

So The Next Generation Will Know

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Date: 12 July 2023

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[0 : 00] Let me pray. Let's ask God for his help. Father, praise you that you do not keep silent. You are a God who speaks.

We thank you that you have revealed yourself to us. So Father, as we meditate and ponder on your words this morning, we pray that we will take them to heart. We pray that these are words that you would put inside of us, these are internalized inside of us so that we might live as you want us to live, that we might be your people who will indeed praise and adore and behold you and let you be known to others.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Nick Baum had a great idea. A Google engineer, he had an 82-year-old father and no kids.

But what if one day he had kids but no more father? How would they know him? And then he remembered. He had built a program called Dear Robot, which sent him a daily text message asking him how his day was going.

But what if his father got a message once a week asking him just one question, any question, about his life? What were your favorite toys growing up?

[1 : 22] What things mattered most to you? What do you wish you'd done differently? So that's what he set up. And soon he had an entire book's worth of anecdotes, memories and advice from his dad he could pass on to his children.

In fact, he began to realize that others might appreciate something like this too. So he founded StoryWorth, a service that does what he did for his father and prints them in a beautifully bound book as a gift to the family.

In this way, a father could leave behind a lasting legacy for his children and dear children. What about you?

What would you like to leave behind? How would you like to leave a mark on the generations that will come after you? Well, this morning, those are the kind of questions our passage today will address.

Today we're looking at Psalm 78, which are words that a guy called SF has left behind for us. And Psalm 78 as a whole is a psalm that's all about looking back to the past for the benefit of the present.

[2 : 40] It's a recounting of how God's people failed in the past so that we will not repeat their failures. And today we'll be looking in particular at the first eight verses, although we will refer to the rest of the psalm here and there.

For the first eight verses really set the scene for the entire psalm. And these verses are there to show us what steps we can take to leave behind a lasting legacy.

So here's the first step. Listen to the story. Listen to the story. Verse 1. More literally, the psalmist says, Incline your ear.

Pay attention. You see, today in the 21st century, we can listen to an unprecedented number of voices telling us how to leave our mark.

You could go on any number of social media platforms and learn about how a particular parenting style, whether that's positive parenting or attachment parenting and many others besides, how those kind of styles will set up your children for life.

[4 : 08] Or you can hear tons of YouTube gurus telling you how to get your financial affairs in order so that you can leave behind a substantial material legacy for others to enjoy.

There are many articles published about how to keep young people in the church and transform them into history makers. And those voices aren't all bad.

Some of them can be quite helpful. But amidst all those voices, what does the psalmist ask us to pay the most attention to?

The answer, verse 1, is to listen to his teaching. What kind of teaching is it? Well, he tells us, verse 2, Now, I wonder if that strikes you as a little strange.

After all, when we hear the word parable, what comes to mind? Usually it's little short stories, often making a comparison of some sort as they point out some link between that story and your life now.

[5 : 30] We think of Jesus talking about seeds and soil, about wedding banquets and guests, rich men and poor men.

But look at what the psalmist goes on to talk about in the rest of Psalm 78. He speaks of past incidents during the Exodus years, especially in the wilderness.

Let me just give you an example. Let me read from verse 12. Verse 12. He, that is God, did miracles in the sight of their ancestors, in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zorn.

He divided the sea and led them through. He made the water stand up like a wall. He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. He split the rocks in the wilderness and gave them water as abundant as the seas.

He brought streams out of a rocky crack and made water flow down like rivers. But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the wilderness against the Most High.

[6 : 36] They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they crave. They spoke against God. They said, Can God really spread a table in the wilderness?

True. He struck the rock and waters gushed out. Streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people?

When the Lord heard them, he was furious. His fire broke out against Jacob and his wrath rose against Israel. For they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens. He rained down manna for the people to eat. He gave them the grain of heaven.

And it continues on in this vein. Now, that is not exactly what we think of as a parable, is it? It's simply ancient history.

[7 : 32] As the psalmist himself says, verse 2 again, these things are from, of, of, of. So at least it's half right. But let's think again.

After all, what is a parable? It is a story with meaning. And what are parables meant to do? To those who are truly willing to listen?

To those who are teachable? They reveal what is hidden. The psalmist says as much in verse 2. And often, parables raise a riddle, causing us to puzzle over them.

And Israel's history had two fundamental riddles. Now, here's the first one. How is it that God's people keep getting things wrong?

Time and time and time again. In spite of God's goodness. After all, look a little closer.

[8 : 42] And you will soon notice a common pattern to all those historical episodes recorded in this psalm. First off, they usually mention God performing some marvelous act of deliverance.

I think you heard that just now, didn't you, in those verses. But after that, they major on Israel's rebellion and testing. And then, finally, they talk about God having to bring about his wrath and judgment, which is usually when Israel finally comes back to their senses and cry out to him.

So, that's the riddle. How is it that we are so prone to wander away when we have a God who loves us and saves us and provides for us and wants the best for us?

How is it that we are often faithless, rebellious, traitorous? Well, that pattern isn't just Israel's story. That's our story. But thankfully, that is only part of the story. Because here is the second riddle.

[10 : 04] How is it that God remains good to us time and time and time again in spite of our wonderings?

You see, yes, in verses 9 to 32 and verses 41 to 64, we're told story of the story of Israel's unfaithfulness. But right in the center of this psalm, quite literally, we find these words.

Look with me at verse 35. They remembered that God was their rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.

Their hearts were not loyal to him. They were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful, he forgave them their iniquities and did not destroy them.

Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

[11 : 14] And so Israel's history is indeed a parable. For they reveal a riddle, a paradox that though we are faithless, God remains faithful.

You see? That's the gospel. It is the story of how God meets our unfaithfulness with his faithfulness. It is the story of God not giving up on us in spite of us constantly turning our backs on him. It is the story of his grace and his mercy and his patience. In verse 5, we are reminded that God decreed statutes and established the law.

That must be a reference at the very least to the Ten Commandments. But how do the Ten Commandments start? Not with Exodus 20 verse 3, you shall have no other gods before me, but with verse 1.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Our story is a story of redemption.

[12 : 32] How much more do we know that story? Because we know Jesus. And that is the story we bear testimony to. That is the story that has become our legacy and that is the story the psalmist asks us to keep listening to, to immerse ourselves in.

But why? Quite simple, I think. We can't pass down what we don't know. We can't pass down what we don't have.

And we can't pass down what we've forgotten. that's why we need to be reminded. If you have a little child, you know you have to constantly remind them about just about everything.

Don't forget to brush your teeth. Don't forget to pack your school bag. So, as another pastor once said, when it comes to needing reminders, we are all children.

and as we are reminded of the story, we are being shaped anew. We remember whose family we belong to, our heavenly fathers.

[13 : 49] We remember on what basis we are accepted, not how we perform, but through Christ's death alone. We remember our purpose, to give glory to the one who rescued us.

And if this amazing story is really our story, if it is true, we are motivated not to let that story be lost. We'll be thoroughly invested to pass it on. So, here's a question for us today. How's our listening? Perhaps today we felt like we've become over-familiar with the story, and so we neglect it.

And when we neglect it, we forget. My son nowadays often asks me questions about details of this Bible story or that Bible story, and sometimes I find that quite challenging because often I realize that stories that I thought I knew well, I can't recall.

And I'm the pastor. So, how's your grasp of the details of the gospel? Can you explain the meaning and benefits of Christ's justification?

[15 : 13] Can you show how Jesus' death and resurrection secures the renewal of all creation? Let's listen well to have something to pass on.

So, that's the first step. Listen to the story. But what's the second step to leaving behind a gospel legacy? Again, it's quite simple.

Secondly, tell the story. Tell the story. That's what the psalmist says we should do. Verse 4. Indeed, I wonder if you've noticed the emphasis on telling throughout these verses.

In verses 1 and 2, that's what the psalmist does as he opens his mouth. In verse 3, it's what has been done to him as his ancestors told him and his generation.

In verse 5, he notes the command of the Lord to teach the gospel to our children, who will, verse 6, tell their children in turn.

[16 : 37] And so, the psalmist has at least four generations in view here. You see, when you tell the story of the gospel, you are engaging in something that will last.

you are doing something with the potential to make a generational impact. God has spoken, verse 5, he has laid down his decrees and statutes, and because he has spoken, we now speak.

We put forth plainly and clearly the gospel. gospel. But if we do not, the gospel will be lost.

Now, that doesn't always happen all at once. Often, it is also a three or four generation process, and it usually happens like this.

You can see it on the screen. It's also on your handout. one, the gospel is accepted, that's the first generation. Then, the gospel is assumed by the next generation.

[17 : 49] Then, the gospel is confused. And finally, the gospel is lost. And the critical point is that point when the gospel is assumed.

that is, often, the slide starts not when people stop believing the gospel, but when people stop telling the gospel.

It is when the church assumes, hey, you know, we're all Christians here, right? Of course, everyone knows the gospel. We have a very sound statement of faith, which everyone says that they agree with.

We have high levels of attendance on a Sunday. We have lots of participation in Bible studies and other activities. And so, what happens is, we can assume the gospel, and it slowly fades into the background.

We hear cause to discipleship, but no reminder that Jesus is our Savior King. We hear fervent prayers about the sin that is out there in society, but never prayers of repentance over our own sin.

[19 : 05] Oh, yes, at this point, the gospel is still belief, but it is not told. It is not rehearsed. And before we know it, it is not heard by the next generation.

Instead, they think that the gospel or Christianity is about practicing a certain lifestyle, or imitating a certain culture, or using certain religious phrases.

And you see, because the gospel is assumed, the gospel becomes confused, and then it will be lost. And that's certainly a very real danger for us here in Sarawak.

We often take pride in the fact that we're the most Christian state in Malaysia. But are we properly stewarding what we have?

So that's why the psalmist reminds us, tell the gospel. For grammar nerds out there, the phrase we will tell in the Hebrew is actually in the participle, which means it is not a one-off, but a continual retelling.

[20 : 22] We keep telling the story. from one generation to another, the way families or close friends like to tell their favorite memories.

Who should do the telling? According to Psalm 78, that's the ancestors, the forefathers. And without a doubt, that includes parents.

They have primary responsibility. parents, amidst all the chaos of family life, it is your job to pass on the gospel to your children.

That's what scripture tells us. It is not primarily to invest in the academic success of your kids, or to give them the very best coaching of whatever their hobby is, or to provide for their material well-being to the absolute fullness.

Now, these are not bad things in themselves, but they are not ultimate things. Instead, look at some of these verses that are about to be flashed up on the screen.

[21 : 37] Pay attention to what we're meant to actively do. Train up a child in the way he should go. Even when he is old, he will not depart from it. Next verse.

And then next verse again. Teach them, that is God's word, 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. So, my fellow parents, I know it's hard.

But these are things that we cannot outsource, not even to our Sunday school teachers, or youth leaders, or even dare I say it, to youth devotional material, as if simply handing your teenagers one will resolve everything.

There is no room for completely hands-off parenting for followers of Christ. We might not want to overly smother and obsess over our kids, but we must be thoughtful and intentional.

[22 : 51] So today, what can you do? It's the simple things. If you're watching a TV show together, take time to discuss some of its themes and whether they match up with God's word or not.

Puzzle over a difficult Bible story together. You don't have to have all the answers, but together you could discuss what the Bible author could mean or not mean.

Celebrate a moment when God showed his grace to you and share it with your child if appropriate. Whatever it takes to leave behind a legacy that will last.

do you know? But although parents have primary responsibility, and this is very important to get here this well, they don't have exclusive responsibility.

Because look again at verse 1. Who is this psalm directed to? The psalmist says it's to my people. It is to the whole community of faith.

[24 : 03] It is to every Christian. And so all of us are meant to, directly or indirectly, pass on the gospel to the next generation.

There's an African proverb that says it takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes a church to raise a Christian. Let me share with you one finding from sociological research.

it's known as the five-to-one ratio. Now, according to one study, if a teenager has five adult Christians other than their parents who chooses to invest in them, whether in big or small ways, they are more likely to stick with their faith and with the church.

In other words, if there are five non-parent adults whom they felt that they could approach, maybe because they have a question or two about their faith and they just need someone to process it with, or maybe because they're having some hard time over some situation and they need some advice on how to honour God in that, or something along those lines, well, that would, humanly speaking, help them in their faith journey.

so, never think that we don't have any role to play in passing the gospel to the next generation just because we might not have kids or be officially involved with Sunday school or youth ministry.

[25 : 39] even taking an interest in our kids and our teenagers later on, right after service, is a good and godly thing to do. Now, of course, I know that we also need to create a safe environment and all that just to make sure that we don't expose our kids to people with bad intentions, but taking that into account, let's not be afraid to talk about explicitly faith matters with our young ones here at church.

We'll ask them what God has been teaching them recently. Listen to what struggles they might be facing. Indeed, testimony after testimony from researchers show that when you do that, you help our young ones feel like they have a place here, they are valued.

As a teenager who grew up in this church, I certainly valued the interactions with some of the uncles and the aunts who showed me what it means to follow Jesus.

And let's also think about what we are modelling. For example, if our kids notice that week after week, the conversation of the church during coffee time is about anything and everything except what has just happened or been spoken about in the hour before, now, wouldn't that be weird? Wouldn't that communicate something about what we really think about God's word or even the gospel? So think about what our example is teaching them about Jesus.

[27 : 19] And teach them to serve. Invite them to help out in serving Jesus. Now, I know that some of our young ones who in recent ones have started to serve and help out in our various ministries, being a librarian, an usher, projectionist.

That's great. And as you invite them, remind them why they are serving. It's not for the sake of getting a few extra merit points.

It is because Jesus is the Lord who has rescued us. So, listen to the story. Tell the story.

But why? What is our ultimate aim? Well, that's the title of our sermon today. It's so that the next generation will know God for themselves.

That's what verse 6 says. We don't tell simply because, culturally speaking, we want to be identified as members of this particular religion rather than some other religion.

[28 : 29] We don't tell because we hope that we hope that we will somehow keep our kids out of trouble or that they will adopt a moral code that we're comfortable with. We tell because we want the next generation and the generation after that to know God.

We don't just want them to know about God. Now, that forms part of it because, obviously, you can't know someone without knowing about them. But we want the next generation to experience the joy of knowing the one who knows them best, who loves them more than anyone else, who can give them life to the fullest.

We want them to know God in such a way, verse 7, that they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds.

Now, that is the kind of knowing we want for our next generation. Not simply to know so-called Christian values, but to know Christ himself. Now, I like how one youth ministry lecturer puts it. Education in the secular world, he says, is often about building self-confidence. But the aim of Christian education, he says, is about building God confidence.

[29 : 44] confidence. And so, we want to give them the gospel in such a way that when they've gotten a bad grade at school, or they're being shunned by their friends for whatever reason, or they're not being invited to that social gathering, or when they're being pressured to do something, they know that they can go to the Lord Jesus directly.

They can lay their burdens down at his feet, and they can say, Jesus, I know you are still for me, and I'm for you. We want them to know and trust God.

And we want them, verse 7 again, to be someone who keeps his commands. Now, let's be clear what we are not talking about. We're not talking about wanting them to be good boys and girls at church, and then someone different once they're out of sight of all the church uncles and aunts. We're not talking about wanting them to do all the right things externally, like getting an A on their Bible knowledge exam, or playing the guitar up here on Sundays, or their hearts are dead to God. Rather, we want them to be those who recognize that they were dead in their sin, but now they have been made alive in Christ, and now they are equipped to live for him all of their days.

[31 : 08] And of course, that is something none of us can create in another person. And again, that is why we tell the gospel.

We can help someone be nice, but only God can help someone be made new. And he does it through the gospel.

And there is one more reason we tell the gospel. It is because of the alternative. Look what happens when the gospel is not passed down, verse 8. A stubborn and rebellious generation is born, one whose hearts are not loyal to God, whose spirits are not faithful to him.

You see, there is no neutral zone. If Psalm 78 does not happen, this is the outcome. We can see a stark example of this in Judges 2.

Now, prior to the book of Judges, I can take it off the screen first, we have the story of Joshua, who led the people into the promised land. And by the end of the book of Joshua, they declared that they and their households will serve the Lord.

[32 : 22] But let's pick up the story from Judges 2, verse 10, on the screen. After that, after that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them that aroused the Lord's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Well, that is the sobering truth. When we fail to tell the gospel to the next generation, we are in effect hiding it from them to use the language of verse 4 again.

We are hiding the most precious possession that we have from the very ones who will one day take our place.

And we could do this in all sorts of ways. When we emphasize morality or activity, that is what we should do, at the expense of theology, that is who God is, we are in effect hiding the gospel.

[33 : 48] Or, when the next generation sees the gospel making no practical difference in our lives, we are in effect hiding the gospel.

gospel. And that is a pathway to verse 8. And if I may speak a little more personally here, well, these eight verses function as a kind of ministry motto for me.

Now, I don't know when God is going to call an end to my time here at this church. Hopefully, it's a long way away. But my big hope is that when that time comes, I can say that the ministry here has at the very least caused us to never tire of hearing of the story of the gospel, and has equipped us to tell the gospel to the next generation, so that decades after I die, BEMKEC will still be standing as a testimony to the Lord Jesus for many more generations.

It is the desire of my heart that we never assume the gospel. But before I end, I'm aware that perhaps there's one more thing I need to address.

As I talk about telling the gospel to the generations to come, the truth is, I know very well in our congregation, there are those for whom this message could be painful.

[35 : 22] Perhaps today you are someone with adult children who are not following the Lord for whatever reason. Perhaps it's your fault.

You know that you didn't do what you should have done, and you have regrets. Perhaps it isn't. You tried to teach and train, but you just didn't have the hope for outcome.

There are no guarantees. Proverbs 22 verse 6 isn't a promise. And even today, sometimes perhaps some of you still live in denial because it's the only way you can cope with the knowledge that you have wayward children.

But I just want to speak to you now to bring before you the encouragement of Psalm 78. And the first thing I want to say is don't forget God is familiar with our repeated failures.

That's what Psalm 78 is all about. God is completely unsurprised by them. But Psalm 78 does not end on the note of failure. Instead, in verses 65 to 72, that's the end of the psalm, there is a new beginning.

[36 : 36] There is a turning point. In verses 68 to 69, he tells Israel, I have not given up. Instead, I have chosen Judah. And out of Judah, I'm going to bring King David.

And he is going to be like a shepherd to you. And that's exactly what God did, not just by bringing King David, but a greater Davidic king, Jesus himself, who offers everlasting hope amidst our failures.

Now, God doesn't promise that your children will necessarily come back, I can't say that, but he does promise that in Christ, he will be your healing balm through that painful experience.

And then, don't forget, Psalm 78 reminds us not to give up. The story is not over yet.

There is still time to tell the gospel to the next generation, including even those who have gone astray for now. There is still time for a new chapter to be written.

[37 : 43] but what we must do is not to hide the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord from the next generation. We must with wisdom and gentleness and discernment tell and live out the gospel.

Wherever we are today, we must grasp that this is the single biggest legacy we can leave behind. This is the story worth investing everything in.

Let's ask God to make that our resolve today. Heavenly Father, we come before you and we plead before you that you'll be doing a great work in us this morning.

we confess to you where we have gone astray, where we have not always listened to you, we have not heard your teaching, we have gone wandering away.

But Father, thank you that you never give up on us. And so Father, will you help us to take to heart what you have just told us, that we, whether we are parents or not, but as a church, that we will resolve not to hide the gospel, but to tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

[39 : 12] Pray for those who are maybe struggling, knowing that there are those in their family whom they love, who are presently away from you. I pray, Lord, that you would be of comfort to them, but you would also help them, Lord, to remain faithful to you, even amidst that pain, and trust you with their children and to keep praying for their children and not to give up.

So, Father, help us to put our trust in you, help us not to forget your deeds, help us to keep your commands. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen.