

Scripture Reading: Solomon the son of David, king of Israel talks about the importance of teaching wisdom to those around us in Proverbs 1:1-9. “Their purpose is to teach wisdom and discipline, to help one understand wise sayings. They provide insightful instruction, which is righteous, just, and full of integrity. They make the naive mature, the young knowledgeable and discreet. The wise hear them and grow in wisdom; those with understanding gain guidance. They help one understand proverbs and difficult sayings, the words of the wise, and their puzzles. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction; don’t neglect your mother’s teaching; for they are a graceful wreath on your head, and beads for your neck.”

[SLIDE 1]

Where did summer go? Every year when the halfway marker hits, I find myself asking this question. Now, I recognize many of you are saying, “Hey! Summer didn’t go anywhere. It’s only July 17th.” And you would be technically right, but the moment I drive by our local High School and see the soccer and football teams out in two-a-day practices, it’s a sign for my world that summer is over.

If you’d indulge me this morning, I’d love to give you a little summer report of my full and fruitful summer. As I think back, it’s been marked by three categories: family, camps and theatres.

For Family: Our summer started a bit early this year with Lily coming home from college the first weekend of May. We had some “family projects” . It wouldn’t be summer without a honey do list. We did some quick weekend or day getaways together.

For Camps: This summer I attended Red Rock summer camp. During my time there I spent time with 70+ students spanning age six to 23 and made meaningful connections with others and God, and had a ton of fun. Here at Forest Hills we are getting ready for our Summer Kids Bash. We already have 8 new kids from the community signed up for our Wednesday morning program.

Theatres: This summer we are starting our second year of our theatre outreach program here at Forest Hills. This year we had 15 teens and young adults audition and have a cast and crew of 12. This includes 4 new teens. Set build is just starting. I also volunteer with Masquers Community Theatre in town and their

show Beauty and the Beast opened this weekend. Which has been great connecting with 40 adults and kids from our community.

As I think back on these three categories of family, summer camps, and theatres, it has continued to stir up a deep passion and burden I have. It is the call to raise up the next generation, and I believe it has a lot to do with all of us. It also has a lot to do with beads.

More on that in a moment, but first let's go to Deuteronomy 6:1-9. In this section of Scripture, Moses stood before the people of Israel as they prepared to head into the Promise Land. It is his challenge to them as a nation and as households to be a people who follows and honors God.

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Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (NIV 84)

¹These 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, ²so 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. ³Hear, O 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 fathers, promised you.

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

I think it doesn't take much to catch the heart of raising up the next generation in this passage, but before we get into that, let's take a moment to examine two verses that are extremely significant to both the Jewish and Christian religion:

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Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV 84)

⁴Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These two verses are being recited in Jewish synagogues around the world to this day. They will be spoken in Jewish homes. It is posted on door frames in Jewish homes. These two verses are such a big deal that they are actually given a name:

The Shema. (sha - MA-ch)

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Where did that name come from? I'm so glad you asked! The answer is actually found in the very first word of the verses. Shema is the Hebrew word that is translated to "hear" or "listen" (depending on your translation).

But I want to pause on this for a second because when we see the word "hear" we may just think of a noise going in our ears and registering with our brain. This word is much more than that. You see, fully understood, to shema is to listen, pay attention and respond to.

Here is why I pause on this one for a moment. By starting with the word *shema*, Moses was saying, "Listen Israel! Pay attention to this. The Lord is God. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. So Israel, because you are paying attention to this, respond by loving God with all your being."

Grab hold of this, church. It's one thing to listen, but it is something more to *shema*. And maybe, just maybe the most important challenge you need is today is to simply *shema* (aka, listen, pay attention, and respond to) the Shema.

Now, let's get into the point that is really resonating with me.

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The call of Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is not only to personally live out the Shema, but to also pass it on to the next generation.

This becomes very clear in the immediate instructions following the Shema.

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Check out verse 6: *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.* The call is to live it out.

Then check out the beginning of verse 7: *Impress them on your children.* Pass it on to the next generation.

And Moses goes a little deeper and detailed in his instruction in the second half of verse 7 all the way through verse 9.

⁷Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Look at these verses closely. Moses presents an all-encompassing call to the people of Israel to raise up the next generation to live out the Shema. He's saying do this **all day long**. Catch the "when" words here: When you... *sit, walk, lie down, get up*. He's saying to do this **in all settings**. It's *at home* and *along the road*. He's saying it needs to be **the highest priority**. That's what he's getting at in verse 8 with the picture of having symbols *on your hands* and bound *on your foreheads*. And finally, he's saying it needs to happen while they are **still under our roofs**. That's what he's getting at in verse 9 when he highlights *our houses* and *our gates*. This one is a little more subtle in this passage, but there is a principle laced throughout Scripture on the importance of instilling faith during the formative years when they are under our care. Probably the most blatant Scripture that challenges us toward this idea is found in Proverbs 22:6

[SLIDE 7]

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV 84)

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not part from it.

Some of you may know this verse. In fact, it was probably hung up in your childhood bedroom or bathroom. We love to hold on to this verse as a promise. The reality is that we should probably grab ahold of this as a call or commandment.

Which finally brings me back to beads...

I know this jar of beads has been likely driving you nuts. I mean, is this one of those "guess how many" deals? Go ahead, lean over to the person right now and make a guess on how many beads there are in the jar.

So, the answer is 936. If any of you got that right, you win absolutely nothing and you really should have saved that perfect guess for a time where you could win something.

This number, 936 has meaning when it comes to raising up the next generation.

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It is approximately 936 weeks from birth until high school graduation.

So, letting one of these beads represent a single week, there are approximately 936 beads from the day your child is born until your child graduates and move on to what's next. From the moment that little child entered the world, the countdown started. With each passing week, a bead comes out of the jar.

Now, let's draw this out a little bit by getting a visual of some of the more significant transition ages in this 936 week span.

Once Kindergarten starts, we get pretty specific in our timing. It is 624 weeks until they move on [put up the Kindergarten jar]. This is a big shift as we run into the formative grade school years and then we hit the big transition into Middle School.

At 7th Grade, we are down to 312 beads [put up 7th Grade Marble Jar]... 312 hormonally charged beads. At this point, we have already lost nearly 2/3 of our beads.

Then, when your kid walks through the doors of High School as a Freshman, you are now down to 208 beads [put up the 9th Grade jar].

And then, just for you parents of Seniors out there, consider the fact that you are down to your last 52 beads [put up the 12th Grade jar].

I know what you're thinking parents and grandparents: "Thanks for the equally depressing me and freaking me out."

Please know that neither of those emotions are my goal. I also know that some of you may be resistant to the idea of doing a countdown. You may be thinking, "Don't make me focus on how much time I have left. I should just be focused on the now."

This visual of the beads comes from the folks at Orange, an organization that focuses on the strategic partnership between the church and the family in raising up the next generation. Reggie Joiner, the CEO of Orange, says this when it comes to keeping track of your “beads”:

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*When you see how much time you have left,
you tend to get serious about the time you have now.
-Reggie Joiner (CEO Orange)*

We aren’t counting down with dread. Instead we are paying attention to the time we have left so we will be motivated to make the countdown count.

Now, I want to pause for a moment to make sure we are ALL tracking. Grandparents and parents, you have likely been healthily tracking to this point. I fully recognize there are empty-nesters, non parents, singles, and those of you who actually are a part of this age group in the room. So, you might be thinking “Well, this morning is a waste of my time.”

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Here’s where you come in. And don’t miss this. You are **ESSENTIAL** to this. **This is the responsibility of the family and the church.** I believe the biblical model outlined in Deuteronomy and in other places points to the home as the place where the primary discipleship should be happening. Yet, the church family is here to work in partnership with the home. It is really meant to be a both/and situation. When I see this partnership fully functioning, it is a beautiful thing.

However, there can be moments when the investment is not taking place at home. In these moments, the church has the opportunity to play its normal role, and also to play a role as a family. When I see this happen, it’s a amazing thing.

It makes me think of Brad and Jenna. Brad and Jenna both graduated from our Red Rock Camp Ministry in 2003. Jenna came from a family that took the call of Deuteronomy 6 seriously. They were investing in her spiritual journey at home. When Jenna jumped into Red Rock Camp, she found some key friendships from students from different schools who were also pursuing after Christ. I remember a summer where Jenna fully surrendered her life and future over to Christ.

Brad came from a tough home life. His parents did not have church nor did they any interest in any kind of spiritual pursuit. But Brad dove in, and the Christians at Red Rock Camp dove back into his life. People like Mike and Jen became spiritual parents to him. BEn, his Small Group Leader, became like a big brother. I'll never forget one night where Brad and his buddies were hanging out in Hillside well after camp was done. I was tired, and asked, "Don't you guys want to go home?" Brad looked back at me and said, "You don't get it. This is my home."

Well, Brad and Jenna not only fell in love with Jesus through their camp years. Brad and Jenna are now seeking to raise their kids to follow the Shema!

Whether it's present in the home or not, you are important to the spiritual development of the next generation.

[SLIDE 11]

In the world of children and youth ministries, there is this thing known as the **5:1 ratio**. The idea is, whether it's a weekly program or a retreat, to have one adult leader present for every five kids. The general thought is that this ratio gives good coverage to the kids and ensures that nothing gets burnt down.

Chap Clark is a great youth ministry mind at Fuller Theological Seminary, and he has challenged this ratio. He's asked the question, what if we flipped it?

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What if we were to seek to get five caring adults to invest in the spiritual journey of one kid? Let me even take it a step further. What if moms and dads in this church were able to confidently identify five individuals intentionally investing in their child's life through every step of the journey? There's only one way that can happen. There are some great mentors in our community that come in the form of our educators and coaches. Several of them love Jesus. But they have some limitations to what they can do and say when it comes to spiritual investment. The church is the place where we can fully and unapologetically focus in on our kids and students' journey with Jesus.

So empty-nester, single adult, married with no kids, upper class student... what if you were one of the five in the life of one of this amazing crew of 0-18 year olds?

This finally brings me to those of you in this room in that 0-18 year old crowd. Are you sick of me talking about you yet? Okay. How about if I talk to you for a minute? First, you are all amazing. I love working with you and I am not fearful about your futures. I am so hopeful for you. If I could just throw one simple challenge to you in this all... be willing to be invested in.

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The truth is that a **willing heart is a game-changer**. As I've walked with a lot of students over my time at this church, I've noticed a trend. Those students who seek out and surround themselves with those who care about their journey with Jesus are the ones who excel in their faith during their next phase in life.

You can seek after a lot of things...

... popularity

... academic or athletic success

... selfish or sinful desires

What if you sought to surround yourself with people who are going to help you learn to love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength?

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If you can't tell, this stuff gets me pretty fired up. I know we've covered a lot of ground, and I want to make sure you walk out of here with some motivation to step up in the call to pass the Shema on to the next generation. What I want to do as I close the message is to give you some practical steps that might be worth considering. Let's consider this the "SO WHAT?" section of our gathering this morning.

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First, and this is for every single one of us: **Let's shema the Shema**. Let's be a church that does not just hear the call of God to love Him with all our being. Let's be a church who listens, pays attention and responds to this call in every aspect of our lives.

[SLIDE 16]

Second, and I'm mainly thinking of parents on this one: **Let's make the countdown count**. I had a thought leading into this week: Wouldn't it be funny if

Amazon noticed a major uptick on glass jars and beads in our area? Seriously though, what if you bought your own set of beads for each of your kids? At the end of every week, you pull two beads out. With one, you look at and consider how you've done this past week with your call to raise up your child in the way he or she should go, and then you put that bead to the side. With the other, you process and take a moment to pray, asking God for the wisdom and courage to make the most of the week ahead and then put it back in the jar.

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Third, and I'm mainly thinking of those who are non-parent or grandparents: **Let's invest in the next generation.** Here comes my recruiting pitch, but don't hear me trying to fill up volunteer spots. Instead, I want to invite you into the biblical call to raise up the next generation. You can do that in an official volunteer role and we have all kinds of opportunities that vary in style and commitment levels. You can even start this summer by helping with Kids Bash from 9-11:30am each Wednesday of August. You can also help this fall with Echo our Wednesday kids program, or be a confirmation mentor or help at Youth group with the older kids. For all of us we can also simply start getting intentional with some of the relationships that are already present in your life.

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Finally, and I'm thinking mainly of families on this one: **Let's Identify the five.** Students, what if you sat down with your parents and came up with five individuals who could intentionally invest in your spiritual journey (Hint: your mom and dad should be two of them)? And, what if you actually approached these individuals and let them know you are willing to be invested in?

The bottom line this morning: *When you see how much time you have left, you tend to get serious about the time you have now.* May we be a church who will shema the Shema as we make the countdown count!