

Christian Education Doesn't Stop After School
Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It was the late 1940s, a time when sexual norms were in line with biblical truth. A time long before Roe vs. Wade had been decided. Prayer and Bible reading was not uncommon in public schools. The divorce rate was half what it is today. Church attendance in the US was at the highest point in the past 100 years coming off of a post WW2 nation-wide increase. Why? Moral values as a whole were for the most part in line with Biblical norms. Unlike today where many seek out Christian schools, wanting a safe moral environment for their kids, that was not the case in the late 1940s. Yet as a small group of Christians in Fond du Lac officially formed Faith Lutheran Church almost 75 years ago, they made a strong commitment to Christian education. Even before they opened their own school in the early 60s, the members of Faith committed to paying the tuition for their congregation's students to attend St. Peter's Lutheran School. Why? It would only slow down procuring the funds to build a Church. Well, you don't have to look too far. The reason is clearly stated in the mission statement of Faith Lutheran School – that we are here to prepare our children for life and eternity. About 260 plus kids in preschool through eighth grade assemble each school day at Faith Lutheran School, and what do we want for them more than anything else? Heaven. Do we want them to learn to read and write and do math? Sure. Do we want to give them opportunities to hone their physical skills and keep in good physical condition, of course. Do we want them to have opportunities to learn to sing or play instruments, or act in a play? Yes. But more than any of these, we want them in heaven. And the only pathway there – faith in Jesus, trust in the God of the Bible. And where does that come from? The Bibles tells us that ***Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.*** From the get-go all of our methods of Christian education, Sunday School, Lutheran preschool, elementary, and high schools weave the truths of the Bible into every subject, every extracurricular, every interaction, because we want to instill and nurture the Faith in Jesus that each one needs to end up in heaven. It's really that simple, that "why" we do these things. From the very start, Christian education at Faith was not simply an institution, but a partnership between parents, congregation members, pastors, and teachers. Our church gave birth to the school, not vice versa. Parents were not wanting to pass off Christian instruction to teachers and pastors, but wanting what they taught at home reinforced in their children's lives all day long. It's good to go back and take that all in, good because in spite of the intent, it is all too easy to treat formal Christian education as the whole of Christian education. In other words, to have the attitude, "I've taken care of my child's Christian training them by sending them to..." (fill in the blank—Sunday school, confirmation class, Christian preschool, or elementary school, Christian high school, etc.) And what ends up happening is that Christian education ends for the day when the bell rings, and it ends for life upon confirmation or graduation from whatever institution that student was attending.

This was never God's intent. The words of the Bible before us today drive that point home. They are written in the book of Deuteronomy. Permit a bit of context. Most people know the name Moses. They know that the Israelites escaped from Egypt and about the journey across the desert to the land of Canaan, or modern day Israel. What might easily be forgotten is that the same Israelites who had walked through the parted Red Sea, did not believe that God could deliver this new land into their hands because of the report of the spies that they had sent in who told of giant people and fortified cities too strong for them to take. As a result of their distrust, God didn't allow that generation to take the land, he told them that they would live for 40 years in the desert, and indeed they did. When this time was up, an aged Moses, who would not himself enter the promised land, spoke to them the words of this book, words from God to the Israelites, who were about to start anew – a new country, new homes, eventually a permanent temple. These words were an encouragement, "It's finally time! God is with you!" But they were also a warning: "Don't repeat the mistakes of the previous generation! Put your trust in God." It's in that situation that we come across these words from **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** **These 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, 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.** Moses goes on to say how when they do, it will be a great blessing to them in this new land and in their lives. But how do these words connect with our theme this week – Christian education?

Well, were there any formal institutions for Christian education in this fledgling nation? Actually there were – God had set up the priesthood and the Levites. There were leaders and elders in each of the tribes and subdivisions of the 12 tribes of Israel. But to whom are these words addressed? Verse 7, impress them on your **children**. Talk

about them when you sit at **home**. When you **get up** or **lie down**. Write them on the doorframes of your **houses**. Whose he talking to primarily? Parents! For the Israelites, Christian education didn't start and end with the Levites or the priests, or the elders, or even Moses. It starts with parents, and it continues on with parents as the primary educators throughout life. Levites, priests, or today, pastors, Christian Sunday School, day school, and high school teachers, they are partners, but Christian education doesn't stop after school!

OK so let's do some reflecting. I know this is never fun, but it is valuable. Look at this passage again and let's all ask ourselves, how are we doing? Do we talk out God's commands and God's promises when we sit at home and walk along the road? When we lie down and when we get up? I'm guessing we're at our best when they are little, right? We read a Bible story at bedtime, we do a prayer before going to sleep. But how about as our children get older? Parents of fifth graders on up. Be honest with yourself, when is the last time that you initiated a spiritual conversation with your son or daughter? When is the last time you told them with words how important knowing Jesus and being confident that you will go to heaven is to you? When is the last time you asked them, "How is your walk with God going?" Do your children see and hear the Bible truths they heard and leaned at school, at chapel, at church reinforced from your lips and your actions? Have you had a heart to heart with you high school senior about the spiritual challenges that will inevitably come during the post high school years, especially if they are going away to college? Now compare that to how many times you've taught them some other skill, how to shoot a jump shot, how to bait a hook, how to throw a curve, how to play piano with two hands. Compare that to how many times you asked them about their relationships with friends. Compare that to how many times you've talked with them about their grades, or their major, or line of work they want to go into. Does Christian education continue for the rest of the day at your home, or does it stop for the most part after the bell or after graduation?

It's humbling to consider the answer is probably not. I know it is for me. Is repentance in order? I know it is for me. I'm guessing for you too. I'm certain that none of us have done a perfect job of doing what God asks of us here. So we go to God, and does he forgive? Of course. And does he step in and strengthen our children and bless them even where we have failed? He does. What a relief! Thank you God, thank you, but now help us! Help us parents to enjoy this gift, this relationship that you want us to have with our children!

I mean it when I say that this job of Christian parenting is a gift and a blessing, I do! Because it is! Those conversations might be hard to initiate, and our children might be slow to engage, but they are worth it and they are a joy. I think back to one of them from my own youth. My grandfather had just passed away and my father came to the high school where I attended which was four hours away to drive me home. He initiated a lengthy conversation with me about school, life, college, all from the perspective of my Christian faith and trust. You know I was blessed with some amazing Christian teachers, I attended Christian schools my whole life. I heard hundreds of sermons preached from the pulpit by my father, but let me tell you, that four-hour conversation was more impactful than all the rest, more than that, it validated all the rest. I knew from that and other conversations with Dad and Mom, that what they believed, what they knew to be important, matched with the pastors and teachers and instructors at the schools they sent me to. Their actions – no not all perfect – but their actions in life demonstrated to me that they believed the truths they and the pastors and teachers who taught me shared. And you can be certain that my parents enjoyed those conversations too. Were they hard to initiate – I'm sure they were. But did they bring them closer to their children? Yes, they did. And did they bring their children closer to God? Yes, they did. And now I have children of my own. Are those spiritual conversations hard to initiate? Yes, they are, even for a pastor and the Christian teacher. Are they worth it, are they enjoyable? Yes, they are. And I guarantee my wife would say the same. They bring us closer to our children. They help our children grow in the faith. And there are so many ways to do it. There's the everyday. Maybe it's setting a time to meet and talk or have devotion in the evening. Maybe breakfast or dinner time works better for you. I knew one family where the children each go on a trip of their choosing (within reason) boys with dad, or girls with mom the summer after confirmation and the parent, along with the fun of a trip, takes the time for heart-to-heart spiritual conversation. Maybe it's just taking time during that vacation or trip to a game to initiate the conversation. Do it! You will not regret it! God has put you in a place where you can make a huge impact, one that is a blessing to both you and your children. It's a gift from him to be enjoyed!

You know what? We are blessed. We are so blessed here at Faith with Christian education. Give thanks for the Sunday School teachers and day school teachers. Give thanks for them and to them, but remember Christian education doesn't stop in the classroom! It starts and continues with you! AMEN.