

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

**These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, <sup>2</sup>so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. <sup>3</sup>Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you.**

**<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>5</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup>Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup>Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup>Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.**

Moses spoke those words to a group of parents who cared for their children. When Christians care for children, they want them to know God. But how do we help them know God in a godless world?

A grandpa had an idea. He spoke to his grandson about God as they stood over the fresh grave of the boy's father. The father had died in unbelief. The old man knew that the world would tempt his grandson with all the same ideas that tricked his father. He'd feel the pull of all kinds of sinful pleasures. And the old man would not live long enough to help his grandson steer clear of all those dangers. So the grandfather puts the child under oath. "Swear to me that you will remain in Christ!" And the little one dropped to his knees before the grandpa scooped him up. Is that the secret—an emotional commitment to make our children know God?

Another story is of a young man whose parents decided to put the fear of God into him, in all the worst senses of that word. Steal an apple and get lashes. God hates thieves. Sass your teacher and get a whoopin'. God doesn't love rude kids. Is that it? The power of pain keeps kids close to God?

God himself has an idea about this. Study. Moses said, **"God directed me to**

**teach you, so that you and your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live.” (Deuteronomy 6:1-2)** God wants kids to fear him as long as they live, so he gave them a teacher and parents. God’s method is to study. Study God. Learn about him when you get up, when you lay down for bed, at home, on the road. In fact, God’s teachings should be such a part of you that it’s like they’re on your hands and fastened to your forehead.

Some people took that literally. Some Jewish people roll up God’s commandments, put them in little boxes called phylacteries, and tie them to their arms and head. They don’t believe that the words are actually going to permeate their skin. But those phylacteries are great reminders that God’s affects everything we think and do. We impress it on our hearts. That’s why our family, our church family, we study. We know it would be hard to do life if we didn’t know how to read or if we didn’t know how to add and subtract. It would be hard to do life if we didn’t know God’s love. So we study it. We put it in our brains and hearts and into the hearts of our children.

As a family growing in Christ, we take our kids’ studies very seriously. For more than 50 years, Christian education has been a big deal at Mount Olive. We’ve got a huge mural that says. **“Mount Olive Evangelical Lutheran School assists parents with Christian training of children for life and eternity.”** To do that, students study Bible stories. But more than that, they learn science from a Christian worldview and history as God guides it. They eat lunch after giving thanks to God and play sports to give glory to God. We impress God’s word onto all they think and do.

You have invested in that goal. If you add up the cost of the staff and building and everything it takes to run our school, it costs about \$9,000 to educate one student for one year. But that’s not what each student pays in tuition because you help them cover that cost. We think that studying God’s word is so vital that we pool our money in the offering plate to make sure kids know Jesus.

In this family, everyone studies, even the kids. If you’ve got a child or a grandchild, you don’t need to put them under oath to stay close to God or threaten them with pain. But you can impress God’s love on their hearts. You can set your nose down next to your baby’s and sing, “I am Jesus little lamb.” You could look at the Bible verses your school kids have to memorize and learn it with them. You can set out breakfast cereal and tell kids that even this comes from the God who loves us.

If you don’t have a child to study with, then pray for our school. Advocate for it, and keep supporting it. We care about our kids. That’s why our family studies.

**Colossians 3:15-17**

**<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

That reading sounds like a friendship from a fairy tale. Peace rules their hearts. They learn from each other, and they grow in wisdom together. It's so delightful that they break out in song because their hearts are so grateful.

And just like a fairytale, that friendship sounds like fiction! The relationships I know are sometimes a bit awkward, not always peaceful, and there are no spontaneous musical numbers.

Was this passage written to a fairytale congregation? No, it was written to the Colossian congregation. It's not about fairytale friendship; it's about Christian friendship, where the message of Christ lives in your relationship.

Imagine if you spotted an old friend across the diner. You go over to catch up. "I haven't seen you since high school!" "Yeah, I'm in town for a few days on business," he says. "Well, you're welcome to stay at my place. It wouldn't be any trouble." So he does. You go to work the next day with your friend still asleep, but by the time you get home, he has done the dishes and the vacuuming, and stocked the fridge with the fanciest foods, re-worked the bathroom counters(!) and added a game room above the garage! And you say, "Hold on! I can't pay for all this." That's when your friend quietly informs you that in the years since high school, he's, well—he's become a billionaire. Pretty amazing to have that resource in your friendship.

That's kind of like having the message of Christ in your friendship. That message of Christ is that the tension and frustration in your relationships are evidence that you're sinful. And every sin is a felony in God's court and a slap in the judge's face. What's a little awkward between friends is big-time trouble between you and God. But Jesus stood trial for you, accepted your punishment, and he carried it out with his death on the cross. Now instead of trouble, there's big-time peace between God and us.

When you've got the message of Christ in your friendship and the peace of God

in your heart, then even if you can't buy your friends everything they want, you can give them the peace they've always dreamed of, the encouragement we need more than we need a game room.

That's not a fairytale. Those friendships exist in this congregation when the message of Jesus is at the center.

I see it in our Life Groups. Those are small group Bible studies that meet each week in people's houses to discuss the sermon from the past week. I've eavesdropped on some good Bible conversation at Life Groups, but I've seen some billion-dollar friendships too. There are people in this room right now who, during the covid lockdown last year, the only thing that kept them sane was seeing their Life Group in virtual meetings. There are people in this room who are in the same Life Group even though they disagree about sports and politics and masks and vaccines, but what's in the center of their friendship isn't similarity; it's the message of Jesus., it's peace with God and a fairytale love for one another.

New Life Groups are starting. Go to [mountoliveappleton.com/lifegroups](https://mountoliveappleton.com/lifegroups) to see when and where. Or contact Pastor Raasch to start your own group. Or sign up for one in the atrium. Studying Jesus with friends brings us closer to one another than anything else in the world. That's why our family studies.



**John 8:31-32**

**<sup>31</sup> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”**

Jesus says he can give you freedom. That’s a bold claim in America these days. Some people today think the solution to all their problems is more individual freedom. “Let me do what I want!” Others believe we need to work together. “If we all do our part, we can fix things!” But I think we all know deep down that whether we have more freedom or more cooperation, it will not fix everything. We’ll still have nagging questions. Why is my life so hard? Am I part of the problem? What do I do about it?

Jesus doesn’t promise civil rights. He’s promising freedom from guilt—a life of joy; freedom from grumbling—a thankful life; freedom from death—a fearless life. And he offers it to people who hold on to his teaching. Is that you?

During his life, Jesus made it clear that the whole Bible is about him and belongs to him. To hold onto his teaching means we’ve got to study the Bible!

We do that in church. This gathering is vital to our spiritual health, as Pastor Priewe said last week. And in public worship services, we review the main points of Jesus. We sin, and God forgives us for Jesus’ sake, so we love him. We pound the basics every week in rituals, in songs, in prayers so that even if you sleep through the sermon, you get the main idea.

But I want to take you behind the scenes for our worship. We follow what is called the three-year lectionary—that word means “what we read.” What we read every week is three passages from the Bible, plus one psalm. Today, I’m doing one devotion on each of the three passages. The lectionary is the calendar that tells us what to read each week. It repeats every three years. So, for example, on Easter of year A, we’ve got these three readings and a psalm. Then the following year, on Easter, three different readings and a different psalm. Then in year C, three new readings and a new psalm. By the fourth year, we repeat year A. So there’s a limited number of passages we read in church before they start repeating.

What percentage of the whole Bible do you think you hear in church before it repeats? I counted it up. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. And if you come to church every single week for three years in a row, and you listen to every single reading without missing one, you will hear parts of 424 chapters—424 out of

1,189. That's 35% of the Bible, which means more than 700 chapters are never on the calendar to be read in public worship. Some of those chapters are rated PG-13, so a big gathering is maybe not the best place for them. Some of those chapters are pretty detailed, and on Sundays, we focus on the main points. But in those 700 chapters are stories that illustrate what Jesus taught, word pictures to help Jesus' teachings stick in your memory, and wisdom to help you apply Jesus' teaching to the stickiest situations in your life. If you come to worship all the time but don't study your Bible apart from that, you're missing out on all of that.

I'll give you one example. Have you ever wondered which preachers you can trust? You see a guy on TV or hear a Christian podcast, and you don't know if you should believe what he says. The Bible has an answer, and it's in Galatians chapter 1. And guess what's never on the calendar to be read in church—Galatians chapter 1. But if you come to Pastor Zank's Wednesday morning Bible class this week, at 9:30 AM, guess what we're studying—Galatians chapter 1, and how to know if you can trust a preacher!

We've got at least eight Bible studies meeting every week. Pastor Raasch studies 1 Peter. I am studying God and gender. Pastor Priewe studies the foundations of our faith on Sunday mornings, Tuesday nights, Thursday nights. There are women's Bible studies on Philippians, and others study how we use our words. The men's Bible class on Friday morning is studying the book of John.

Tons of people from our family growing in Christ are studying Jesus' teachings. And Jesus promises that if we hold to his teachings, we'll know freedom from guilt, freedom from the fear of death, and someday perfect freedom forever. That's why our family studies.

So what's your study plan? If you were a fellow-nerd in school, you made a little schedule for how you would study your homework. What's your plan for how you'll study God's Word? Will you do it with your kids from school? Will you join a Life Group or start one with your friends? Will you find a Bible class? Download the Bible app? If none of those is working for you, then find me after service. We'll put our heads together and find a way for all of us to study God's word. That's what we do as a family growing in Christ.

Amen.