

What Are You Committed To?
A Family Commitment
Deuteronomy 6:4-6; 11:18-21
1/15/17

- When I was in the 4th grade, I started piano lessons. We didn't even own a piano at the time. But, I wanted to take lessons so badly and my dad, in particular, wanted me to take lessons as well. Some of you know that I come from a pretty musical family. My father even has a master's degree in music education and was a band director in a high school before feeling God's call to go into ministry. So, my parents scraped together the money for lessons and my dad would take me to the church to practice on the church's piano several times each week.
 - o After about a year of doing this, my grandmother decided that she was going to give me her piano. My grandmother was a gifted pianist. She was one who could play by ear. She could read music, too, but if she heard a song a couple of times, she could sit down at the piano and play it. I wish I had that gift. One of my prized possessions is a cassette tape of my Grandma and Grandpa Reynolds along with my Dad playing songs. I called them ho-down songs.
 - o So, my grandma told my dad that she would give me her piano. It was the piano that my grandpa had given her for an anniversary gift years before – before my grandpa passed away. It was precious to her. If you've been to our house, you have seen it.
 - o I was ecstatic. Now, my grandma lived in Florida and we lived in Ohio. But, my uncle was going to be going down to visit grandma. Again, my parents scraped together the money to rent a U-haul for him to bring that piano back from Florida.

- I was determined to be the best piano player around. But, here's the problem – I didn't really like to practice. I liked playing the piano. I liked having the piano. I liked the thought of being a great piano player. But, I lacked the commitment to practice so I could be a great piano player.
 - o So, I decided that it was enough to just get to the point where I could play well enough so I could play songs that I liked to sing to. When I was in the 8th grade, the day before my scheduled piano lesson, when my dad was away at a pastor's retreat, I decided that I was at that point and that I didn't need piano lessons anymore. I had learned enough.
 - o My mom, tired of arguing with me and tired of several of years of battling with me to practice for my piano lesson, she gave up and said, "Fine. You can quit piano lessons. But, you have to call Ms. Shafer (my piano teacher) and tell her."
 - o So, I called Ms. Shafer and told her that I was quitting. Ms. Shafer asked why. I said, "Well, I just want to be able to play the piano and sing my kind of music and I think I've learned enough to do that." "Really?" was her response. Then she said, "Your father is OK with you quitting?" I said, "Well, my dad isn't here right now, but

my mom said that I could quit.” “Hmmm,” was her response, “OK, if you think you can learn by yourself, go ahead and try.”

- When my dad got home and learned the news of what happened, he was not happy. I tried to explain the same logic to him – I wanted to do my kind of music and really, I just wanted to focus on my singing. That was my real dream.
 - o He said, “Angela, the fact that you think you have learned enough shows just how much you don’t know. If you want to do anything with music, even singing, you need to stick with this because there is much more for you to learn about music. Plus, too many people have sacrificed for you and you made a commitment that you are going to keep. Oh, and you are going to call Mrs. Shafer and apologize and see if she will take you back as a student.”
 - o With my tail between my legs, I called Mrs. Shafer. I continued with my piano lessons for another year and a half until we eventually moved from Northeast Ohio to Southwest Ohio. During that time, I still didn’t like to practice what she gave me. I was made to keep my commitment to lessons, but I didn’t really commit myself to them. And, because of that, even after six years of piano lessons, even after graduating college with a minor in music business - I’m still not all that great at playing the piano.

- Commitment. Two weeks ago, Pastor Will started the new year off talking about commitment and being committed to God remolding us. For the first part of this year, we are going to talk about commitment in various areas.
 - o Here’s the thing, many people avoid commitment. They avoid being committed to their faith in God, they avoid being committed to their marriage, they avoid being committed to their job, they avoid being committed to anything that might possibly involve some hard work. If something is hard, people like to bail.
 - o Then, we wonder why our lives aren’t what they could have been. Why are we so mediocre? Why is life so blasé? Because of a lack of commitment.

- You won’t have a great anything without commitment. You won’t have a great relationship with God, great faith, a great marriage, a great family, a great career, or be great at playing the piano without commitment.
 - o You know what the sad thing about my piano playing – I was gifted enough at playing the piano that I could have been an accomplished pianist if I would have committed and practiced.
 - o What I usually did is blow off practicing during the week or just mess around when I was supposed to be practicing and then when it was lesson day, I would come home from school and practice frantically for the couple of hours before my lesson. Sometimes, I got my pieces down enough that I even fooled Mrs. Shafer. Most of the times, I didn’t. She would often tell me, “Angela, if you would really practice and put the time in, you could be one of my best students.”

- Commitment. What do you want to be great at? You have to be committed to it! You have to put the time into it! Greatness doesn't come automatically. It requires hard work.
 - o I believe there are things that God wants us to experience greatness in. Of course, he wants us to be people of great faith and we are sure going to get into that this year.
 - o In addition, I believe God wants us to have great families. Family is incredibly important to God. The family was instituted by God. And, it is in the family unit where we get to work out who we are in Christ and where we first learn to walk by faith.
 - o When God created Adam and Eve, He created a family. The first human institution was the family. What does that tell you about what God thinks about family and the importance of family? Let's not take for granted that God has put us together in units called families. We have a responsibility to understand what that means.
 - o Whether you are married or single, whether you have children or not, you still come from a family of origin that God desires for you to impact, and all of us who are in Christ are part of the Family of God where through the blood of Jesus we are all connected to one another in a beautiful extended family.

- I also believe that because family is so important to God and God loves families, Satan is out to destroy the family. Listen, anything that is good, anything that is of God, anything that is close to the heart of God, Satan goes after with relentless force. Satan wants to destroy your family and he wants to destroy my family. And, Satan wants to destroy the Family of God, the church. He hates our families.
 - o Do you know what will stop him? Our commitment to making our family great through the strength and power of Jesus. I want to be committed to that! I want to stand in front of the schemes and tactics of Satan he is trying to use to destroy my family, to come against my marriage, to use on my kids and say, "Oh no, no, no you lying punk! You will not have this family! I'm committed to standing up for my family. I'm committed to putting in the time for my family. I won't treat my family like I did my piano practice. I'm committed to this!"
 - o Is anyone with me?

- So, this year, we want to stress commitment for your families, marriages, relationships, God and the church. We want your family to spend time together, to serve together, to pray together, and to learn Scripture together. We want to give you parenting tools and tools that will help strengthen your marriages.
 - o Whether you are in a two-parent family, are a single parent, are a grandparent raising grandchildren, whether you are a blended family or a family that has been blessed with children through adoption or foster care, or whether you are in a family where you are the only practicing Christian, we want you to know that God has a plan for your family and wants your family to succeed.
 - o But, we also want you to know that it's going to take great commitment.

- God's Word talks about the kind of commitment it's going to take to keep your family on track. Let's read **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**.
 - o Those, my friends, are some verses on commitment.

- On this 15th day of the new year, how many people are still keeping their resolutions or their goals? By next week, the number will be fewer and by next month, fewer still.
 - o This morning, I want to challenge you not to keep a resolution, but to make a commitment. I want to challenge you to commit to making the spiritual health and well-being of your family a priority during 2017.
 - o Families are a lot like sports teams. Each member of a team has something to contribute to the team. What is it that you bring to the table in your family? How can you make a greater commitment to being a family man or family woman?
 - o What are God's desires for your family? At the start of this new year I want to challenge you to make three commitments regarding your family. Then, over the next few weeks, we are going to touch on how to live those out in greater detail.

- First, commit that Christ is the AUTHORITY for your home. You have to decide on what authority, on what foundation, your home will be built. Whether you have thought much about it or not, every family is built on some authority. Your family will either be built on the wisdom of the culture or on the wisdom of Christ. What informs your family life? From where do you draw your values? Your goals? What determines how you spend your time and money?
 - o Culture tells us to keep up with the Kardashians – dear God help us! But the Word of God tells us to keep in step with the Holy Spirit, to keep up with Christ. They are two entirely different pursuits with two entirely different outcomes.
 - o Most TV families portray a kind of life that is in conflict with the Word of God. Think about it. When shows portray children disrespecting their parents, when they mock the institution of marriage, when they portray marital unfaithfulness as the norm or healthy exploration, when they encourage their children to pursue selfish-motivated happiness and to experiment sexually - we need to see those storylines as being in conflict with God's design for the family rather than “just the way it is these days.”

- God and His Word must be the final authority for the home or what happens? The home begins to crumble. If you want the lives of the Kardashians – filled with divorce after divorce after divorce, infidelity, children without two parents, shallow-minded, superficial. Now, they've got money, lots of money and they've got fame, lots of fame. Is money and fame enough? If so, keep up with the Kardashians.
 - o But, if you want a strong family of faithfulness, integrity, depth of character, children who think beyond their own selfish desires – then you can only find that in the Word of God and being committed to the Word of God.
 - o Deuteronomy tells us that you must commit to loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. That is the foundational command upon which everything is built. Is that the foundation of your home?

- Let's look at some other verses in **Deuteronomy 11:18-21**.
 - o Did you hear the commitment in those verses and in Deuteronomy 6? This is not a casual faith in the Lord. It is a commitment that God and our whole love for God will be the absolute authority for our family.
 - o God's people are to be people of the Word, people who transmit the Word into the hearts of their children.
 - o I know this is one area where I have fallen short as a parent. I have worked to instill Christian values and principles into our kids' hearts, but Scripture memory and talking about the Word as intently as this passage commands hasn't been the focus it should have been. And, we need to do a better job, especially as our boys get older. So, this year, we are going to start by doing a little devotional with them every day. It's a Veggie Tales book and it's called 365 Devotions for Boys. After this year, we will move on to something else.
 - o Our kids need to not only know what Christian values are, but they need to understand the Word behind the values. We're told in Psalm 119:11, "I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you." It doesn't say, "I have hidden your principles in my heart, but your Word."

- Knowing Christian values is great, but if our kids believe that the values by which we live are our idea, then as they grow and become young adults they may be more easily swayed to develop their own values and ideas which may be different. But if they realize the values aren't just our idea based on our life experience, but that they are God's truth, straight from His Word, they will understand that there is a higher authority than the authority of their parents and that He is the final authority for all things good!
 - o Kids will try anything to get around your authority in order to do what they want. A few months ago, our four year old, Stephen, was trying to figure out if there was any way he could get around my authority. I posted some of this on Facebook.
 - o One day, he was not happy with me putting him in time out:
Stephen: You think you're the boss. But, Daddy is the boss of you.
 - o Me: Daddy isn't the boss of me.
Stephen: Yes he is.
Me: No he isn't. Daddy and I are a team. We work together. We are both the boss of you and you better quit sassing me or you're going to be in time out longer!
 - o A few days later, after I told him he was not going to have pancakes for dinner:
Stephen: I'm going to tell on you.
Me: You're going to tell on me? Who are you going to tell?
Stephen: Someone who tells you about me.
Me: Stephen, you have to accept it when Mommy says "no." There is no one who tells me anything about you. I am it for you.
 - o Then, one morning Stephen wanted to brush his teeth by himself.
 - o Me: Stephen, you need help to do a good job. I am going to help you.
Stephen: Well...you're not the king of the world!
Me: Well, I'm the king of your world, little boy, so get in the bathroom so we can

brush your teeth.

Stephen: You can't be the king of my world because you're a girl.

Me: Fine, I'm the queen of your world. Open your mouth.

- Finally, a week or so later, I told him to do something and he said, "Well, you're not a giant!" He just keeps trying!

- All of that shows this - God's got to be the giant, the boss, and the King. God must be the final authority. Parents, our authority will one day no longer be valid. One day, they won't have to listen to us. Those who have grown children know that. So, our kids have to have an authority above us so that what we live by is above us.
 - They have to know that there is power in knowing the Word of God, a kind of power that will help us build Christian homes and stay on the right track in the midst of a culture that is headed down another track.
 - So, you must commit that Christ and His Word and ways will be the authority for your home.

- Second, Commit that faith is the ANCHOR for your home.
 - Now, the anchor of a ship or boat keeps it steady and fixed in one spot. But, faith is a spiritual anchor that keeps you connected to one thing – the strength and stability of the Holy Spirit. When you are connected to God's Spirit, he is able move you forward and help you grow as a Christian.
 - If our families are anchored by faith, then God will move our families in the right direction.

- Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith is the doing of our knowing and believing. Faith is the expression of our commitment to make Christ the authority of our homes.
 - When Christ is the anchor of our homes, our homes and our families look different that other homes and families. That's because faith has to be lived out. James 2:17 tells us that faith without works is dead. We aren't only supposed to believe something as Christian families, but we are to practice and express something as Christian families.

- Our homes are wonderful incubators for faith to develop. Living out faith begins in the home. Trusting God as a family, praying together as a family, serving the Lord as a family, worshipping together as families is so important. It isn't what we say, but what we do that proves our faith to be genuine.
 - Listen, the culture in this country is, in large part, opposite of God. Do you believe that? Our children, our families are in a culture that is pulling them away from Jesus Christ. Some of that might be deliberate and some isn't. Regardless, it's happening.
 - Our kids are learning in school about being transgender, about how it's OK for men to marry men and women to marry women, and about other cultures that may or

may not be completely true. How do I know? Because my first grade son has come home with question about all of those things.

- I have to, then, tell him the truth and talk with him about living out that truth in a way that is loving toward people, but a way that doesn't accept that which isn't truth.
- We have to teach our children how to live out their faith because they won't get that lesson anywhere else. Where faith is expressed the life of Christ is lived out in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - And, when we choose be Spirit-led in our homes and live out our faith, there is peace instead of anger. There is joy instead of division. Family members are built up instead of torn down.
 - Our homes need to be the safest emotional place on the planet. When expressing our faith as individuals and as a family becomes a priority, our family unit becomes a wonderful witness to the rest of the world.
- When God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis, it was a covenant that involved not only Abraham and his family, but it extended to the whole world. Through Abraham's descendants, through his children and his children's children, and their children for generations to come, all other nations would be blessed as Jesus would eventually be born.
 - Here is the thing: God has a plan to help other people experience salvation through you and your family's witness. The love and unity in your home are supposed to point people to the love of God and the unity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share. No wonder Satan attacks the family!
 - The way you speak to one another, the choices you make as a family, the standards by which you live, the way you reach out to others, your commitment to your church - all of those faithful expressions are to be used by God to help other families see that there is a different way, a better way, a holy way to live.
 - Just as God used Abraham's family to point the world to God, he will use your family as well. People are watching. If you claim to be a Christ follower, you better believe others are watching.
- Dads and Moms, this living out your faith, it starts with us. Your kids are looking at you primarily and will model you. Even if you have adult children, they are still looking at you. If you have grandchildren, they are looking at you. They aren't looking at me. They only see me once or twice a week, if that! Your kids and grandkids are looking at you. I have two little boys who are looking at me.
 - Do our children see us expressing faith? Do they see us reading the Word or hear us talking about it? Do they see us giving God's way? Do we take godly authority in our homes and set boundaries for our kids that will help them stay spiritually safe and draw closer to Christ or do we bend over backwards to do anything they want us to do and give them everything they ask for?
 - Do our kids see us engaging in worship when we come here or do they observe us simply going through the motions? Do we lead our families in prayer? Do we point

our children to the goodness of God and regularly give thanks for His many blessings? Are we serving the Lord in some capacity that models for our kids what it means to use our gifts and talents to build others up?

- Those passages in Deuteronomy tells us how to teach our children God's commands and what we can do. But, it won't matter what we teach them, or tie on their hands or bind on their foreheads if we don't walk our own talk. What we model matters. We will never transmit a real faith if we don't live it out ourselves. You can't take you kids to church and expect that to make a difference. You've got to live for Christ every day.

- When I was a youth pastor, I heard this quote and I often shared it with parents: "Your children will model the good you do in moderation. But, your children will model the wrong you do in extremes." You cannot lead your children to be people of faith, committed to God at a greater level than what your own faith or commitment to God is.
 - Faith is action, and it needs to be demonstrated first and foremost in our homes. That doesn't mean that we don't have a responsibility to demonstrate it here, especially for those children who come without their parents.
 - What it shows is that if you have children, you are and will always be the one that they look at and model – always. No matter if they are going through a phase where it seems as though peers are most important, don't believe it. Mom and Dad, Grandma and Grandpa – you are always most important and the most influential.

- Speaking of that phase where friends rule and parents drool...you know that phase, right? Maybe some of you are experiencing that phase right now. For this phase and all others, the final commitment is to commit that grace is the ANSWER for your home.
 - Genesis 2:24-25 tells us that when God created Adam and Eve, before sin entered the world, they were naked and unashamed. They were together before the Lord without shame. When God created the family, it was a unit, an experience without shame and condemnation. But after Adam and Eve sinned, we find them hiding from God.
 - When God called to them and reached to them, Adam told him that although he had heard God calling, he was afraid and stayed in hiding. Genesis 3:10 tells us that after he sinned he recognized his nakedness which brought him shame. Sin and shame go together.

- If you are married, you are married to someone who was born a sinner. If you are a parent, you are parenting people who were born sinners. I also deliver the cheerful news that you, yourself, were born a sinner. You are listening to a born-sinner deliver this message.
 - It is important to own the scriptural truth that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Before you can understand grace, you have to first accept that you are a sinner. We were all born sinners. Because of that sin, we are prone to division. See, sin not only produces shame, but it separates us – from God and from others. Sin creates division in families.

- We can see that in Adam and Eve. They sinned and then experienced tremendous conflict and division in their marriage after they sinned as they started pointing fingers at each other, trying to blame each other for the mess they were in before God. We are so quick to turn on each other, aren't we?
- Here's the good news. In Genesis 3:21, grace entered the picture. God didn't treat Adam and Eve as their sins deserved. God came to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 and gave them clothes of skin to wear.
 - Have you noticed that before? They didn't make clothing. They didn't even know what to do. In his grace, God gave them what they needed. He killed the animals, He skinned the animals, He tailored the clothes, and He covered their nakedness.
 - He covered not only their sin by shedding blood in the Garden, but He also covered their shame and made a way for them to be right with God and to come together again as a family. His grace is so wonderful. He loves us so very much, even when we mess up. Sin divides us, but grace restores.
- And, we are all certainly capable of messing up. We are all capable of sinning against God. We are all tempted to blame someone else for our wrong choices. We are all capable of selling out even those in our family in order to save ourselves.
 - And when we do, there can be division in our family. What we need is forgiveness to flow in our families. What we need is a fresh start to be possible in our families. What we need is grace.
 - As Christian families, we need to make sure we make it easy for our family members to have a do-over. We need to make sure that grace abounds in our home so that we model the grace of God to the world.
 - As I Corinthians 13 says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." We need to love generously. We need to forgive often. We need to stop blaming each other for what has gone wrong in our families and ask ourselves what we can do to help fix it.
 - Not one of us is part of a perfect family. What could we do to help create an environment where grace abounds?
- So, on this third Sunday of the year, when your weight loss goals, your work goals, your financial goals, your educational goals and whatever other goals you have been considering for 2017 maybe have already been abandoned, I want to challenge you to not abandon this one.
 - Focus on your family in perhaps a more intentional way than ever. Look to Christ to be the authority for your family. Purpose to live out your faith in order to keep your family anchored to the Holy Spirit. Decide to do your part to help maintain unity in your home through forgiveness and grace. It is never too late.
 - Will you join me in making these "Family Commitments" for 2017? Let's not treat our families the way I treated the piano. Let's commit and have the best, God honoring families.