

God-Saturated Homes – 4

Most Western teenagers believe in something called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. That's according to a 2005 book called *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, which was compiled from interviews with around 3000 teenagers. As the authors interviewed the teenagers, they kept seeing the same set of beliefs: A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. Good people go to heaven when they die. In other words, such people were moralists – they thought we should be outwardly good, and that is enough to go to heaven; they thought that God was really like a therapeutic, someone to help you in your quest to feel happy and good about yourself, and they were deists – God is not personally involved in any real way. Moralistic, therapeutic deists.

Moralistic therapeutic deists do not love God with all their heart, soul and strength. They do not remain in churches, worshipping God, and evangelising the lost. They abandon church and live secular lives.

We have been considering why so many people turn out this way, and considering the words of Deuteronomy 6: that love for God needs to be taught by direct instruction, by observed actions, by priorities, pleasures, routines and rituals. And if our homes are practically secular, then by our deeds and actions and routines, we say that God does not really matter. God is a light concern, a once-a-week concern. Homes that are practically secular do not usually produce wholehearted disciples.

There is one more way that our homes can be practically secular: when the roles and relationships are no different to that of the world.

Before a child is old enough to understand the teachings from the Word of God; before he is old enough to recognise his parents priorities and pleasures and dependencies; before he is old enough to understand the routines and rituals in the home, he learns all about God by simply being in a home. The first people he encounters are his parents and brothers and sisters. They become to him not merely providers of food and clothing, but his primary models of reality. His family is more than a place of shelter and safety, it is like an acted out lessons, a living and ongoing explanation of who God is, who he is, who others are.

The home is like an extended role-play. Each member plays a role, and with that role come various relationships. The husband has one role. He acts in certain ways towards his wife. The wife takes another role, and relates to her husband in a particular way. Father takes a role, and relates to the children in a particular way. The children take a role and relate to father in a particular way. Mother takes a role, and relates to the children in a particular way, and the children relate to her in a particular way.

In the home, the children observe this role-play for nearly twenty years. Day-in, day-out they observe this play, this drama. And whether or not anyone in the home realises it, this play is teaching the children about ultimate reality. It is teaching about authority, and how it should be exercised. It is teaching about obedience and disobedience, the reasons for obedience, the consequences of obedience and disobedience. It is teaching about love. It teaches that there are different kinds of love, love of husband to wife, love of wife to husband, love of parent to child, love of child to parent. The home is where the child understands all the shades of love. The home

teaches about grace and mercy, forgiveness for wrongs.

Before your child has pronounced the word “God” he has an idea of authority. Before your child has ever heard about hell, she has learnt whether or not selfishness has negative consequences. Before they have ever memorized John 3:16, they have observed some kind of love in the home.

If ever we are to have children who go on to love God wholeheartedly, it will not only be because of our instructions, our actions, our routines and our rituals. It will be very much because of our roles and relationships in the home. If our homes have biblical roles and relationships, we give living portrayals of who God is, what He is like, what obstructs knowing Him, how we come to know Him. Put simply, the roles and relationships explain the gospel and the Christian life.

If we do our best to be obedient to the biblical roles, we fill our homes with something quite extraordinary: an ongoing, albeit imperfect picture of the Creator who rules, but who also redeems and saves. Once again, children will learn not just that they should love God, but that loving God is good. They learn, if loving God is like Mom & Dad's marriage, then I want to love God. If God is a Father like my father, then I want Him to be my father. If God cares for me like my mother, then I want to know God. If God is as just and strict as my parents, then I need my sins forgiven.

There are two aspects of God's nature that summarise just about all we want to communicate to our children: God's greatness, and God's goodness. You cannot have one without the other. God's greatness is a greatness with goodness. God's goodness is a goodness with greatness. I want us to consider just those two aspects, and how biblical roles and relationships in the home can teach about God. Today I want us to consider how biblical roles and relationships teach that God is Great, and can lead children to love and fear Him with all their heart.

Not everyone is convinced that parents need to be authorities, authorities that teach of the authority and power of God. You may have noticed that the word 'authoritarian' has a very negative connotation in our society. We no longer have teachers and students, we have educators and learners. We no longer have rulers and subjects, we have civil servants and taxpaying citizens. Today, if you haven't noticed, the terminology is no longer parent, supervisor, guardian, it's “primary care-giver”. As if that's all parents do: provide care. Authority is ugly, demeaning and abusive, in the world's eyes.

Unfortunately, many Christian parents have embraced a secular view of authority. In their minds, authority is almost always a bad thing, and they don't want to be perceived by their children as authoritative. They would like their children to like them, all the time. They want to be popular care-givers. For them, the worst thing that their children could ever say about them would be that they were authoritarian.

But what does the Bible say about the parent's role?

We have already read Deuteronomy 6:6-9 which is clearly addressed to parents, telling them to structure their homes so as to teach love for God. Parents are supposed to teach and instruct. Teaching and instructing means you are in a position to lead those you teach. God gives parents the role of authority in the home. They are to exercise, on God's behalf, authority.

Look at some other Scriptures:

Genesis 18:19 *"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to*

Abraham what He has spoken to him."

Deuteronomy 32:46 and He said to them: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe -- all the words of this law.

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.

No, according to Scripture, parents provide much more than care: they are to provide direction, instruction, admonition, exhortation, correction. These are not roles of workers at the play-group, or part-time nannies. These are roles of leaders. These are the roles given to people who are charged with leading people from one place to another.

In the case of parents, you are to lead your children away from destruction, and towards life – life found in God through Christ. When this role is performed, children learn that God has Greatness. He is a righteous authority; He is a holy Lord; He has power over us. He rules over His creation, and has the right to punish evil. He makes laws and expects them to be kept. He has great power, and great wrath at evil. He is to be deeply revered and feared. God is a loving authority, that people ought to desire to submit to, trust, obey and be loyal to. They ought to do so both out of deep admiration for His holiness and goodness, but also out of awe and fear at His judgements and power.

There are two things we can learn from the Bible about God's greatness with goodness, God's loving authority, both of which need to be modelled in our homes

I. Loving Authority Inspires and Expects Obedience

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

Here we see one of many Scriptures in which parents are to give their children instruction or commands. Those commands can range from the command to not touch a cake on the table, or to not dating an unbeliever. They range from basic instructions to come when called, or to eat the food or go to bed when told, to moral instructions such as not lying, being generous, not gossiping. Whatever the case, God places parents in the role of mediating His commands, His authority through to the children. Parents are not ultimate authorities, they are subordinate authorities. Their role is to teach the children the reality that they live in a universe with a King. They live in a universe which they did not create. They are guests, tenants, people who have been invited to live in God's universe. And since they are in God's universe, they are to submit and obey His commands.

Question: when it comes to obeying God's commands, how should God be obeyed? Should He be obeyed immediately or with a delay, in our own time? Is it OK to say to God, I will, but later? Should God be obeyed with an argument, or with complete submission? Is it acceptable to say to God, "But God, I can't do that, because..." Should God be obeyed with a challenge, or without a challenge? Should God be obeyed pouting, sulking, huffing and puffing, sighing and complaining, or cheerfully? Now, if the kind of obedience God expects is cheerful, immediate obedience without an argument or a challenge or delay, how do you suppose we go about preparing our children to relate to this God? What kind of obedience should we expect in our homes?

What does God say?

^{NKJ} **Ephesians 6:1** *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

You see, parents are the link to teach children what this God is like. The role of parents is to act as intermediaries of God's authorities, so that the children are indeed seeing something of God on the doorpost, on their hands, between their eyes, when they lie down and rise up.

If you want your children to think that they can live in God's universe and get away with disobeying Him, then let them get away with it. If you want to communicate the idea that God is satisfied with sulky, pouting obedience, then allow that in your home. If you want your children to think that God is okay with tantrums and excuses from adults, then let them have them when they are children.

If we want our children to think that God will bribe them to obey, then we should bribe them to obey. If we want our children to think that God only cares about outward behaviour, then we should only care about outward behaviour. If we want our children to think that God will plead or beg or negotiate with them to get obedience, then we should do that. But if that is not true of God, then it should not be true of parents in a Christian home.

Loving authority inspires and expects obedience. It communicates God's standards. It then supervises to ensure that the commands are followed. And if the obedience is not forthcoming, it corrects.

Proverbs 13:24 ²⁴ *He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.*

Proverbs 19:18 ¹⁸ *Chasten your son while there is hope, And do not set your heart on his destruction.*

Proverbs 23:13-14 ¹³ *Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.*
¹⁴ *You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell.*

Proverbs 29:15 ¹⁵ *The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.*

Proverbs 29:17 ¹⁷ *Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul.*

What does God authorise the parent to do? Use the rod. Not to vent; not to lash out; not to take revenge; not to express annoyance - to train. Every time we have to correct, we ought to be prodding our children to the cross of Christ. We ask them, "What you just did, what does God call that? What was in your heart when you did that? What happens to people who live their whole lives like that? But what has God done so that you can be forgiven? What has God done so that you can have a new heart? Now, Daddy is going to correct you, because God tells me to. This is to remind you and to teach you that sin hurts, disobedience is painful. I do this because you have wandered away from God's ways, and that is a place of danger and hurt. And then after the chastening, there is a chance for repentance. If there is true repentance, then there is forgiveness and reconciliation. Right there, you have taught the child about God as a loving authority. God makes laws. God expects immediate, submissive, cheerful obedience. God will punish disobedience. But God has made a way for sinners to be forgiven. If we come to Him, He will forgive us.

"I never spank my children, that's barbaric. I give him a time-out and it really works." Now, I am not against using that method; there is a place for varying how you correct, depending on the severity of the offence. The age of the child also affects how often we use the rod.

But I have two responses. First, when we say it works, what do we mean? Works for what? Works to change the behaviour for an hour? Or works to produce repentance over sin and a desire for forgiveness? The second thing I would say to that is, when God sends people to hell for rebellion, is He giving them a time-out? No, he's punishing them. The rod, when rightly used, is a merciful, quickly-over lesson in sin and its consequences. This might sting and burn, but it is soon over. God's final judgement on sin does not go away.

Now can parents abuse their authority? Yes, anything good can be abused. Sinful people will distort a perfect picture. A parent can use his authority selfishly. He can be a bully. She can be manipulative. He can crush the spirit of his child. He can also abuse it the other way – by abdicating and refusing to use authority, like Eli the priest, or like David - fathers who would not restrain their sons. He can fail on both sides. And by the way a parent who fails to exercise authority will be resented just as much as the parent who brings down crushing ungodly authority.

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

Do not exasperate your children. Inspire their obedience. Remember Proverbs 23?

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

Loving authority inspires, because it is fair. It communicates clearly and does not keep changing standards. It tries to live consistently by its own standards, and admits when it has failed. It is not legalistic or unfair in its expectations. It does not explode or discipline in anger. It encourages, and does not only criticise and scold and find fault. It listens carefully. It doesn't shame, or mock, or ridicule, or unfairly compare. It is not physically abusive. It is winsome, and encouraging, and just, and gentle. It is the loving firmness of God who wants to bless us, and hates to see our sin destroy us.

There is another relationship in the home which inspires and expects obedience, though of a slightly different kind, and that is the relationship of husband to wife. Husbands are to be loving authorities. Husbands are the heads of their wives, according to 1 Corinthians 11:2, and according to Ephesians 5:23. We'll talk more next week of how the husband is to model the goodness of God in his sacrificial love. But there is no doubt that he is to use his God-given authority to lead his wife.

Ephesians 5:25-27 ²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

And what is the response to be to this leadership?

Ephesians 5:22-24 ²² *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. ²⁴ Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Now, it's obvious that this is not identical to the child-parent role and relationship, but there are parallels. You have loving authority, and submission to that authority. In fact, one of the key ways that children learn to obey, is because they observe this pattern. If Mom is wilful and utterly rejects her husband's authority, it won't be long before the little ones pick up on that. After all, if Mom doesn't have to obey Dad, when God's Word says she should, why must I obey them when God's Word says I should.

On the other hand, when Mom cheerfully, happily submits, the children learn – submission to a loving authority is safe, and good, and beneficial. Once again, they have learnt what it means to submit to the loving authority who is God. God's greatness is even in loving authority which inspires and expects obedience. But God's greatness is also seen in a second way.

II. Loving Authority Inspires and Expects Respect.

***NKJ Exodus 20:12** " Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.*

The word for *honour* in the Hebrew is *kabbed*, which comes from words meaning *heavy*. The idea is, your parents should carry weight in your life. You don't treat them lightly, because God commands you to feel the gravity, the importance of their presence in your life. They are God's gifts to you, and you do not treat them, or speak to them as if they are otherwise. When Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 6:2, he uses the Greek word *tima* which means value highly, estimate greatly.

Loving authority inspires and expects respect.

This is taught several times in Scripture.

***1 Timothy 3:4-5** ⁴ one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence ⁵ (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);*

***Hebrews 12:9** ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*

Question: when it comes to responding to God's authority, how should God be treated? Should He be spoken to in a tone that says, "Yes, yes!" in an irritated way? Is it okay to say to God, "I heard you the first time!" Should God be responded to with rolling of the eyes, folding of the arms, and shaking of the head? Is it acceptable to be cheeky and insolent with God? If God tells us to do something, is it acceptable to say, "Why don't you do it yourself?" Is it okay to stick out our tongues at God and whisper curses at him under our breaths? How about calling God names? "You big silly" Is it okay to come up with nick-names for God and call him that?

Now if we, parents, and particularly we, fathers, are the first and primary link for our children understanding the greatness of God, how do we expect them to do so if we allow disrespect in our homes? If our children have no respect or reverence for the first authorities in their lives, where do we expect the fear of the Lord to come from?

***Proverbs 30:11** ¹¹ There is a generation that curses its father, And does not bless its mother.*

We're living in that generation. And people who have no idea how to respect their elders are crippled when it comes to respecting God. If you have no reverence for the people in your life closest to you, whom God appointed to guide you, how in the world will you reverence a God you have not seen? Let me adapt 1 John 4:20, and use the word fear or reverence in place of love.

***1 John 4:20** ²⁰ If someone says, "I fear God," and disrespects his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not respect his brother whom he has seen, how can he fear God whom he has not seen?*

Children can be taught to use respectful titles for Mom and Dad. They can be taught to ask for things in respectful tones of voice. They can be taught there are things you say and things you do not say to Mom and Dad. They can be taught to not interrupt. They can be taught to answer when spoken to. They can be taught to cheerfully greet adults they know. They can be taught that playing with Dad doesn't mean disrespecting Dad. And by the way, it does not stop merely at family.

***Leviticus 19:32** ' You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.*

Israel was to show honour to the aged. For that matter, Romans 13 says:

Romans 13:7 ⁷ *Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

We are trying hard to teach our children that adults are 'sir' and 'ma'am', the other elder of the church is Pastor Dave, the magistrate is 'your honour', the policeman is 'sir', those adults they know are 'uncle' or 'auntie'. This is not because we want to flatter the people who hear it; it is because we want our children to understand order, distinction in life, that they are just starting out at the bottom of an order in reality, at which the top is God Almighty. Unless they internalise that practically at home, at church and in society, it will be hard for them to imagine God as deeply worthy of respect.

Once again, there is another relationship in the home that models this.

Ephesians 5:33 ³³ *Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

1 Peter 3:5-6 ⁵ *For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,* ⁶ *as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

Children who see their mother show contempt and casual disrespect for their father, will struggle to respect him. Children don't need to be taught how to be disrespectful, that's already in their heart. But when they see mother being disrespectful, it just authorises their own disrespect.

Now loving authority does not only expect respect, it inspires it. That is, people respect what is respectable. If you are a continual goofball, a perpetual clown, you are not likely to be taken seriously. If you are a lazy sloth, mooching from couch, to bed, to kitchen, to couch, your children, particularly your older children, will lose respect.

As much as it is frowned upon today, there is something to be said for fathers having dignity, seriousness, nobility.

Titus 2:2 *Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.*

There is something to be said for mothers having elegance, graciousness and poise. If you want respect, inspire it, model it as someone worth respecting.

Titus 2:3 *Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,*

Imagine the experience of a child, slowly waking up to the world in your home. As he encounters you as his first authority figures, what does he learn about the ultimate authority – God? Does he learn that God is a loving authority who inspires and expects obedience? Does he learn that God is a loving authority who inspires and expects reverence? If so, you have helped put the knowledge of God on the doorposts, on the gates, when you rise and lie down. And it may be that your children will come to love God with all their heart, soul and strength.

