

Text: Psalm 78:1-8 (Pew Bible pg.579)

Title: “Faith Sings ... To the Next Generation”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles with me to Psalm 78. I’m returning to our study of the Psalms, a series I’ve entitled “Faith Songs.” There are songs that we sing to our children. Faith must sing to the next generation. Read vv.1-8.

ILLUSTRATION – So our faith must be passed on to our kids. It is like passing the baton in a relay race. It’s a lot harder than it looks. You have a span of track in which the exchange takes place. If it doesn’t happen there, or if the baton is dropped, the team can lose the race, or be disqualified.

And this very issue was burning in the heart of a man by the name of Asaph. We have been introduced to Asaph in our study of the Psalms. He is the composer of many of the psalms. He has seen a pattern in history. He has seen that there were certain generations that failed miserably as the people of God. And he doesn’t want to see that happen to the generation that will follow him.

You see the urgency in his words: **“O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.”**

This is urgent and critical. It has to do with the future and with the future generations. We live in a culture filled with false hopes and false religions. These constantly compete for our souls, and particularly for the souls of our youth. The world knows that if you win the youth, you win the generations to follow.

So this is urgent. When Asaph says “listen to the words of my mouth,” it literally means, “Incline your ears ... stretch your ears to hear my words.” Asaph is dead serious.

ILLUSTRATION – When a child is conceived and born there is some very important information that is passed automatically from the mother and the father to the baby in the womb. That information comes in the form of DNA. And that DNA shapes the development of the child, not just in the womb, but for the rest of their lives ... their gender, the color of their hair, the shape of their face and their body, perhaps even their temperament.

But there is other very important information that needs to be passed from one generation to the next. It does not happen automatically. As parents we don’t have any control over what physical traits are passed to our kids. But we do have control over the spiritual DNA that is passed to our kids. And if the right information, this spiritual DNA, isn’t passed to the next generation, it will negatively affect their development.

So something has to be told to someone. Let me just ask a few questions along that line to help us see the truth of Scripture:

1. WHO MUST BE TOLD?

The psalm answers that for us.

Psalm 78:2 (NIV) - I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—

Psalm 78:3-4a (NIV) - what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation...

Psalm 78:6 - so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

Who must be told this important information? The children of the next generation must be told ... boys and girls, young people, students. They are the ones who will one day occupy the places that adults occupy today.

ILLUSTRATION – The generation of young people today are called by researchers “Millennials.” They are those born between 1980 and 2000 ... roughly thirty year olds down to ten year olds. There are 78 million Millennials ... America's largest generation yet. Christian researchers like Thom Rainer have given us some valuable insights into this generation, particularly the older part of the Millennials, the 20-somethings. They are about to start having children. How have we done?

The research reveals some encouraging values. Millennials place a high premium on family. When asked, "What is really important to you?" 61 percent placed "family" at the top of the list, far ahead of their friends.

They retain close relationships with their parents. Maybe too close. Parents of Millennials have been dubbed "Helicopter Parents" for their tendency to hover over their grown children's lives, sometimes paying their bills and taking other responsibilities that the son or daughter should shoulder themselves. Ninety-four percent of Millennials say they have respect for older generations. They also have a high view of marriage. Of those surveyed, 86 percent plan to marry once or not at all.

When it comes to religion, the picture is not encouraging. Only 13 percent of Millennials consider any type of religion or spirituality to be important in their lives. Core Christian doctrines, such as salvation in Christ alone, fare poorly. When it comes to the afterlife, the most popular view is that no one can really know what happens after death.

As they began their research, Rainer feared they'd discover that Millennials were opposed to Christianity. What they found, however, was worse: they're actually indifferent to it. Generally they don't even have the Christian faith on their radar screen.

However, Millennials who do embrace the Christ and the life of following Him, are radically committed to it, and are aware that they are swimming upstream against their prevailing culture.

What does this tell us? It tells us that this coming generation of older children, teens and young adults are at risk. So this important information must be told to them. There's another question:

2. WHO MUST TELL THEM?

Again, the answer is here in the psalm.

Psalm 78:4 (NIV) - We will not hide them from their children, we will tell the next generation...

This word is addressed to us as parents and grandparents concerning our children and grandchildren. But it is also addressed to the church, to the covenant community of God's people.

Notice it says, "We will not hide them from *their* children." Obviously passing this spiritual DNA on to children is primarily the responsibility of parents. But it's also the responsibility of the entire church. The children in our church really are "our children." We all share the responsibility to tell the next generation about the Lord.

When it says, "we will not hide this from the children" it really means, "we will not keep this back from them ... we will not refuse them this information."

This is exactly what the Lord commanded His people through Moses:

Deuteronomy 4:9 - Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

And specifically, in the NT, fathers are given the responsibility of leading this transfer of spiritual DNA to their children.

Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

It's not that mothers aren't a vital part of the process. Much of the hands-on spiritual nurturing is done by moms. If we fail at this ... if we hide the revelation of God from our children, we do them a grave injustice.

Here's the next question:

3. WHAT MUST BE TOLD?

We must tell them what God has done and what God has said.

ILLUSTRATION – I had the privilege of attending the Fort Worth Christian Prayer Breakfast last week. The keynote speaker was Brad McCoy, who is the father Colt McCoy, former Texas Longhorn quarterback and now quarterback for the Cleveland Browns. Brad is a football coach and

Colt is an amazing Christian young man, on the field and off. Brad shared the philosophy that he and his wife held to as they raised their three sons: “Prepare the child for the path, not the path for the child.”

Note: Many parents make the mistake of trying to prepare the path for their children. They become like the Helicopter Parents I mentioned earlier. They hover over the path trying to remove anything that might make it hard for their kids. Don’t do that. Now obviously when they are very small you have to hover over them so they won’t get hurt. But with each year of their growth we need to do that less and less.

How do you prepare children and young people for the path? You give them the equipment they need and the knowledge they need to handle anything that comes along the path. The equipment comes in the form of information.

Psalm 78:4 (NIV) - We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

The first thing is...

THE WORKS OF GOD MUST BE TOLD

Specifically, we’re talking about three things here:

“praiseworthy deeds” = things God has done in history that show His glory

“power” = things that God has done in history that reveal His power

“wonders” = things that God has done that are almost too marvelous to describe ... things that fill us with awe and wonder

Listen, do our kids and grandkids see in us the awe and wonder of Almighty God? The works of God are communicated to others when they see us stand in awestruck wonder of who God is and what He has done. Do they see and hear it in our worship before them and in our witness to them?

How do you do this?

- Talk to them about God’s mighty deeds recorded in the Bible.
- Share with them about men and women whom God has used mightily throughout Christian history. When our girls were little we gave them an autograph book ... not for celebrities, but for heroes in the faith ... missionaries and great Christian leaders.
- Share with them personal stories of how God has worked in your life. Tell them how Christ saved you. When I am preparing to do a funeral for a family, if I helping the children of a deceased parent I will often ask them when their parent was saved. I’m thrilled when they say, “O Dad told us that story over and over.” I’m saddened when they say, “Well, Mom never really talked about that.” It’s never too late.

- We have a great story to tell as a church. This is our 100th anniversary celebration year. We're going to retell the stories of how faithful God has been to us and how our church has remained strong because each generation took God and His promises seriously.

What are we conveying to the future generations? We are conveying the great and wonderful works of our God.

THE WORDS OF GOD MUST BE TOLD.

Psalm 78:5 (NIV) - He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,

God did two things:

“decreed statutes” = God established principles for living in His Word.

“established the law” = the “law” is the Hebrew word Torah. It is the Book of the Law, the Ten Commandments, the authoritative instruction of the Lord.

Then God commanded that what He has decreed and established is to be taught. Parents and church, that's the command of the Lord for us.

Prepare your kids for the path. They need the God-given compass of the Scripture in their minds and in their hearts to keep them from going astray.

Now there's one remaining question:

4. WHY MUST THEY BE TOLD?

The next three verses give us the crucial reasons why this information must be given to the coming generations.

SO THEY WILL KNOW THE LORD

Psalm 78:6 (NIV) - so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

Notice the long-range vision here. We cannot merely think about what is good for us ... what we like. Many of us are too short-sighted. This command requires a long-range plan, and deep love for future generations that will cause us to sacrifice.

Church, I want us to have a knowledge of who God is and what He has done that is so strong that it presses into the lives of our kids so powerfully that they cannot shake it off when they're teenagers and college students and young adults. And it will be so strong that they pass it to their children.

SO THEY WILL TRUST THE LORD

Psalm 78:7 (NIV) - Then they would put their trust in God...

That is, that they would put their hope in God. Knowledge should lead one to hope. What we teach into their heads should ultimately shape their hearts to hope in God.

And this should be our overwhelming hope for our children ... that they would learn to trust in God. We can hope that they will get real smart and go to a great university, we can hope that they would become great athletes, or that they might get a great job and make lots of money, and that's all fine and good.

But if we have not instilled in them the importance of trusting in God and putting Him first in their lives, then we have failed them. Children learn to trust God from people who trust God. You cannot lead your children somewhere you are not going yourself. So show your children what it means to live by faith and follow God with a passion.

SO THEY WILL OBEY THE LORD

Psalm 78:7 (NIV) - Then they would ... not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

So you see it starts with what they know in their heads, then it makes it down to their hearts where they trust God. Ultimately it will move to their will and to their actions. They obey God.

What a great mission statement for every home and for every children's ministry and youth ministry ... to raise up children who know God, who trust God and who obey God. Students, what a great life mission statement for you as well.

Now there's a negative motivation here. Generations in the past have failed.

Psalm 78:8 (NIV) - They would not be like their forefathers— a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

Avoid this at all cost! Go home today and read the rest of Psalm 78. See how various generations failed at fully following God. I don't want to be part of a generation like that. I want to be part of a generation like follows God fully and hands off that commitment to the next generation.

ILLUSTRATION - Charles Spurgeon was a great British preacher of another generation. He and a friend were walking up a road one evening. Looking up the hill ahead of them they saw a lamplighter. In those days the streets were lit with lamps that had to be lit each evening. This was done by someone called "the lamplighter." Spurgeon and his friend were watching the lamplighter moving up the hill, lighting light after light until he disappeared over the crest of the hill. Turning to his friend Spurgeon said, "I hope my life will be just like that. I should like to think that when I've gone over the brow of the hill I shall leave lights shining behind me."