

God-Saturated Homes – 5

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 *"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, ² "that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. ³ "Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you -- 'a land flowing with milk and honey.' ⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 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. ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

In the last week, I read a deeply saddening article. It was by a young lady by the name of Meghan O’Gieblyn. In the article, she describes how through her pre-teen and later years, she followed one Christian rock group and pop group after another, through the various fads and fashions of the 90s and early 2000s. She describes how as she grew up in this environment, she saw how the church tried to keep up with the marketing techniques of the world, to make itself supposedly relevant, trendy, cool and attractive. This is how she finishes the article. “... I continued to call myself a Christian into my early twenties. When I finally stopped, it wasn’t because being a believer made me uncool or outdated or freakish, it was because being a Christian no longer meant anything. It was a label to slap on my Facebook page, next to my music preferences. The gospel became just another product someone was trying to sell me, and a paltry one at that ... “ In trying to compete in this market, the church has forfeited the one advantage it had in the game to attract disillusioned youth: authenticity. If Christian leaders weren’t so ashamed of those unvarnished values, they might have something more attractive than anything on today’s bleak moral market. In the meantime, they’ve lost one more kid to the competition.”

One more. One more of many. As we have pointed to, George Barna's studies showed that 6 out of 10 people who grow up in evangelical churches, permanently abandon the faith when they are in their twenties. These are people who sit in Sunday School and church, pray the sinner's prayer, give us their testimonies before baptism, attend the youth groups and are regulars in church with their parents. But two thirds of them do not simply choose other churches, they choose other gods. They abandon Christianity altogether.

In this series, we've tried to look at the words of Deuteronomy 6 as the solution, and the opposite of them as the problem. In other words, if we do not teach loving God wholeheartedly when we rise up and when we lie down, when we come and when we go. If we do not allow loving God to be as prominent as if it were something tied to our hands, sticking out on our foreheads between our eyes. If loving God is not something inscribed into our family lives, then we have practically secular homes. Whatever we might say once a week at church, our lives say that God does not matter. Our routines, priorities, conversations all say that God rests lightly upon our consciousness. Children growing up in these homes learn that we ought to take education seriously, we ought to take getting a great quality of life seriously, but we do not need to take God seriously.

On the other hand, if we pay attention to all the ways that we communicate love for God, the message is different. If we teach love for God formally and informally; if we show love for God by what we prioritise, by what we take pleasure in, by the very routines in our lives, by the rituals in which we symbolise what is important to us, it may be that the Spirit of God will bless our efforts, and show the beauty of Christ, the power of the gospel and the glory of living a life of love for God to our children. They will not only know they ought to love God, but they will desire that themselves.

One huge way in which we communicate who God is and why He is to be loved, is in the roles of family members. Father, mother, husband, wife, child all have roles. When these roles are fulfilled, it becomes an ongoing picture, a living portrait of who God is, what He is like. It turns the people you know most into symbols of what it is to know and love God. We saw there are two aspects of God that He wishes to see clearly portrayed in our roles – His greatness and His goodness.

Last week we took the time to consider how the roles in a family communicate God's greatness. We saw that the role of father and mother communicates God's greatness by inspiring and requiring obedience from children. Likewise the wife's role models that heart and attitude of submission in front of the children. We also saw that the role of father and mother communicates God's greatness by inspiring and requiring respect. Again, the role of a wife to a husband sets that tone of respect which the children follow. When we do this, we see what it means to submit and yield and reverence God.

But if all we know is God's greatness, we might fear and reverence Him, but it might be nothing but dread. God's goodness is with greatness, and God's greatness is with goodness. In this final message of the series, we want to ask, how do the roles in the family communicate God's goodness?

Ephesians 5 provides much of the answer, because there Paul tells us that the home, and in particular, marriage, is in fact an acted-out portrayal of Christ and the church.

We've already dealt with the aspect of the wife's submission, and the children's obedience. Notice the space that is given to the husband's love of his wife.

Ephesians 5:25-29 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.* ²⁸ *So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.* ²⁹ *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

Paul is giving husbands an instruction. His command is for husbands to love their wives the way Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? He loved it so much, He willingly gave His own life for it. Why? So that He could save people from their sins, and present to Himself a holy, purified church, and so enjoy her forever. The man who loves his wife, is loving his own flesh, just like Christ loved the church to present it back to Himself.

That's the model for husbands - love in the same way. In verse 29, we see two words which describe this kind of love- nourish and cherish. In this passage, we'll see two aspects to God's goodness, or love that are to be displayed in the roles of husbands and parents. God's Love sacrificially provides for the Beloved – that's nourishing. God's love self-consciously prizes the beloved – that's cherishing.

I. God's Love Sacrificially Provides for the Beloved

Husbands are to love their wives as themselves. How do they treat themselves? They nourish themselves, so they are to nourish their wives. Just a few verses later, in 6:4, fathers are instructed to do the same with their children. The words 'bring them up' translate this same Greek word translated nourish. Fathers, nourish your children in the training and admonition of the Lord.

What does 'nourish' mean? On a very physical level, it means to feed. A man provides his own body with nourishment to survive. So, the husband is to provide for his wife's physical needs of food and clothing and shelter. A father is to provide for the physical, financial needs of his home.

1 Timothy 5:8 ⁸ *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

But the husband's model here is Christ and the church. Has Jesus provided for the church's physical needs? He has, but as verse 25 tells us, He has provided much more than that. What has He provided? We were dying rebels, shaking our fists in God's face, till he came, and experienced God's justice on our behalf. He provided atonement, forgiveness, new life. He has provided the ultimate good – eternal life! Without that provision, all physical provision would just be a nice meal before execution. Jesus provided what is ultimately good for His beloved – their salvation and their sanctification. Nourishment is providing what the Hebrew word *shalom* communicated- health, wholeness, overall blessing. This is what God's love does – seeks our shalom.

This is what God's love does: it longs for the greatest possible good for the one it loves. It does not want to short-change the one it loves. It does not want to cheat them with second-rate blessings, or cheap, short-lived blessings. Love wants the most permanent, ultimate state of good to be showered on the one it loves.

Deuteronomy 5:29 ²⁹ *'Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!*

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 *And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ "and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?
This is God's heart to His people. When Jesus came, He expressed the same heart.*

John 15:11 ¹¹ *"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

So this helps us understand how God's goodness is to be communicated in the home. Husbands, and parents, are to provide what will bring fullness of joy for the beloved. A husband seeks to give his wife what will be her greatest and most lasting joy. Parents seek to bless their children with joy, but with the deepest, and most long-lasting joys.

So let's think through that. To love like this means you are interested in the physical well-being of the one you love – food, clothing, medical care, shelter, safety. A wife who receives this should know she is loved. A child who receives this is seeing some token of God's nourishing love. He or she learns – God cares about feeding me, clothing me, sheltering me. God is merciful and kind. God can be trusted.

To love like this also means you are interested in the emotional well-being of the one you love. You want the one you love to be without anxiety, fear, depression, sadness, unhappiness, or other disturbances. A husband or parent will try his best to provide the comfort, or the counsel that will help the one loved to have shalom in the mind and heart. This also means taking the time to learn and listen.

1 Peter 3:7 ⁷ *Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*

The child who sees this learns dad does not want mom to be unhappy. My parents want me to be satisfied. God must be the same One who seeks to bless me. God can be trusted.

To love like this also means you are interested in the social well-being of the one you love. You want the one you love to achieve goals, be educated, be well-equipped, do the things they enjoy. A husband who loves tries to provide support and encouragement for this to happen. Parents provide this kind of love as well.

“1 Thessalonians 2:11 ¹¹ as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,”

Nourishment is for the body, for the mind, for the whole life. But what is ultimate - 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.

The greatest love is the love that provides spiritually, because it provides eternally. To love like this means you are interested in seeing the one you love confess Christ as Lord and Saviour. To love like this means you are desirous to see them disciplined and live a whole life of devotion. And to that end you provide.

You provide instruction from the Bible. You provide prayer, both with them and for them. You provide the example of godliness. You provide the leadership that takes your family to corporate worship. You provide routines and rituals that reinforce spiritual truth. You provide resources at home to read and listen to which teach love for God. The husband and parent who provides spiritually is seeking the ultimate blessing for the ones he loves.

But what is needed for this kind of provision? What did Jesus need to do to provide like that? He sacrificed, He gave Himself up in the effort. Make no mistake, providing what is best takes great cost. A cost in prayer, a cost in study, a cost in planning, a cost in reading, a cost in staying up later or getting up earlier, a cost of self-sacrificing hard work. Why? Because we are to love as Christ loved the church. He did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many.

But Paul used a second word to describe a husband's love for his wife. Not only must a husband nourish his wife, he must also cherish his wife, just as the Lord does the church.

II. God's Love Self-Consciously Prizes the Beloved

The husband must cherish his wife, just as he cherishes his own body. Husbands do this for their own bodies. When we are cold, we put on warmer clothes. When we hurt, we seek alleviation of pain. When tired we seek rest. We treat, we cherish ourselves. Here's what's interesting Just as that word *nourishes* is also given to fathers in Ephesians 6:4, so this word *cherishes* is said to be true of mothers in 1 Thessalonians 2:7

1 Thessalonians 2:7 ⁷ But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children

What does this word mean? It actually comes from a word connected with what a hen does with her eggs - covering them, warming them, sheltering them. So the idea is to treat as precious, to give comfort, to display tenderness and a deep sense of valuing.

Now again, this is said to be true of Christ. Christ cherishes the church. In what way? Well, He gave

Himself for it, so that He could eventually present the church back to Himself so that He could enjoy it as bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. God's love has a benevolent self-interest. He wishes to enjoy His people. So He sacrifices so that He can enjoy them as holy.

Psalm 149:4 ⁴ *For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.*
Zephaniah 3:17 *The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."*

God prizes His people. We are prized by God not because of intrinsic worth, but because of the price Christ paid for us – His own life. We are called in Romans 1:7 “beloved of God”. God does not merely nourish us; He cherishes us. He prizes us as His beloved church, and treats us with tender affection, with warmth, with esteem. How does God display this cherishing of us?

Well, for one, He communicates it. He says often in the Word how precious His people are to Him. He makes promises to us, and binds Himself to them. If Song of Songs contains any symbolism of Christ and the church, then God praises His people as he sees them in Christ. God showers us with gifts, comforts, enjoyments, answers.

This is what husbands are to model in the home. Husbands are to prize their wives. Just as Christ treats the church as that which He paid for with His life, so husbands are to see their wives as very precious. They are to communicate that they see their wives as precious. This is something which is communicated in words. It is communicated non-verbally. It is communicated physically. It is communicated in gifts, and praise, and gratitude, and acts of kindness. It is shown in sheer delight to be in each other's presence.

I think the Bible knows that husbands will struggle against coldness and a failure to cherish, because Paul says in Colossians 3:19:

Colossians 3:19 ¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*

When a child grows up in a home where he sees his father cherishing his mother because of what Christ has done in his heart, he sees a glimpse of the goodness of God. God prizes His people. It is a mighty privilege to be loved by God. God is someone one should desire to know and be loyal to.

Parents too, display this cherishing love. Mothers are singled out by Paul, because it seems to come more naturally to mothers, the displaying of tender, compassionate affection. A child who grows up provided for, but never cherished, will usually be an unhappy child. How many stories can we relate of children whose parents have been enormously wealthy, and made sure every want was provided for, but never displayed personal warmth, care, and delight in those children.

In a home where there is this kind of prizing of one another, there is joy. It is not a gloomy home, but a celebratory home. And I will say this on the authority of Deuteronomy 28:47 – it is a sin to have a consistently gloomy home.

Deuteronomy 28:47-48 *" Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, ⁴⁸ "therefore you shall serve your enemies,*

So certain is God that He has cherished His people, that He regards it as sinful if they live without joy and gladness. He has, according to Psalm 103, loaded us with benefits. The Christian home should be a reflection of this. God has delighted in us, we delight in Him, and by His command, we delight in one another. We enjoy each other. We find pleasure in each other's company. We prize each other, and display that.

When children grow up in a home like this, they see a taste of the goodness of God. They see that God not only provides for us, but He enjoys us, and we are meant to enjoy Him. God is someone in whom is fullness of joy. I need not go looking for joy in the broken cisterns of the world – it is right here, in the God of my parents.

Here is God's goodness summarised: He nourishes His people, He provides, and He cherishes the people He prizes. Here is what we model in our homes so that the fragrance of God is in the home – sacrificially providing what is best, and prizing one another with joy.

If we combine this goodness, with the greatness that inspires and expects obedience and reverence, our children will have a fair idea of what this perfectly good and great God is like.

If our +- 40 children are to grow up and be robust, persevering disciples of Jesus Christ, it will not be because we got them to pray a prayer to accept Jesus one time in their lives. It will not be because we interrupted our otherwise secular lives once a week to do church. It will not be because we had a Christian version of the youth culture in our churches. It will not be because we made church fun for the children and cool for the teenagers.

It will be because our homes and church were God-saturated. The love of God was taught from the pulpit, from the dinner table and from the couch. The love of God was taught through the home and church's priorities and pleasures. The love of God was taught in our routines, and in our rituals and the love of God was taught through the biblical roles in the home – roles which show God is great, and God is good. If we do this, then our children will see something of God when they rise up and when they lie down, when they come and when they go, on the doorposts, on their hands, on their foreheads – everywhere they look. Loving God will be not only be the ultimate priority, but the ultimate reality.

***** The Goodness and Greatness of God in the Home.**