Full sermon script: Inspiring faith that lasts.

Aim:

To explore:

- What it looks like to be marinated in the word of God
- How we can pass on faith to the next generation, particularly encouraging parents to become more intentional in this
- Some of the reasons why we need to pass on our faith to the next generation

Each section has a brief overview in blue and a number of illustrations and practical discussions in red.

Scripture reference:

Deuteronomy chapter 11 – this could be read in its entirety during the introduction or pick out verses as they are appropriate.

Introduction

Context

The purpose of the introduction is to provide an understanding of the context of Deuteronomy and particularly the final words Moses spoke to the Israelites, as they were about to step out into the Promised Land. He makes it clear that there will be lots of changes as they enter the new land. One significant issue is how they would pass on their knowledge and experience of God's faithfulness and provision to the next generation, who had not encountered it for themselves.

People's final words can give real insight…

Here are some illustrations from famous people…

John Wesley – Grasping the hands of those who loved him, he repeatedly told them farewell. At the end, when nearly all his strength had gone, his reported last words were 'The best of all is, God is with us.'

Sir Isaac Newton - "I don't know what I may seem to the world. But as to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself now and then in finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than the ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Spike Milligan - "I told you I was ill."

Deuteronomy is Moses' final word to the Israelites after leading them for 40 years. Deuteronomy means 'repeated Law' and contains three speeches given by Moses, probably in the last week of his life.'

The great Moses was about to leave his people as they entered this new stage of life.

He had:

- Freed them from captivity, challenging the super power of the day
- Led them through the Red Sea
- Encountered God on Mount Sinai and received the 10 Commandments
- Led them through the wilderness, where they witnessed multiple miracles

Moses give this speech as the people were living between the two realities of:

- Looking back – to how they had been rescued from slavery in Egypt
- Looking forward – to the Promised Land that awaited.

They were stood on the plains of Moab as Moses spoke, literally standing between their past (Egypt) and their future (Promised Land). They were on the cusp of a new season!

Illustration: It's a bit like the TV programme 'Location, location, location' which shows how people feel as they move from one place to the next.

What would it have been like for Moses and the Israelites to appear on that kind of a TV show?

The Israelites had spent 40 years in the wilderness, on the verge of a new homeland. Imagine how they felt as they heard Moses give this speech. Probably a mixture of excitement at what lay ahead, but also perhaps fear and anxiety as their great leader would soon be gone.

Changes in the new season.
Moses makes it clear that things are going to change…

1. **They would no longer be nomadic but would be able to settle in the Promised Land.**
   A land which was 'flowing with milk and honey' Deuteronomy 11:9.
   It would signal a whole new way of relating to God. They would no longer be dependent upon heavenly manna but would have to cultivate the field.

2. **The Promised Land would be better than Egypt**.
   It would be 'a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from Heaven' Deuteronomy 11:11.
   In Egypt they'd needed to use foot pumps to irrigate the field. It had taken hard labour to get water out of a river. But in the new land, God's eyes would be over it. The yoke would be easy. It would be naturally irrigated. The people could rest in the provision of God.

3. **The Promised Land would have different challenges**
   'Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them' Deuteronomy 11:16
   The people of Canaan worshipped various idols but the Israelites would need to stay true to worshipping God alone and not be enticed by these.

It's in this context, as the people enter this new land, that Moses' speeches are so significant. He was helping the people to understand what it would mean to be God's people in this new season of life.

4. **But there was one major issue!**

   Unlike their parents, the younger generation had not seen firsthand, all that God had done and provided.

Deuteronomy 11:2-7
Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the Lord your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the Lord brought lasting ruin on them. It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the wilderness until you arrived at this place, and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the Lord has done.

Illustration –It's a bit like communicating to a child what the world was like before mobile phones and Google or trying to describe the thrill of a rollercoaster to someone when they have not actually experienced it for themselves.

So, with this major issue in mind, Moses gives the commands in Deuteronomy 11: 18-21, which we will unpack today. (They are also repeated in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 because they are so important!)

Deuteronomy 11:18-21 18
Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

As the Israelites looked to the future, they probably felt a whole range of emotions and thoughts about what lay ahead. We also can look to the future with both excitement and a sense of trepidation. We live in uncertain times…

The Israelites were told to pass on the stories and the Laws of God to the next generation, which would help them to know the true character of God and put their trust in him.

This is a real challenge for us today. If we want our children to experience God for themselves, we need to show and tell them what we have witnessed God doing in our lives.
The Israelites were moving into an area with many idols. We also live in a society saturated with many idols. If we want to help the next generation not to be enticed by these idols, we need to pass on our experiences of God to them, so that they can find their identity in him and put their trust in him.

Research shows that at present, only around 50% of children brought up in Christian homes still follow the faith as adults.

But we want to change that.

Although there are no guarantees that our children will continue to have faith as adults, these verses contain some ancient wisdom that might help us all, as the Church, to change that statistic.

It takes a village.

But this is not just for parents!

Although, it's clear that this command is for parents, it's also true for the whole Israelite community. In Luke 2:43, 100s of years later, we read of Jesus getting left behind in Jerusalem by his parents when they had gone back to Nazareth. Although that could look like the ultimate in bad parenting, it actually shows that the Israelites shared a real sense of community where they would look out for one another. Jesus' parents presumed Jesus was just with the group.

In our world today, where grandparents and relatives often live in different areas, and many parents live busy lives, there is a need more than ever to support parents in helping them with their children. We can all have a part to play in raising this next generation to have their own personal faith in Jesus.

The challenge is thinking about which parents and carers can you intentionally encourage and support as they nurture their children's faith? This can be through both prayer and practical support.

Point 1: The Marination

Notes: The aim of this point is to help people to think about how in order to pass faith on it is important that we marinate (soak) our self in scripture. Deuteronomy 11:8 talks about the importance of meditating on scriptures and setting up practical, visible reminders, which will show the next generation how important scripture is.

Illustration: Discuss how delicious food can be when marinated in the correct herbs and spices. It soaks in and becomes the flavor.

'Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads' Deuteronomy 11:18.

a) What are 'these words'?

The words Moses is referring to are to:

'Love the Lord your God and keep his requirement, his decrees, his laws and his commands always' Deuteronomy 11:1.

The Israelites had a covenant with God and their side of this covenant was to keep the Law, which was there to keep them holy and 'set apart'.

However, even though we can read in Deuteronomy 9-10, that time and time again they had been rebellious and failed to keep God's Laws, God, by his grace, had brought them to the border of the Promised Land.

It is in these chapters, that we see the character of God - his holiness but also his grace and it's in these 'words' that we discover what he is like and why he can be loved.

The challenge in verse 1 begins by 'loving' God.

Today, we live under a New Covenant. We don't need to earn God's favour by keeping his commands, but we respond to the love of God, expressed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, by saying thank you with our lives.

The danger is we can think of the Christian faith as lots of legalistic laws to follow and to teach our children. But really, the Christian faith is living in response to God's love for us. Love and obedience go hand in hand.

The challenge we all have, if we want to help pass on the Christian faith to the next generation, is to show them how we respond to God's love for us and demonstrate our love for him in the way that we live our lives.

Illustration: You might like to give a personal example here and how it has impacted the way you live.

b) Being practical.

Moses provides the Israelites with a practical idea for showing the next generation all that God had done.

- Tie them down - *'tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads'* Deuteronomy 11:18.

This is the ancient Hebrew practice of literally wearing scripture through a phylactery (a small square leather box holding inscriptions of the commandments) on their head and arms.

But the essence here is that Moses is challenging us to get practical. It's about making scripture visible. Not, just in our minds and our hearts but in our homes and lives.

So what might that look like to you?

- Maybe displaying Bible verses in our homes
- Starting the day reflecting on a passage of Scripture
- Listening to worship songs as we carry out every day routines, like making the kids packed lunch.

Illustration: Billy Graham wrote, "Wherever I am in the world, whether it be here or at home or in a hotel or at someone's house, I place my open Bible where I will see it frequently. Whenever I notice it, I stop and read a verse or two or a chapter or two or even for an hour or two. This is not for sermon preparation or study. This is just for my spiritual nourishment - my food."

The secret is finding out what that likes for us, so that we can vbe marinated in God's word.

Point 2: The EVERYDAY

Notes: The second point, drawing upon vs 19-20, is that Moses does not direct the teaching of children to specialists but encourages us all to share about God in the day to day.

Illustration: Talk about the mannerisms children pick up - a turn of phrase, an expression, how they mimic being on the phone like daddy etc. What are some of the mannerisms that we pick up from our parents? Think about the phrase "I have become just like my mother/ father"!

v19 *Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates…*

a) Who is Moses asking to teach the children?

Moses is not speaking specifically to the priests but to the Israelite people at large.

We live in a culture where we often delegate to professionals. For example, if kids want to learn dance, sport or a certain skill, we often enroll them in a class. The danger is that we do the same with helping our kids explore the Christian faith. We send them to Sunday school or on a kid's camp because we believe that children's workers are the experts. But, although Sunday school and kids camps are great, research shows that the biggest influence on children's lives is their home life.

b) When?

Moses makes it very clear that it's not just about special moments or certain festivals but about the everyday of life… when you're sat at home, walking to play group, getting ready for bed or getting up in the morning. Perhaps, too often, we have made Sunday morning the only place when we can encounter God and go deeper with him. Jesus models what it's like to teach in the everyday. When he was with his disciples, he often taught as he was fishing, climbing a mountain, sharing a meal or encountering strangers.

c) How?

So, how do we teach our children in the everyday of life?
The biggest challenge from this verse is the importance of being intentional, of realising that we have so many 'God-given' opportunities to share our faith in Jesus with our kids.

Illustration: To show that faith is often communicated best, when we do things together in life, rather than just hearing what is taught in a classroom.

Use two volunteers. Ask one of them to lie on the floor on their back. The other person has to instruct them to stand on their feet, using step by step instructions e.g. put your right hand forward, bring your left knee up. The person lying down can only do what they are told. This is really difficult. Then, ask the person giving directions to do it again, but this time they must lie on the floor next to them and talk through what they are doing as they stand to their feet. This tends to be much simpler!

A really practical idea is to give the congregation some examples of the ways they can include God in each of the 4 different scenerios Moses talks about. You may even want to give people the oppportunity to talk in small groups for a few minutes and think about some ideas they would use.

1. **Sit at Home**

- Making grace part of meal times
- Weekly 'prayer and share' activity based around a bible story whilst you eat pancakes
- Unpack themes that are explored on TV programmes
- Explore difficult questions that are raised on the News and share our practical response, as Christians, to world issues
- Over the dinner table ask 'How did you see God at work today?'
- Baking or cooking a meal to take to another family in need or just because we want to share God's love as a family
- Demonstrating hospitatality by inviting others into our home

2. **Walk along**

- As we explore the outdoors, give thanks for the seasons, the trees and the vegetation
- Model generosity when people are collecting for charity
- Discuss issues raised with littering, homelessness and graffiti
- Share our testimony and what we are learning about God at this time

3. **Book ends - morning and bed time**

The morning routine can be a mad rush to leave the house and the evenings can be a
battle to get the kids to sleep. However, these moments can also be an opportunity to
create family rituals /traditions, such as:

- Breakfast or bedtime prayer times
- Bible reading or story telling
- Reflection on the day through discussing a high and low moment of the day
- Family game time, with opportunities to encourage each other and discuss fair play

4. **Door posts - transition**

This is referring to a Jewish practice, of placing small boxes of Scripture outside the home. But doorposts also carries the general sense of transition in life, as we walk through doorways. A good idea would be to think of ways that we could mark seasons, festivals, birthdays and school terms by teaching about God's provision and presence at different stages of life.

Ways to mark this could be:

- To give our kids a new (age appropriate) Bible or devotional at each new phase of life or gather together a group of people who have a spiritual influence on your children so that they can encourage your child as part of the celebrations.

Point 3: The PROMISE

Notes: The final point is about reminding people of the promises of God. We don't just do these things because we are told to but because we want the next generation to make good choices and know their Father in heaven both now and for all eternity.

Illustration: What are you passionate about? Is it football, camping, music, reading, cooking? Who was it that taught you to love what you love today? For example, who took you to your first football game? Who bought you your first sleeping bag?

As someone shared their passion with you, you now have that passion yourself. When we share our love for God, that passion goes on for another generation.

v21 *so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.*

Moses' command is followed by a promise. The Israelites are told that if they held onto God's words and passed them on to the next generation, then they would live in the 'Promised Land' indefinitely.

The final words Jesus speaks to his disciples in Matthew 28:17-20 are also a command followed by a promise. He commands them to introduce people to God's ways and share his teaching and he also follows this with the promise "Surely I will be with you to the very end of the age" Matthew 28:20.

We don't travel to a physical place to experience God or know His presence. Because of Jesus and his death and resurrection we have a reality today that stretches into eternity – our 'Promised Land' is fullness in Christ - the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

Illustration: You might like to get the congregation to shout out some of the promises of God that are found in Scripture.

Even when we follow this God-inspired teaching from Moses, it does not always mean everything will be rosy. The Israelites had some difficult times as they took the Promised Land and the disciples faced a range of troubles and persecution following Jesus.

When we invest in the faith of our children, there is no certainty that they will share our passion for God. They will have to make their own choices. But by investing in them, we set them up with the best opportunity of knowing Christ. And we can be sure that God is with us, he will never leave us and will always help us.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Notes: To conclude, we want to remind the congregation again of both the importance of marinating in Scripture and intentionally sharing our faith with the next generation.

The Israelites settled in the Promised Land but over time, the words they had been commanded to cherish, got laid aside. Their children were not told of the greatness of God and in the centuries that followed, the Israelites were taken from their land. Today, we have the opportunity to follow the command to share our faith with the next generation. As we look forward with excitement and trepidation, let's keep these two questions at the forefront…

How will I marinate myself in the words of God?

How can I intentionally look to share my faith with the next generation in the everyday of life?

We'll end with this story:

Illustration: A Native American and his friend were walking on Times Square in New York City when the streets were busy, noisy, and filled with people. The sounds of the city were almost deafening. Suddenly, the Native American said, "I hear a cricket." His friend said, "What? You must be crazy. You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all of this noise!" "No, I'm sure of it," the Native American said, "I heard a cricket." "That's just crazy," said the friend.

The Native American listened carefully for a moment, and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches, and sure enough, he located a small cricket. In utter amazement, the friend said, "That's incredible! You must have superhuman ears." "No," said the Native American. "My ears are no different from yours. It just depends on what you're listening for." The friend replied, "There is just no way. I could never hear a cricket in this noise." But the Native American simply replied, "It depends on what is really important to you. Here, let me show you."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the sidewalk. Even with all the noise of the crowded street blaring in their ears, nearly every person within twenty feet noticed the sound of the coins and turned to look and see if the money that hit the pavement was theirs. "See what I mean?" said the Native American. "It all just depends on what's important to you."

As Christians, we need to have our lives tuned into God so that in turn, we can help our children discern his voice and the promises that he has for their lives.