the Jewish faith
Knew the *Shema* very well.

When he was asked

Which of the commandments was the greatest?

Jesus recited Deuteronomy 6:4-5

And then added a verse from Leviticus 19:17-18.

Matthew 22:37-40 NRSVUE ³⁷ He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.

³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The *Shema* teaches us to love God

To think constantly about his commandments

And to live each day by their guidelines.

It challenges the listener

To consider the critical responsibility

To pass the faith to the next generation.

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But to be perfectly honest, in today’s context

Very few of the church’s next generation

Will have a basic understanding of the Bible.

I’m not a doomsayer, I’m just saying

And I’m not the only one, it doesn’t look good.

Hearing the stories of the Bible

Hearing of God’s redemptive history

Hearing the story of Jesus

Are vital lessons that need to be taught.

Hearing the invitation to respond to God's love
Through confession of faith
And through the waters of baptism

Hearing the history of who we are as Brethren
To me, is pretty important stuff.

Are we paying attention to how it's passed to our youth?

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We understand the Bible to be the Word of God

2 Timothy 3:16 NIV All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

But very few actually read it
Or consider it relevant for today.

And many who do read it, read a verse here or there
Never really getting an overview of its total content.

Truth be known, the church and American society at large
Are becoming biblically illiterate.

According to Albert Mohler's website.

- Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels.
- Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples.

- According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments.

Think about it, how will you know what's bad behavior
If no one has taught you what bad behavior is?

I truly believe this to be one of the ills of our society.

Here's some more statistics

- 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife.
- Another survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.
- A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham (albertmohler.com).

Shouldn't this concern us?

Proverbs 22:6 KJV Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

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Church and Sunday school (or some kind of alternative)

Like our Children's Church

Are areas that instruct younger generations

On the Bible and matters of faith.

But is it solely the responsibility of the church?

Judith grew up with an aunty who made it her responsibility
To teach the stories of the Bible.

She would call the children around her
And tell the stories in such an animated way
The children were held spellbound for hours

She brought to life the important stories
Of God and God's relationship to people.

As our passage describes
The passing of our faith to the next generation
Requires a holistic approach.

1. Recite them to your children
2. Talk about them at home
3. When you are away
4. When you lie down
5. When you rise
6. Bind them on your hand
7. Fix them as an emblem
8. Write them on your doorpost and gate.

Using these instructions from Moses
The Hebrew people were extremely successful
At teaching the tenets of faith.

Religious education was not just left to the synagogue
It was life-oriented
Rather than information-oriented.

They used the context of everyday living to teach about God

Another way to put it

We are not only responsible to teach them
The stories by word of mouth

We are to live them out in our everyday lives.

The *National Study of Youth and Religion*.

Found three factors

In effectively passing the faith to youth

1. *The young person's parents practiced the faith in the home and in daily life, not just in public-church settings.*
2. *The young person had at least one significant adult mentor or friend, other than parents, who practiced the faith seriously.*
3. *The young person had at least one significant spiritual experience before the age of 17.*

Teenagers are more likely to walk in the faith

When they have meaningful relationships

With their parents, with another adult mentor

And with Jesus himself.

This is what the *Shema* teaches.

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So great is his concern for today's youth

The Christian author Josh McDowell

Wrote a book

The Last Christian Generation

“I realize the title of this book may be shocking. But the decision to call this The Last Christian Generation was not made lightly nor was it done for sensationalism.

I sincerely believe unless something is done now to change the spiritual state of our young people—[they] will become the last Christian generation!”

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The ethnic Christian churches in Richmond
Seem to be an exception.

A few weeks ago, the Egyptian Coptic Church up the street
Held their yearly cultural festival

It was well represented by their youth.

My barber, Lee Saad, a Lebanese Catholic
Says his church of approximately 400
Have about 200 youth.

Every age group have their own Sunday school class.

I don't say this to discourage but to encourage us.

If we want our children to be followers of Jesus
We must make Jesus an everyday occurrence

Not only by establishing ways
For them to hear from God's Holy Word
The history of God's salvific acts

Not only by talking about God outside of church and SS
But by exemplifying a loving, Christ-like behavior

Sarah does what she can
It is up to us to do the rest.

Let us practice our faith at home as well as in church

Let us reach out and befriend our youth
Developing meaningful relationships with them

And let's try and provide opportunities
That they might experience Christ for themselves.

If not us, who?
If not now, when?