

A God-Saturated Home – Communicating Ultimate Love for God

Meet Ricky. Ricky is a twenty-five-year old professional, who has a fairly decent job, enough to afford his own place. Ricky lives with his girlfriend, whom he's been with for two years. He's got a good circle of friends, goes on some holidays with them, meets them every Friday night or so for a few drinks, and he's saving up for a Harley. Ricky's beliefs about God and eternity are pretty simple: be true to yourself, don't hurt others, and make the most of life. Ricky's your average secular fellow, nothing extraordinary in our current age. The interesting thing about Ricky is that he attended Sunday school from nursery school age, was in the church's youth group through much of high school. At one youth camp, he prayed to accept Jesus as His personal Saviour, and was baptized shortly after that.

As time went on, Ricky seemed to drift from church, and by the time university was over, he told his parents that he didn't see the importance of going to church. He wouldn't tell his parents this, but his friends know that he is agnostic: he claims we can't know if God exists.

The sad thing is this: Ricky is not uncommon. Thousands upon thousands of young people have abandoned the faith they grew up in. Their parents went to church, took them to church. They seemed to imbibe and agree with the Bible's teaching, until it all seemed to dissolve. All kinds of things are blamed: the secularizing effect of the university, bad friends, or sometimes no one is blamed. The parents just throw up their hands and say, "Well, he made his choice."

Last week, I suggested a reason for this. Many Christian homes are practically secular. In theory, they do not deny God, they go to church, pray before meals but in practice, they act as if He does not matter. He is inconspicuous, invisible, weightless as far as the realities of life are concerned. He is some therapeutic Being you keep in your heart for when you are lonely and depressed, but for all practical intents and purposes, God is invisible in these homes.

And so the Rickys of the world, who grow up in these homes decide that the whole thing was just an odd preference that Mom and Dad had for how to spend Sundays, a kind of tradition that was important to them. But in an era where everyone wants to re-invent himself, if that's all it is, it's not hard to throw off your parents' eccentric ways.

We're asking how our homes can avoid becoming part of the statistic.

When we considered Deuteronomy 6:4-5 last week, we saw why we should love God ultimately, and what that means. We learnt that we always love our gods with ultimate love. Our gods are what we depend on ultimately. Our gods are what we are devoted to ultimately. Our gods are what we delight in ultimately. Our gods can be multiple, but your god is whatever you look to or commit to or take pleasure in for itself, and not as a means to anything else.

God's reasoning is: there is no other God but He. He alone is God. All other gods will fail us, betray us, deceive us, disappoint us. However, right on the heels of that command, God turns it into a family and home command. He wants this kind of ultimate love taught through conversation and life, indoors and outdoors, at rest, at work, when the day starts or when it ends. God wanted this kind of love for Himself to be as prominent as one's own hand, as visible as if something was stuck in front of the eyes. He wanted it to be something His people would know every time they entered or left their dwelling.

This is figurative language for saying the whole home life must be structured to shape and develop

and urge the ones in that home to turn to God in saving faith, and then to love Him wholeheartedly. The fabric of life, the relationships, the routines, the rituals, the goals, the priorities, the pleasures must lead those in the home to see loving God as not simply correct, but compelling, desirable, attractive, necessary. God is talking about shaping not merely the mind, but the heart - what is loved.

Learning to love God is not merely a matter of knowing you ought to. It is being in an environment where loving God is the most obvious thing to do, where loving God is the best thing to do, where loving God is the most important thing to do.

Shaping the heart of those who live in our homes is not just one thing, because a home life is not just one thing. It is many things. But the first thing which God seems to home in on is communication.

Deuteronomy 6:7 ⁷ *"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

Teaching and talking. God wants the idea that He alone is God and must be loved ultimately, to be something that is taught, in various ways, in various places, in various formats. The truths of verses 4-5 must be communicated, and communicated often.

There are two ways we teach those in our home: we teach by direct instruction, and we teach by observed actions. I want us to consider those two themes- teaching by direct instruction, and teaching by observed action – and see how we can communicate the idea that God is to be loved ultimately.

I. Parents Must Teach Love for God By Direct Instruction

The Bible makes it clear again and again that it is to be parents, not Sunday school teachers, not religious DVDs, not only pastors, but parents who are to be actively instructing and teaching their children.

Proverbs 1:8 ⁸ *My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother;*

Proverbs 2:1 *My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you,*

Proverbs 3:1 *My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands;*

Proverbs 4:1 *Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, And give attention to know understanding;* ² *For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law.* ³ *When I was my father's son, Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother,* ⁴ *He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live.*

Proverbs 5:1 *My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding,* ² *That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge.*

Proverbs 6:20 *My son, keep your father's command, And do not forsake the law of your mother.*

Proverbs 7:1 *My son, keep my words, And treasure my commands within you.*

Proverbs 23:26 *My son, give me your heart, And let your eyes observe my ways.*

Here the Bible makes it obvious that the primary discipler of the child is the parent. And, when present, the primary responsibility falls on the father.

Ephesians 6:4 ⁴ *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

We are so used to the idea of farming out our children to professional teachers, that we miss the fact that God places the responsibility for instruction squarely in the lap of the parents. You teach them. You make it your goal to remove their ignorance about God, and to teach them what you know about God. Who God is, what he has done, why He is to be loved.

If you ask where to start, you start with yourself.

Deuteronomy 6:6 ⁶ *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.*

You begin by internalising and understanding and practising this kind of love for God. You search the Scriptures to know who God is, what He is like, why He is to be loved. You might not be able to teach your son geometry, calculus or advanced chemistry, but if there is one subject you want to know and study and be able to speak about – it is the knowledge of God.

It is not that you have to be a gifted public speaker. Whatever it is you enjoy, or are devoted to, becomes something you can talk about to others. I wonder what would happen if for every three books that Mom reads on baby development and child psychology, she read at least one book on theology or spiritual growth. What would happen if for every three books Dad reads on his hobbies or career or professional skills, he reads one book on who God is and what He is like. See, we tend to study the things we love, and we are then able to communicate the things we have become familiar with.

Let me show you the anatomy of a teacher:

Ezra 7:10 ¹⁰ *For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

Ezra first sought God in His Word. Once he understood it, once those words were in his heart, he did them. He obeyed and put them into practice. After that, he taught them.

You can only instruct your children to love God ultimately if that is the priority of your life. You can only train your children to be something other than a Ricky if you are someone desiring to love God wholeheartedly. This is why when we do child dedications, I say the following to the father: “Your child will likely be as passionate about God as you are. You can't take them beyond where you are”. Lukewarm parents seldom produce children on fire for God.

Direct instruction will take place at designated times. A family should have some kind of devotions together, some kind of gathering together to read the Word, pray and even sing. The dinner table is an excellent place of instruction.

Correction is a special place of instruction. We correct, not just to get better behaviour, but to reveal something of God, of His law, of sin, consequences and of grace and forgiveness.

Problem-solving is a place of instruction. When your children come to you trying to work out how to deal with a problem, or respond to a situation, it's an opportunity to think through the issue from God's point of view.

And then instruction can take place in conversations. Pointing out what God has made, considering what God's will is for a situation, discussing how situations and things and people reveal something of God. Everyday conversations will turn into opportunities for instruction about who God is, what He has done, and why He is to be loved.

Husbands, parents, grandparents, future parents, know that your role is one of teacher. Internalise the subject matter. Make it your own. For then, you are sure to communicate it in conversation, and make time to communicate it.

We teach love for God by direct instruction. However, God's words did not mean that He wanted the Israelites to discuss nothing but loving Him in every situation and on every occasion. He also meant that the same things were to be taught in other ways. That leads to the second way which is this:

II. Parents Must Teach Love For God By Their Observed Actions

Our words are important, but our actions explain or illustrate our words. Children hear what we say, but they often learn even more by what we do. And here we often fail to connect what we say we believe, with what we practice. The Ricky's of this world come about because Mom and Dad had a creed which they recited at church, but their deeds were thoroughly secular.

Loving God ultimately, as we saw, means making God your ultimate dependence, your ultimate devotion and your ultimate delight. Like it or not, we cannot help communicating what we are ultimately dependent on, committed to or delighted in.

Let's consider some examples.

I. Ultimate Dependence

2 Chronicles 16:1-9 **2 Chronicles 16:1** *In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. ² Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, ³ "Let there be a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. Here, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me." ⁴ So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. ⁵ Now it happened, when Baasha heard it, that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. ⁶ Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he built Geba and Mizpah. ⁷ And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. ⁸ "Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. ⁹ "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars."*

While Asa would have told people that he trusted in the Lord, when it came down to it, what did his actions say? He turned to the military might of a pagan nation. The children in his home would have learned, you can sing about trusting God in the Temple, but when you really need help, turn to the military might of the unsaved. They would have learned that ultimate dependence should not be placed in the Lord.

You see, when you are in difficulty, what do your children see you turning to? What do they see you

running to first, and what do you run to last? What you worry about and what you fear speak volumes about what you ultimately trust in.

This is exactly why James tells us to rejoice when we fall into trials. Why? Because trials present an opportunity for trust. Trials are an opportunity to display to our children that our ultimate dependence is not in circumstances, or in man, or even in our own plans, but in God.

When in the middle of a health or financial or emotional crisis, Dad says to the family, “We can be very thankful for what God has given us. Let’s turn to Him now in prayer, and ask Him for grace”. That lesson speaks to little hearts in powerful ways. Gratitude & contentment says more than 100 sermons. God does love us, and He is worth our ultimate trust. When Dad says, we’ve barely got petrol in the tank, but we know God wants us to worship Him. We’ll trust that the One who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, will enable what He commands. And do you know what God loves to do when those little eyes are watching that act of ultimate dependence? Provide. Supply. Protect.

If we are ultimately dependent on God, it will show up in prayer, and gratitude and attitudes of faith. If God is our ultimate dependence, we’ll also be teaching that during times of correction. God is our only hope of forgiveness for our sins. He is our only hope of change. He is the one we must turn to and rely on completely.

Love for God is not only ultimate dependence, but also ultimate devotion.

ii. Ultimate Devotion

Matthew 6:19-24 ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

Jesus said here that when money is the priority, then God cannot be the priority. Verse 21 makes it very clear. Look for where the treasure is, look for what is valued, prized above all, and there you will find the heart. What the person prioritises is his ultimate love.

If our dependence is seen in our prayers, then devotion is seen in our priorities. We cannot help expressing what is most important to us. It shows up in how and for what we spend the money. It shows up in how and for what we make time. It shows up to what degree we sacrifice for those things. We are continually putting a value on things, by how much commitment we display. Our actions show what we are willing to pay, in time, money, energy for that thing.

When the child is groaning about a sore throat on Monday morning, and Dad says, “Get out of that bed, and get ready, *you are going to school!*”, he is teaching the importance of education. But when the child has the same groans about a sore throat on Sunday morning, and Dad says, “Well, just take it easy and rest this morning”, he has taught something else. He has taught that education takes priority over worship.

When Mom will drive from this side of the city for swimming, to that side of the city for tennis or ballet, to the other side for extra maths, back again for soccer and finally home, racking up a good 100kms in the process, he might learn that Mom and Dad like him to have activities. But when they

say, “We can't go to the Wednesday evening service, it's too much driving, and petrol is getting more expensive”, he learns about priorities. Petrol costs and driving time aren't an issue if it is extra-murals or education, but very high hurdles if it is church. He has just learnt *how* committed one should be to God, and it is not an ultimate commitment.

When Dad will work hard to be the bread-winner, coming home sometimes after 8, exhausted, but gets up early enough to get to work the next day, the child learns the value of hard work. But when Dad is never seen up late and up early with the Bible or in prayer, the children learn what is worth pursuing late at night and early in the morning.

“Dad, why don't we ever go the evening service?” “It's just a prayer-time, son, it's not important, we come for the sermon.” Years later, little Johnny doesn't go to church. Dad asks him why not. He says, “Dad, I can download the best sermons in the world, and listen to them.” He learnt very well.

One of the reasons why God makes demands on us regarding corporate worship is that it forces a physical expression of commitment. It is not merely an invisible love, but a love that we pursue in spite of inconvenience. It gives us an opportunity to outwardly express commitment to Christ. And given that once or twice a week opportunity, your children watch: what does it take to stop you – sickness, fatigue, inconvenience?

Part of the reason why many missionaries' children go on to serve Christ is that often, Dad and Mom had modelled with their lives – Christ is worth radically inconveniencing your life. Christ is worth giving up your country, your comforts, your conveniences, because He is worth our ultimate commitment. They've modelled that. They have learned that Christ is worth selling your house for. Christ is worth crossing the globe for. Christ is worth learning a new language for. Christ is even worth being persecuted for, or perhaps executed for.

You don't have to be a missionary for your home to learn that God is the ultimate commitment. It is simply what you display as the chief goal of your home. Is your chief goal that your children become very skilled? Is it that they be well-adjusted? Is it that they pray a prayer to accept Jesus one time in their lives? Is it that they be well-behaved? Is it that they get enough toys to enjoy fun? Or is the goal for God's glory?

Do you make a point of showing that you will sacrifice to give to ministry and missions; that you will sacrifice to visit a needy saint; that you will sacrifice to study His Word; that you will sacrifice to evangelise; that you will sacrifice to worship and break bread with God's people? These actions preach a message louder and clearer than your words.

Just like the gospel is one of ultimate dependence, it's also a message of ultimate commitment. Maybe we have so much easy-believism in our children because it isn't clear from our families that commitment to Christ is ultimate, not merely a prayer prayed once to secure heaven.

iii. Ultimate Delight

Deuteronomy 16:10-14 ¹⁰ "Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. ¹¹ "You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. ¹² "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. ¹³ " You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. ¹⁴ "And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant

and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates.

It is interesting how God wants this kind of corporate joy. He wants the whole family to rejoice before Him. Delight becomes a duty, before God. God wanted it firmly imprinted upon the minds of young Israelites – God is the ultimate joy. We might celebrate many things, we might enjoy many things, but God is worth getting together as a family and rejoicing in His presence. God is to be associated with deep joy, celebration, satisfaction. For the young Israelite, God was the chief and ultimate source of joy and delight, worth feasting, worth travelling to Jerusalem for that feast.

If we had to interview the children in our church, and ask them, what makes Dad really happy? What does your mother really enjoy? We might get some different answers. And it's not necessarily a problem if those joys are things like food or a hobby or scenery. But do they know that those things are still means of your rejoicing in God?

Children know what we love. They see it when our eyes sparkle when we talk about what delights us. They see how we anticipate the things we really love. They see how we reminisce over the things we love and they see how we connect those things to God, if we do. They see what our attitude is towards the things of God.

If Dad's sighing heavily as everyone gets in the car on Sunday, but he's cheerfully buoyant before the start of a rugby game on TV, he communicates which brings more joy. If Mom is humming away while she copies photos to Facebook and makes scrap-book albums, but looks like she's eaten lemons during the singing of hymns, she communicates what brings her joy. If everyone rubs their hands in anticipation of Mom's supper, that's good and well. But if we drag our feet, or even skip the Lord's Supper, we communicate which supper brings us greater delight.

Make no mistake, those little eyes are on you in corporate worship – do you enjoy and understand those hymns, or do you just mouth them? Do you love God's Word and read it with hunger? Do you communicate your relish for the Word before and after? Delight is infectious. They notice when you're soaking in the Word, and they notice when you're looking at your watch. And later on, they might remember that you don't do that during a movie.

If the atmosphere in the home is happier on a Friday night before a movie than it is on Saturday night before worship, we communicate where pleasure is to be found.

When it comes to the means of grace - God's Word, prayer, the local church, worship, the Lord's Supper, do you communicate *we have to*, or do you communicate *we get to*? You can't fake that. If God is increasingly becoming your ultimate delight, your family will know it.

Every good and pure gift can be a part of rejoicing in God, and the wise parent can turn simple pleasures into thanksgivings, reflections on the goodness of God. But you can't contrive that; you have to feel that. You have to see the good gifts as means of loving God, for then you will be sure to make those connections for your children.

Wholehearted lovers of God create homes in which wholehearted love for God seems normal.

Ultimate love for God is to be taught directly at planned times and unplanned times. We must verbally teach who God is, what He has done, why He is to be loved. But ultimate love is very clearly taught with the rest of our lives. Ultimate dependence is seen in your prayers and faith. Ultimate devotion is seen in your priorities and ultimate delight is seen in your pleasures. You can't

fake these things. That's why God says – these words must be in your heart.

So what is being communicated in your home? And how? What is reliable and to be depended on ultimately? What is valuable and worth being devoted to ultimately? And what is satisfying and worth delighting in ultimately? God says there is only One who deserves that kind of love. That should be the day-in, day-out message of our homes.