

# THE CHRISTIAN HOME IN A MODERN WORLD

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6:3–9;  
Matthew 19:3–9;  
Luke 2:40–52;  
24:28–32;  
Ephesians 6:1–9;  
2 Timothy 1:3–5;  
3:14–15

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deut. 6:6–7)

## Daily Bible Readings

Daily Bible Readings			
<b>M</b>	Apr. 20	Prov. 24:1–6	By Wisdom a House Is Built
<b>T</b>	Apr. 21	Luke 2:40–52	Growing in Divine and Human Favor
<b>W</b>	Apr. 22	Eph. 5:21–33	Submit to One Another
<b>Th</b>	Apr. 23	Josh. 24:15–21	Choose Whom You Will Serve
<b>F</b>	Apr. 24	Josh. 24:22–28	We Will Serve the Lord
<b>Sa</b>	Apr. 25	Matt. 19:3–9	An Inseparable Union

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

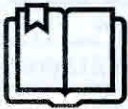
It was a video seen round the world: The Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore tumbling into the water on March 26, 2024. The disaster occurred when a massive container ship lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's pillars, sending people and vehicles into the cold Patapsco River. Six members of a road construction crew were killed in the accident.

The chilling video showed the bridge quickly collapsing, moments after a vessel named *Dali* collided with one of its pillars. *Dali* is an enormous ship, 984 feet long, which is approximately the length of three football fields. Lights on the ship flashed off and on before the accident, suggesting that an electrical problem caused the crew to lose control of the vessel.

According to CNN, the Key Bridge was 1.6 miles long and a critical link in the Baltimore Beltway, a travel route for 30,000 commuters per day. In addition, it soared over a channel which gave ships access to Baltimore, the ninth biggest port in the country for international cargo. The collapse deposited tons of steel and concrete into the water, suspending commercial shipping for weeks. Without its pillar, the bridge could not stand.

In the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses describes God as the strongest pillar of our faith: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Deut. 6:4). He then says, “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut. 6:6–7).

*God of Israel, you are the pillar of our faith. Help us to respect you by keeping your commandments and teaching them to our children. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6:3–9; Matthew 19:3–9

**6:3** Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

<sup>4</sup>“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup>Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup>and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**19:3** Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” <sup>4</sup>He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ <sup>5</sup>and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup>So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” <sup>7</sup>They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” <sup>8</sup>He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup>And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

*Note:* Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

## LOVE THE LORD, THE ONE TRUE GOD

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (Deut. 6:4). Notice that Moses says, *Hear, O Israel*. Particularly important is the verb “hear,” in Hebrew, *shema*. Hearing is critical to the life of faith, even more important than seeing, as the apostle Paul noted when he said, “faith comes from what is heard” (Rom. 10:17). We are challenged to *hear* that the “LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” When the word “LORD” is written in all caps, it is a code for the personal name for Israel’s God: YHWH (pronounced “Yahweh”). Since this name is regarded by many Jews as being too sacred to be pronounced, the word “Lord” is said whenever YHWH appears. It is YHWH, the personal God of Israel, who forms the pillar of our faith.

The “LORD is our God,” says Moses. He is calling us to trust in the almighty power who loves us and desires that we experience fullness of life. Moses predicts that if the Israelites observe the commandments of God, it will “go well” with them, and they will multiply greatly (Deut. 6:3).<sup>1</sup> Decrees and commandments are given for our benefit, to structure our lives in life-giving ways. Just as driving over a bridge would be dangerous without guardrails, our lives would become chaotic without the ordering of God’s laws. Commandments are meant to be helpful, not oppressive.

Moses then gives the commandment to *love the LORD*. This is a bold new approach, one that becomes central to both Judaism and Christianity. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might,” says Moses (Deut. 6:5). Jesus later referenced this verse as the first part of his Great Commandment (Mark 12:29–30). With this commandment comes the challenge of giving priority to God, much in the way that we give priority to the people we love: Spouses, children, relatives, friends, close neighbors. Love is a much stronger bond and obligation than respect, duty, or affection. It is “the first and greatest commandment,” says Bible professor Elizabeth Achtemeier; “it forms the central requirement given in Deuteronomy’s sermons to the people of God.”<sup>2</sup> Love should be at the core of family life, both in our homes and in our congregations.

1. Elizabeth Achtemeier, “Plumbing the Riches: Deuteronomy for the Preacher,” *Interpretation* 41, no. 3, July 1987, 274.



**What practical steps can you take to build your life around love for the Lord?**

## THE DANGER OF IDOLATRY

There are many idols in the modern world, and they can enter our Christian homes. All are counterfeit gods, but still, we fall in love with them. “In Washington, the idol of power draws politicians and their supporters away from compromise,” writes pastor Henry Brinton in *USA Today*. “On Wall Street, success tempts brokers and investors to value profits over people. In Hollywood, the focus on beauty creates a standard of physical perfection that is impossible for most people to achieve. In neighborhoods across the country, children are pampered in ways that border on idolatry, leaving them with a distorted sense of their place in the world.” These are attractive pillars, no doubt about it, and all of them promise us great rewards. But they do not provide the eternal support of the LORD our God.

Several twenty-first century television shows have illustrated what happens when love for God is replaced by another passion. In *House of Cards*, conniving politician Frank Underwood loved power above all else. He schemed his way through Washington and all the way to the White House. In *Mad Men*, advertising man Don Draper loved success, believing that “success comes from standing out, not fitting in.” Unfortunately, his “standing out” did terrible damage to his family members, friends, and colleagues. In the show *Breaking Bad*, chemistry teacher Walter White claimed that he loved his family. After being diagnosed with cancer, he built a drug empire on the belief that he needed to provide for his wife and children. Even a good thing such as love for family can cause death and destruction if it replaces love for God. At one point, Walt’s wife remarked that someone has to protect this family from the man who protects this family.

Moses reminds us that the “LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” and he gives us the challenge to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4–5). He knows that what we love will drive our actions. If we allow idols to take the place of the one LORD God, we will find ourselves without the strong support we need for life. If we love anything more than God, we will find ourselves failing in spectacular fashion.

 Where do you see counterfeit gods in Christian homes today, and how can they be resisted?

## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

**S**o, how do we maintain our love for God? In Deuteronomy, Moses urges the people to keep his words in their hearts, recite them to their children, and talk about them both inside and outside their homes. Fix “them as an emblem on your forehead,” he says, “and write them on the doorposts of your house” (Deut. 6:8–9). In Judaism, these instructions are followed in the wearing of phylacteries, small leather containers which contain biblical texts, and the nailing of a mezuzah to a doorway. By doing this, God’s law is remembered in every aspect of life.

Very few Christians today wear phylacteries or hang mezuzahs. But in our homes and congregations, we can follow Moses by teaching our children the Ten Commandments, as well as Jesus’ Great Commandment. This particular commandment is a set of twin pillars, constructed by Jesus when he quoted Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19. “The first is,” said Jesus, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God’ . . . The second is this; ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mark 12:29–31). Love for God. Love for neighbor. According to Jesus, there is no commandment greater than these.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the teaching of Jesus about divorce is difficult, and it is especially hard to hear if you are a person who has experienced divorce. But when Jesus says, “what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:6), he is trying to protect the women and children who suffered so terribly from divorce in his day. At that time, it was relatively easy for a man to divorce his wife and cast her aside. Jesus says that Moses allowed divorce because people “were so hard-hearted” (Matt. 19:8), but he did not endorse it as desirable. Instead, Jesus wanted to honor marriage and preserve families whenever possible, so that parents could share the commandments of God with their children.

Today, Jesus wants us to focus on our love for God, instead of making an idol out of power or success. And when our children become fixated on the latest toy or device, he wants us to teach them about loving God and loving neighbor. This is a love that can shape society.

 **How do you focus on love for God and neighbor in your family life?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Shaping an environment for raising children in faith, Deuteronomy (“second law”) opens with the Israelites encamped just east of the land of promise. The book establishes the formal covenant relationship between God and the Israelites by way of Moses’s farewell address, in which he instructed Israel on their appropriate behavior within the land. Modern scholarship dates Deuteronomy to the seventh century BCE as part of Josiah’s reform (see 2 Kgs. 22). Moses promises long life in the land to those who keep the commandments, statutes, and ordinances.
2. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, in an exposition of the first commandment, enjoins us to teach our children how to be faithful to God. Faith and its virtues can be taught—or caught!—morning, noon, and night through ordinary, everyday experiences. Robert Cole’s *The Moral Intelligence of Children* asserts that building our children’s character requires imaginative conversation about moral choices and their consequences. Tertullian (c. 155 to c. 240 CE) said, “Christians are made, not born” (Apol., xviii). The gospel can, and must, be taught and learned. Parents and other trusted adults have primary responsibility in this endeavor. (See also 2 Tim. 1:3-5; 3:14-15.)
3. Matthew employs the
4. text of the Pharisees’ testing Jesus as a way to validate his church as a true interpreter of Jewish Torah and practice, thereby reducing tensions between the two.
5. Jesus counters Moses’s allowing men to divorce their wives with the Creation texts that lend equitable value to men and women/husbands and wives. For a majority of women in that culture, survival depended upon being a member of a household. A woman, perhaps with children, without a husband, could be exposed to great risk. Jesus speaks of a man committing adultery against a woman (and not against her father or previous husband), thereby implying that adultery involves more than violating the property rights of another man. It concerns accountability to a partner.