

**Mission: Teach These Truths to Your Children.**

**Text: Deut. 6:4-9. 2 Tim. 3:14-16. Matt. 18:1-5.**

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## **Teach. Learn. Switch.**

Today as we focus on Christian Education, we'll consider a few thoughts from each of the texts we heard before. We'll do so using this short outline to summarize and remember each section: Teach. Learn. Switch.

First, we begin in Deuteronomy 6 with Moses' instruction to *teach*. Moses gives this instruction to the people of Israel as they wait in Moab, right on the brink of entering the Promised Land at last, after 40 years of wandering. The whole book of Deuteronomy can really be thought of as like a farewell sermon from Moses, God's chosen servant who had led the people some 40 years. Moses, the Great Lawgiver, was essentially giving the law from God a second time. *Deutero* means two and *Nomos* means law= the Second Law. He was reminding the people of the covenant God had made with his people to be their God and also the laws that he had given them on Mount Sinai to set them apart as a people for his very own.

So at the start of chapter 6, Moses gives his simple purpose. **“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, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping his decrees...” (Deu. 6:1,2).** Hence, our summary word: *Teach*. God told me to teach you so that you could in turn teach your children so that you would remember the Lord and it would go well for you in the Promised Land.

The first verse of our text is perhaps the most famous verse in the Old Testament, sometimes referred to as the “Shema”, the Hebrew word for the command to “Hear”. **“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4).** That verse was like their

John 3:16. That was the first verse the children would memorize and verse they'd recite first thing in their morning and evening prayers. To us, maybe the verse doesn't really seem like much, but it encapsulates the gospel as God was slowly revealing it in the Old Testament. God had chosen Israel to be his people. A little later on in chapter 7, Moses states it clearly, **"You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people. His treasured possession."** (7:6) Israel was the only nation on earth who could say, "the LORD is our God." And they were the only nation who knew that he was the one true God in contrast to all the other gods worshiped on earth. They belonged to each other because God had chosen them and invested in this relationship. He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness by his very presence in the pillar of cloud and fire. They were remembering all of that just by saying, "The LORD our God."

So often, we probably come away with the impression that Moses is just the Lawgiver and that the books of Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy are just all laws, all the rules his people to do. Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of law, but it's all built on the gospel truth that God had chosen them to be his own, and since he was a holy God, this was the way they were supposed to live as his holy people. He had given his heart away to them, and he wanted their hearts in return. That's what any husband should expect from his beloved bride, his people. So Moses instructs God's people then and you still today, **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."** (6:5). Not just when things are going well and it's easy. Not just a piece of you while trying to serve two masters, not just on a rainy day when you need a back up plan, but with your whole self.

Then Moses starts describing the active way these truths are to be taught. **“These words are to be on your hearts. 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. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” (6:6-9).** This is a lifestyle, an every-day, throughout the day, kind of thing that goes along with a regular Sabbath worship life. It’s a lifestyle that realizes that life is not ultimately about the Packers, or about grade school basketball, though he allows us to enjoy those things long the way. Life is about our relationship with God.

Now hearing all that, you might be thinking, “Moses, that’s a lot. I already feel like I’m not getting to everything I should, and now you’re telling me to do all this. Isn’t that their teacher’s job or Sunday School teacher’s, or pastor’s job on Sunday? Well partially yes, our Christian Education system here at Mount Olive is set up in a wonderful way for us to spend time with students in God’s Word at worship and school and chapel and catechism and religion class and devotions. But hear this carefully: all of that is only meant to be a supplement, not a substitute for you, dear parents, and the vital role you have in training up your children to know the Lord. God has given you that wonderful privilege and important responsibility, and it’s our joy here at Mount Olive to partner with you in it, to assist you, and support you in that role.

Now as you think about diving in and starting or restarting your focus on this, you could overwhelm yourself and try 20 different things per day and crash after day two, but here is a different suggestion. Don’t try to do everything at once, but make sure you start doing something, one thing, one time you’re going to do regularly, one thing that will demonstrate in a heartfelt way that you eagerly want your children to share the love you have for the Lord. And

then build on from there. Maybe its reading the daily section from a Bible reading plan, or it's simply making the commitment to get up and go to worship and Bible study. It's a way to say to your children, "Do as I do, and not just as I say!"

I think back to when I was growing up. My dad was not a pastor. He was an exterminator. Through the years he did all kinds of things at church, like teaching Sunday School and Jesus' Cares and leading Lutheran Pioneers, but one thing I remember most was something that was just him and me. It was a job I don't think hardly anyone knew he did. The church had a manual church sign on the main road that people could see as they drove by at 40 mph. It wasn't the digital kind, it was the kind where you had to put the letters up one at a time, and we had a heavy wooden box of alphabetized letters. So we would go to change the message on the sign and that was my job, to get the letters out and hand them to him one at a time and then put the old letters away. Maybe that's how I learned how to spell too, who knows!

Now sometimes churches might put up some clever saying like, "Need prayer conditioning?" Not him. There were 4 lines with space for about 25 words, and they were going to be the words of God. So first, he'd sit at the table and read his Bible to pick a verse that would fit. Did he miss an opportunity to have a devotion on that verse with me before we left? Probably! He was more of a doer than a talker. But every week, no matter if we were putting our blanket down on top of a foot snow and freezing our fingers off, we'd be out there spelling out the Word of God for people to see that week. Did I always want to go? No, sometimes I'd make myself scarce right when he was ready to leave, but as I got older, I started to get it. You don't bother with something like that if it doesn't mean something in your heart, and it made an impression on me, which is exactly what Moses was talking about. **"Impress them on your children." (Deu. 6:7)**

Now let's make the switch from parents to children, and to do that we switch over to the Apostle Paul's words to Timothy, which we can sum up with the word *Learn*. Paul acknowledges the wonderful gift that had been granted to Timothy by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. They had done what Moses said. Though his father was an unbeliever, his mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures from the time he was a baby. They had probably taught him the Greek version of "Jesus Loves Me" and all the Bible stories and promises of God which make a person wise for salvation. And now Paul addresses Timothy, whom he considers to be his dear Son in the faith and says, "**Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.**" (2 Timothy 3:14).

Timothy, you know how much your mother and your grandmother loved the Word of God and you know how much they loved you. So you can trust what they told you, and you can love it for yourself and rely on it with all your heart. Above all else, they wanted you to be saved, to be in heaven one day, and so they taught you the most important thing in all of life- **the Word of God.**

I was reminded of that on the day of my mother's funeral, shortly after my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. As people came through the visitation line, no one really knows what to say and so they all kind of say the same thing. But not my principal. He had known my mother and me for decades. 25 years before, he had been the one to announce the news that I was born to my brother and sister who were at school at the time. Now on the day of her funeral, we stood in view of her casket, this is what he said to me, "You know the promises of God that your mother taught you. Those promises are true today for her and for you." It's the only thing I remember anyone saying that day.

And so I say to you dear children, you who sang and those who read, and those who came for the children's lesson, and those in school and Sunday School and Catechism, listen to your parents all those who teach you the Word of God, and *learn* it with all your heart. You will not go to heaven because your parents went to church when you were little, but the Word of God taken into your own heart and received in faith by the Spirit's power will make you wise to go to heaven. Learn these truths from your parents and your pastors and your teachers and continue in them for the rest of your lives so that they are the promises that are true about you too on the day you take your last breath.

So far, on this Christian Ed. week, we've focused on two things you'd expect. Teaching and learning. But the last word of our theme today might have made you scratch your head a little. The last word is *Switch*. This idea comes from Jesus' words in Matthew 18, and here's what I mean.

After you've started to grow up a little bit, you tend to start focusing on things like, "Who's the best?" or "Who's in charge?" or "Who gets the final say-so?" It's what the disciples were worried about when they asked Jesus who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was.

**"Jesus called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said; 'Truly I tell you unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matt. 18:2).**

You may get used to teaching your children or being in charge or being relied upon. God may call you to that responsibility. But you also have to *switch*. You have to change and become like little children. You must silence your mouth from talking and go back to learning. You have to stop thinking you're in charge of everything and go back to being a child, relying on God for everything. Isn't it ironic how God tells children to grow and become mature in the faith, and to

adults he says the opposite, **“Become like little children.”** Take on their humility and their reliance. Children rely on their parents for everything. They trust without having any idea what is going on and all the while they can be happy while they do it.

This past week I had to learn again to become a little child from my own little child. As many of you know, Josie spent another week in Children’s hospital in Milwaukee with pneumonia, just two weeks after the first week spent in the hospital right after Christmas. It was all quite the ordeal again. She had to ride in the ambulance there as a precaution and she got poked for IV’s and labs and they shoved tubes down her nose and throat every few hours digging for gold. There’s big machines and relentless beeping and doctors and nurses waking her up and taking her temp and all the things that would drive any human being quite insane. To some degree, I guess it’s a good thing she doesn’t understand too much of what’s going on, because it’s all pretty terrifying. But when she feels her mother’s touch or she hears her father’s voice, she smiles because despite being sick as a dog, she knows her parents love her, and by extension, she feels God’s love and that’s enough to make her happy in the moment. So it is to be a child, and to trust like a child. Instead of getting angry or bitter or trying to control everything, she reminded me to become like a child again, to trust, and to be happy in knowing that the LORD my God really does love me as his child. He has proven that forever in the life and death of his son, Jesus Christ.

That truth is ours to pass on forever. Parents, teach. Children, learn. And don’t forget switch and become children again, relying totally on Christ for salvation. Amen.