

PSALM 78: 1-8

We Will Tell The Next Generation!

1. The praiseworthy deed of the Lord
2. So they can tell their children

Dear proclaimers of the Good News,

One Easter, a woman invited her mother and grandmother over for Easter dinner. She served a perfectly baked ham, hot from the oven. When she took the ham out of the roaster, her husband looked at it and asked a simple question, "Dear, why did you cut the ends off the ham before you cooked it?" She thought for a moment and said, "I don't know. I learned that from my mother. She always cut the ends off the ham before she baked it!" So the husband asked his mother-in-law the same question. She answered, "I really do not know. That's how my mother always baked her ham and it always came out just right." So the husband asked grandma the same question. And grandma said, "I cut off the ends because my roasting pan was always too short for a whole ham."

Families value their traditions, even if they do not always work or make sense. Those things which we learn from our parents are highly treasured. Do you realize what powerful teachers we are? What our children learn from us is important in their minds and hearts. On the other hand what our children do not learn from us is often disregarded as unimportant.

What is the most important thing we can hand down to the next generation? If there was just one thing we would impress on them, what would it be? There is only one answer to that question. We would tell them about Jesus. We would teach them about our God. It is with firm resolve that the psalmist speaks for us in our reading: We will tell the next generation!

Tell them the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. Who taught you about Jesus? Did you discover Him on your own? Not many would answer that question with a yes. A lot of things we can learn by ourselves, or by trial and error. Fixing cars is something you can learn by trial and error. You tinker around and around until it fits back together and everything works. It takes time and effort, but eventually you learn what you are doing. However, we can't discover God's plan of salvation by ourselves.

Those who discover their religion on their own only end up deceiving themselves. Our natural religion is one of work-righteousness. We can make things right with that supreme being out there by being good or offering gifts or sacrifices. Basically every religion in the world comes down to that, except Christianity. Sadly, even some so-called Christian churches have made Christianity a work-righteous religion. Such a religion only leaves us burdened and condemned because it is not possible to save ourselves. Nor is it possible to discover how we can be saved. That is why the psalmist calls them "hidden things."

So how did you learn about Jesus? Most of us learned the way the psalmist learned. We learned from our mother and father. Or perhaps from a spouse. Or a pastor or teacher. They taught us the accounts and the Holy Spirit created the faith in our hearts to believe them and to apply them to our lives. Remember Moses? His mother made sure that while she cared for her son in the house of Pharaoh's daughter, he grew up to learn about the God of Israel. Those lessons of childhood were not lost on Moses, even though he grew up in a heathen household and was educated in heathen schools. Remember Joshua? He learned much from his mentor

Moses, and boldly declared, ***“But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”*** (***Joshua 24:14***). Then there was Timothy. His father evidently was not a believer, but his mother and his grandmother faithfully instructed him (2 Timothy 1:5).

What did they learn? What did you learn? Most of us know more than we think about the “praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.” Can you tell the story of how Jesus died? Can you also tell why He died? You apply this story to yourself every day when you confess your sins to God and ask Him to forgive you “because Jesus died for us.”

Can you tell the story of Jesus’ resurrection? Can you tell what this means to you? Perhaps you have comforted someone with the reminder that because Jesus lives, their loved one is in heaven, alive and well, awaiting their physical body which will rise again on Judgment Day. You may be a better teacher than you think! You know what the basics of what the Bible teaches. You understand the saving work that God has done for you. You know how to apply these truths to your life.

Then why are we not doing more as parents, grandparents, or other adults to teach our children these important truths? We can’t brag about the statistics in our church when it comes to teaching our faith at home. Consider how many of our homes don’t hold family devotions. How many of our people don’t read their Bibles on a regular basis? How many children and young people have fallen away from God for lack of interest?

We hear all the usual excuses. We use all the usual excuses. No one eats supper together anymore. No time. My parents never had devotions. That’s the church’s job or the school’s job. I don’t know how. I’m uncomfortable. Those excuses don’t cut it with God. They won’t work if it is said of our children that they ***“neither knew the LORD nor what He had done for Israel?”*** (***Judges 2:10***).

The Gospel is most often lost from one generation to the next simply because it is neglected. The devil and the world have applied pressure on us not to talk about spiritual things. Jesus’ name has become a taboo in our public schools, in print, and elsewhere. Remember that our Old Adam hates God and all that belongs to God. If we don’t feel comfortable praying with our family or teaching them a Bible story, it is because our sinful nature is uncomfortable. When was the last time your children heard you say Jesus’ name outside of church? What happens more often in your home, sitting down to watch a movie together, or having a family devotion? See what I mean? If we neglect it, our children won’t pick it up either.

We know the peace and joy of a loving Savior. A new generation can treasure the same Savior. When we return to the rich promises of God’s Word, we can find the strength to share Jesus with our children. Perhaps we remember the promises that we learned as a child. Maybe we can call to mind what Jesus said on the cross, “Father, forgive them...” Or maybe we remember our favorite passage, like “Though your sins be as scarlet...” or “...in all things God works for the good of those that love Him...” How thankful we are that someone taught us to turn to the Gospel! That someone made us memorize those passages. That someone told those familiar accounts over and over.

Because we are confident of God’s forgiveness, because we know the praiseworthy and saving acts of our God, and because we are thankful, we will join the psalmist in the resolution he expresses in this Psalm. We will tell our children! In fact, we will tell them so well that they will in turn be able to tell their children.

Why? Because unbelief is only a generation away. Consider the frightening example in the time of the judges in Israel. Joshua knew the Lord and made a bold confession to God’s people. After he and his generation were gone, another generation grew up which did not know

the Lord. How about the horrifying example of Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, the first people. God's promise of a savior was lost immediately! Then Noah. The world had just been destroyed because of the wickedness and unbelief of the people in it. And it didn't take long for the world to become that way again.

How can it happen so quickly? Whatever our ethnic background, how was our native ethnic language lost so quickly? One generation was fluent, but did not teach it to their children. The next generation understood it, but could not teach it to their children. The third generation does not know it at all unless they learn it from someone else.

Did your parents teach you about Jesus at home? Did they teach you well enough so that you can teach your children? According to statistics, the vast majority of you did not come from homes where God's Word was taught regularly. Are we the middle generation? Is the next generation doomed to grow up without Jesus at all?

Many farms have been in the family for generations. It is every farmer's dream to pass on the farm to his children and grandchildren. If I were such a farmer, I would not dream of passing the family farm on to my children with the buildings falling down, the machinery in disrepair, and the mortgage only half paid. I would be setting up the next generations, my children and grandchildren, for failure. Children who do not know how to read the Bible, who have never experienced a devotion in the family home, who are embarrassed about praying out loud, or who have learned to go to church once in a while, have inherited a spiritual house in poor repair.

If you grew up in a home where you did not have family prayers or family devotions, you are not doomed to repeat the sins of your parents. With God's help, we can do it better in our generation. Our God is a God who does not change - but who is very skillful and powerful at changing us. Today he will begin a change in your family.

"He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands." Our goal is to teach our children so well that they will know how to teach their children! I will not just tell them to read their Bibles, I will show them how. I will not just tell them to say their prayers, I will pray with them. I will teach them how to pray. I will not just tell them to have personal and family devotions, I will do it with them and show them how. I will not expect them to learn God's truths, I will be in Bible study learning and reviewing along with them.

Our Sunday school, our Christian Day school are tools to help us accomplish that goal. Many of the lessons have take home sheets for the parents to review and discuss the Bible stories and do other activities to reinforce the truths learned. Every Sunday in the bulletin, I put the Sunday school lesson along with a few questions to ask your children, to help you help them. While the children are in Sunday School learning, are you learning in Bible study? The catechis students have questions and passages to take home, do you work and review with them?

"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." If I have but one thing to leave to my children, and to my children's children, let it be this. Amen.