

NEXT: The Gospel and the Next Generation

The Gospel and the Next Generation

Dr. David Platt

May 8, 2011



The Gospel and the Next Generation Psalm 78

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I'm going to invite you to open with me to Psalm 78. We are going to dive in there in just a second, though we had not planned it. In light of switching things around last week and postponing the start of this series on The Gospel and the Next Generation until this week. I don't think it's coincidence that we find ourselves on Mother's Day diving into this topic; the reality I know in my own life of a mom who maybe more than just about anybody else has in my life exemplified the servanthood of Christ and she has literally laid down her life for her three sons and one daughter. One of the main reasons we are walking with Christ now is a result of her service. That's basically what we're going to look at over the next nine or so weeks is how can we as a faith family—whether men or women, moms or dads, husbands or wives, singles or senior adults—how can we all selflessly lay down our lives for the spread of the gospel in the next generation.

I want to invite Scott Kindig to join me up here at the start to set the stage for this whole thing. Scott and I have been praying and working through a variety of things in the context of the church, in the context of this series leading into this and I want you to know how thankful I am for this brother on so many different levels. There are times where I kind of pinch myself when I realize that he is one of the pastors in our midst. I want to ask you—us as a faith family—to be praying for him and his wife Kim and their family. They came at the very end of last year and have been in the process for the last six months of trying to sell their house in Metro, Atlanta. That process is still ongoing, as is the case for a lot of people trying to sell houses and that sort of thing. But I want us, as a church, to really press in and pray for them. This is a picture right now, without going into details, for only if God comes through and does that which would confound reason could this house sell at this point right now. So I want us to pray toward that end.

I want to invite Scott to help us set the stage. You've got the top of your notes there. We have just read Psalm 78, which is a charge to the people of God to pass the gospel on to coming generations. So I want to ask Scott to help us to picture the situation. Scott, we've been charged to make the gospel known from generation to generation. How are we doing in our context in passing the gospel from generation to generation?

The Situation...

Scott Kindig: Thanks, David. Well historically, the church has done a really good job passing faith from generation to generation. It's been almost assumed for decades that when those of us who are born again and we have kids that we would effectively pass the gospel to them. That assumption has been true up until recent times. For those of us who grew up and are thankful for the fact that it was passed on to us, Dr.

Thom Rainer has done some research that has been compiled in a book called *The Bridger Generation* to us compare where we used to be with that assumption to where it is now. With that assumption, we used to hope that not only would we pass the faith to our own children in our home, a sort of biological version of passing the faith to the next generation that we would reach out and grab a hold of a few of their friends and a few of their families and we'd actually increase the percentage of the penetration of the population for the gospel. But in his book, Dr. Rainer, gives us a picture—this is in your notes, you can see this—that if we look at the most recent four generations we get a measurement of how the gospel is doing through us to the next generation.

Percentage of People who Profess to be Born Again Christians who Have Trusted in Christ Alone for Salvation:

65% of those who are 65 years old, or older, in our nation have trusted Christ alone for salvation. Now, that's pretty good news, at least for the 65% who have trusted Christ for salvation, that's very good news; for the 35%, not so much.

But, when you move to the next generation, the next youngest generation, one of things that we discover is something that I hope is a little bit alarming to us, is that we move from 46 to 64 year olds, when you move down to the next stage group. We go from 65% of the people professing faith in Christ to 35% of people professing faith in Christ. Now if 65% was good – 35% is not good. That's not what we want to see happen.

If you move to the next generation below them, the 34 to 45 year olds in our nation, what you see again, is not good. We move from the previous generation having 35% identification with the gospel to 15%. Now, that is really not good. That's definitely in the not good category. So, if we move one generation younger, we go to 16 to 33 year olds, Dr. Rainer's research points us to the fact that we only have 4% of 16 to 33 year olds who are embracing and engaged with the gospel. That's definitely not good.

David: You know for a variety of reasons, I'm always hesitant with statistics. You never know what somebody could write down, "have you confessed faith in Christ", and this was the language, "professed to be born again Christians who trust in Christ alone for salvation", but if those numbers are anywhere close to reality, then there's a very serious picture before us when it comes to passing the gospel from generation... We are basically losing an entire generation in that picture. Even—so this next statistic—among those who are part of the church, involved in church, picture there.

Scott: Okay, well Life Way has a dropout study, and in that dropout study one of the things they discovered of those students that we do have engaged with the gospel when they graduate from high school, 70% of those disappear from church influence sometime over the next four years. Though they may return at some point in the future that's still a pretty bleak picture that we are not only ineffectively passing our faith from generation to generation, but we also are not producing fruit that remains—people who are staying with and advancing the gospel through their college years.

Percentage of High School Students who Attend Church and then Leave the Church within 4 Years of Graduation: 70%

David: So, the percentage of high school students who attend church now then leave the church within four years of graduation is 70%, not 17%, but 70%. So out of 10 students involved in the church in high school, seven out of 10 of them within those first four years after graduation will leave the church. Some of them will come back,

you mentioned that. Hence, the reason why we need to look very seriously at what the Word of God says about passing the gospel on from generation to generation.

So what's the solution? This is one of those areas where Scott and I have been praying, working alongside of one another and want to be crystal clear on what is not the answer. And so we have a few things listed there that are not the answer. First: new methods are not the answer. Scott, elaborate on that for us.

The Solution...

What is Not the Answer

Scott: New methods are not the answer. I've been in student ministry for 25 years prior to coming to Brook Hills about six months ago in the next generation disciple-making pastor capacity. In those 25 years, we were part of a church context where we have looked fervently and frantically to and fro over the whole earth to find the "magic bullet" for reaching the next generation. As a result of that, a ton of fads and trends have come in and moved on through in those 25 years of experience in student ministry. We've watched them come and we've watched them go. Short-term results—no long-term results—then we move on to the next fad, the next trend.

If you look back, some of you remember these. We've been Sunday school driven. We've been purpose driven. We've been program driven. We've been event driven. We've been personality driven. We've even been pizza driven. Unfortunately, if methodology was the key to passing our faith effectively to the next generation, we probably would have accomplished that by now. David, what I'm afraid of is our reliance on methods to reach students has replaced our dependence on the power of the gospel through God's people to the next generation to be the primary thing that creates revival and awakening in our midst.

David: Alright, you've started to preach now. So, let's move on to new methods, all right so it's not new methods. Also not more programs, elaborate on that one for us.

Scott: In our modern context, we have better curriculum than we've ever had before. We have more and higher quality camps, conferences, events, and training, than ever before. We have more professionals who have seminary level training in pre-school ministry, student ministry, children's ministry. And we have more qualified teams who have been trained more efficiently and effectively than any other generation, until recently. We've also spent and invested more budget in reaching the next generation across churches in North America. But the statistics tell us that all those things are not producing the outcomes that we would like.

To complicate it even further, we're also living in the midst of the second baby boom, which means there are more students to be reached, more children to be reached, more families to be reached than we've experienced before, and we're still getting declining statistics. At some point we're going to wake up and we're going to recognize that we're about as effective as a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that just isn't there. Methodology leads us to futility. We have to invest in the things that matter.

David: Okay, so not more methods, not new programs. What about cooler personalities, are they the answer?

Scott: Well, David, if that was the answer and you and I were to take a good look at each other...

David: We'd have things covered. Right?

Scott: Pretty much, we'd be knocked out. Absolutely, there's so much cool up here on the stage right now, I'm not sure the room can hold it any more.

David: Yes. Yes. If you would put more gel in your hair, then I think we could...

Scott: I'll do that when you wear skinny jeans.

David: Not a chance. Not a chance. I'm not wearing skinny jeans.

Scott: Well, the truth is, right now all over Birmingham, because of the cool vortex that's right here, right now, students are involuntarily waking up all over the community and they're going to be drawn into the magnetic pull of our cool factor. Somebody notify the parking people they're on the way. Just tell 'em.

David: Yes, and our mini vans out there, they're the coolest.

Scott: Yeah, if nothing else gets it, our mini vans that we drive definitely will do it. In all honesty, we've tried cool. Don't you agree? I mean, we've tried cool and it's produced futility as well. So I don't think cool factor is exactly going to get us there – as much cool factor as there is.

What is the Answer...

David: Of course. So, if the answer's not having the coolest youth children's ministers, best programs, most new cutting edge methods, then what is the answer? And this is where I want us to see over the coming weeks a three-fold answer. One, the Word must be foundational.

Now that seems obvious, but this is where, I think, if we're not careful we totally miss it. Because if we say we need to have the coolest environment with the best activities and the sharpest people leading those activities, we put all that together, then children and students will like it and they'll bring their friends. If we bank our hope there, then we miss the point from the start.

The reality is, the most effective way to pass the gospel on to the next to generation is not a cool environment with good activities and sharp people. The best way to pass the gospel on to the next generation is to be Biblical men and Biblical women and Biblical husbands and Biblical wives and Biblical moms, Biblical dads, Biblical singles. That's where we're going to be diving into in the days to come. The Word obviously is foundational, but also the core of the Word—the gospel—is foundational.

Scott: Well, David, it's actually a little bit comforting to the church that methods haven't been the solution. To be quite honest, methods aren't the problem and they're not the solution. The fact that there's not a magic formula—there's not a secret formula of the right combination of methods and programs and personalities to make this work—points to the fact that the real solution will work and can work and for us, here's what we want to take place. We want the gospel to empower whatever methods

we use instead of buying into the false idea that our methods empower the gospel to get its work done. Does that make sense?

David: Word foundational, second, the family must be strong. We're going to talk about this in depth in a minute and a good bit over the next few weeks. Obviously, the stronger our marriages are, the stronger our parents are—by strong I mean healthy, Christ-exalting, God-centered marriages and parenting—the more effective we are going to be in passing the gospel on to the next generation.

Then, the church must be accountable. Meaning, and this is part of what we're about to dive into but I want to show you today, that apart from anyone or anything else in the world, we as the Church are accountable for passing the gospel on to the next generation. So, this is where, Scott, you have been working on basically identifying and developing a Next Generation Disciple-Making staff to basically lead the way in how we can pass the gospel to the next generation. I know they're here this morning, so I want to invite you to introduce them to us so we know who they are.

Scott: Very good. They are here. They're amongst us. I want to introduce them to you and to do that appropriately and properly what I'd love for us to do as a congregation, if you wouldn't mind, just stand up for just a minute while we introduce them to you. This is the Next Generation Disciple-Making staff right here. This is it.

David: Give it up for the next generation – you are them!

Scott: Those of you, you just got railroaded in church. This is you. Here's the truth, what we've discussed up to this point, points to the fact that when we look for temporary answers to eternal problems and we look for methods and personalities and programs and we keep doing that over and over again, we're asking God for small results. I'm tired of asking God for small results.

But here's what can happen. If this force, this army of people, with God's instructions goes into the community today to connect with families with pre-school, children, students, whether you have them or not, and to love them into the kingdom, let the gospel be seen through them—show the Word, share the Word, teach the Word, serve the world—when you do all that, we are no longer asking God for small things. We actually are asking God for a great awakening that extends to the nations through the next generation. That's what we're asking for.

When we move corporately God has bigger things in mind for us and it can't be relegated to a few people who are on a staff who show up on a web site. It has to be demonstrated by the family of faith, the people of God. Every single one of us in this room—inter-generationally from the oldest person to the youngest person, every college, single, young adult, every family that has a variety of different shapes—it is our responsibility before God. If we take that assignment seriously, great awakening awaits and I look forward to that. Let's ask God for that in our church and in churches all over our nation. God Bless you guys.

David: Amen. Thanks staff, you can be seated. And thank you, Scott.

This is the picture. It's the picture I want to set the stage with today in Psalm 78. At the top of your notes there are still a few things that I want us to cover. The tough thing is we missed last week and so we're kind of getting caught up. But, there are some foundational realities I want to put on the table that really cover the whole of

scripture that will help us understand some of the specific texts we're going to look at like Psalm 78 and others in the days to come. I want us to think about something before we even dive into Psalm 78. We're going to think for a little bit about the relationship between the Word and the family and the church because there is a lot of confusion when it comes to how those three components work together.

You've got some situations where across the church we just kind of disregard the Word. We put the Word to the side and we do whatever it takes to draw in the most people and we don't trust the Word to do that work. Well, obviously we know that's not our business, but we're going to cling to the Word and the Word will be foundational. That's why we're walking through what we're going to walk through over the next nine or so weeks.

But then when it comes to the family and the church, there's a lot of confusion here. When it comes to our church culture we've got kind of opposite poles that we have wandered between when it comes to our church culture. If you're new to the church, you may not have seen this as much. You've seen this, not just here at Brook Hills, but in a variety of different contexts.

You've got a variety of pictures of the church that have so exalted the church to the exclusion of the family, or ignored the family. Basically, we want children to know Christ so we're going to staff, organize, strategize and create programs. Parents, just come drop your kids off at the door. We don't want you trying this at home. We're going to handle this. And basically, moms and dads all over the place have abdicated their responsibility for the spiritual instruction of their children to programs in the church. And you have a dearth; you have a major void when it comes to moms and dads pouring the gospel and the Word of God into their children. They have just expected others to do that instead; many have no thought of what family worship would look like. What it would look like to have systematic teaching of the word in a home? So that's a problem. That's not good. Church exalted to the exclusion of the family.

But then on the other hand you kind of swing the pendulum and you have another picture that says family is most important; family is primary. This is the responsibility of moms and dads and so church, if you could just stay out of this, we'll take care of this. We don't need any kind of pre-school, children, or student ministry. We can do this. Families are doing this. It will work if moms and dads are doing this, and that's all we need. We don't need the church doing this or that.

And so again, it's reacting to some things that need to be reacted to. But what I want to show you today is that this approach also misses the point. Instead, what we see when we look at the whole scripture, is that there are clear differences in the design of God between the family and the church. Understanding the differences between what family is and what God has designed for the family and what the church is and what God has designed for the church helps us understand how they work together for the spread of the gospel to the next generation.

And so what you've got there in your notes under "Word, Family, Church." I want us to think together about a few important realities; some are going to seem really basic but they're crucial for understanding the journey we are about to go on in the Word in the next few weeks, especially when it comes to the relationship between the family and the church.

So, here are a few essential realities. First, the family includes non-Christians, but the church includes only Christians. That seems obvious, but it's extremely significant. I've tried to be as intentional as I could with those words. The Word is foundational. It's the foundation of everything. Families must be strong and the church must be accountable. The reason I use the word "accountable" is because the church is ultimately who God holds accountable for the spread of the gospel to continuing generations. The church is accountable in a way that's different from the family because the reality is, you have families that are made up of non-Christians. Non-Christian moms, non-Christian dads, and non-Christian kids. There's a responsibility that's on the church. In the church you have only Christians. There are such things, even in the design of God, there are such things as non-Christian families. There are no such things as non-Christian churches.

This is important for a few different reasons. It's important to realize the difference here especially when it comes to Old Testament passages such like, Psalm 78 and Deuteronomy 6, which we're going to look at in a few weeks. The reality is, Israelite conception of family placed huge priority on physical lineage. On moms, dads, sons, daughters. That was the primary unit and it actually expanded to where you had other relatives living in the same context very close to one another. What you have in the Old Testament and it's good. You have this picture of passing the gospel on from mom and dad to son and daughter, from mom and dad to son and daughter. You see that and the reality is you became a part of the people of Israel, primarily through what? Through birth. You were born into the people of Israel. Now we find out later in the New Testament not all Israel was true Israel. Faith was obviously huge in that picture—to be a part of the true people of God. But the reality is you were born into the family of Israel; you were born into the people of Israel.

There's a significant difference when you cross into the pages of the New Testament and you realize that no one is born into the church. You were "born again" into the Church. Irrespective of what your family dynamics look like. Whether you are married or unmarried, whether you have kids or not, you are born again into the people of God, into the Church and in being born again you may actually lose your family.

Isn't that what Jesus said? Jesus said in Matthew 10, "*For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household*" (Matt. 10:35-36). Just hear those words resounding in a Jewish context. And Jesus says, "*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matt. 10:37). Christ is saying that allegiance to Him supersedes family. It's more important than even your family ties and through allegiance to Christ you become part of a new family where you are literally brothers and sisters.

Remember Mark 3 when Jesus' mother and brothers were looking for Him; they were seeking out, trying to find him? In the context, while He's teaching, some people come to Him and say, "Your mother and brothers are looking for you." Jesus responds saying, "*Who are my mother and brothers?*" That's not a good Mother's Day text. Who are they? He looks around at the people He's teaching and says, "*Here are my mother and brothers. Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother or sister or mother.*"

Now that's doesn't mean that Jesus didn't affirm marriage, didn't affirm children or bless children. He obviously did. But He viewed the community of Christ-followers as a family that transcends even natural physical family. Talk about radical. Jesus never preached a gospel urging believers to make marriage and family their ultimate priority. He preached a gospel that called people to make Him their highest priority and in doing so, some of them would have to forsake their families.

I know there are some of you in this context—certainly in other contexts around the world, too—when you became a Christian, when you become a part of the church, you lost your family. I’m thinking of individuals I’ve walked with and prayed through this in their lives. Your families turned their back on you. The reality is that the church—as the people of God—is in a very, very, real sense, elevated even more important than physical family.

It makes sense in eternity, right? The family is a temporary institution but the church is an eternal institution. Jesus says in Matthew 22:30 that there will be no marriage in heaven. He called some people in Matthew 19 to stay unmarried for the sake of the kingdom. Paul did the same thing in 1 Corinthians 7. The picture we get is that even marriage—as the divinely instituted and divinely important relationship—is still temporary. But the church lasts forever, which leads us to the realization that the family has a role in the Great Commission, but the church is responsible for the Great Commission.

This is key. Scripture doesn’t give us this picture to downplay God’s good design for marriage, God’s good design for parenting, God’s good design for physical families. There’s undoubtedly a role that Christian moms and Christian dads play in passing the gospel to the next generation. There’s a role there. But the Great Commission was not given to families. The Great Commission was given to the Church. When those 11 men stood on a mountainside in Matthew 28 and heard the Words of Jesus to them, they were not hearing this primarily as heads of families. They were hearing this primarily as representatives of the Church. In fact, these men had temporarily forsaken family ties in order to follow after Jesus.

Now I’m not saying this commission wouldn’t change the way they lead their families. Based on this charge there’d be a role there but even when we look in the book of Acts—like we read this last Spring—what we see is Paul, Silas, Timothy, Barnabas... These leaders in the church were advancing the gospel as representatives of the church, not primarily heads of families. Paul and Timothy, in all probability—unmarried. So what we realize is not that families are unimportant. Family is hugely important and has a role in the Great Commission. But it’s the Church that is responsible for the Great Commission—for advancing the gospel.

Which on a side note, an important side note though, before we go on to this last point... When we talk about passing the gospel on to the next generation, we are not just talking about passing the gospel on to our kids. That would miss the whole point. We’re talking about passing the gospel on to kids and students all across this community and in all nations. There’s a very dangerous tendency in the context of focusing on the next generation, to get inward, to focus right here. And yes, we want to pass the gospel on to kids among us. But there are kids all around us who need the gospel. If we’re going to reverse those statistics and start going the other way, it is not going to happen just with focusing here, but with focusing here and there. Not either/or here, but both/and—because we’re responsible for making disciples in all the nations. There are 6,000 people groups whose kids have never even heard the gospel. We’ve got to figure out how to pass the gospel on to them.

Now leading to the final conclusion: The family has a unique responsibility for children in the home. There’s no question about that—all over scripture, Old Testament/New Testament alike. Parents are commanded to teach their children, Deuteronomy 6, Ephesians 6. You and I are in the church together but the reality is, I have a unique responsibility. Heather and I have a unique responsibility for Caleb and Joshua Platt. We have a responsibility that you do not have for their physical well-being, their social well-being, their spiritual well-being. It’s unique for us. Those of you who have children of your own have a unique

responsibility for your children. All of us have unique responsibilities for physical relatives. Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:8, *“if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for the members of his own household he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

So clearly, there are unique responsibilities we each have for the people in our physical families, a unique responsibility. Parents, God holds you and I—Deuteronomy 6/Ephesians 6, we’re going to see this... He holds you and I accountable for spiritual instruction of our children. But at the same time the church has a shared responsibility for children in the body. We are indeed brothers and sisters, and we have a responsibility from God—as the family of God—to come along side one another and insure together that the gospel is being passed on to the next generation. The body of Christ is growing among the next generation. We all have that responsibility—all of us have that shared responsibility.

So this is where we see that both of these extremes must be avoided. It would make no sense to just focus on the church and exclude the family when God has divinely instituted the family. He’s blessed the family and He’s commanded husbands and wives to love one another in certain ways. He’s commanded parents to instruct their children in certain ways. To exclude the family would be absurd; it would not be good.

At the same time, if we exalt the family to the exclusion of the church we will have missed the point as well. The goal is not, “Families just do this and church just kind of stay on the side.” No, the goal is the church is accountable for the accomplishment of the Great Commission and the church uses families in the process.

Which leads too... Okay I tried to summarize here, and let this lead us into Psalm 78. So what should this relationship between church and family look like? I think it’s twofold.

First, the church must strengthen parents—and future parents, for that matter. The church is accountable for passing the gospel on to the next generation, so think about it. If the church is accountable for passing the gospel on to the next generation and marriage is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel in the world today, then the church is going to focus on strengthening marriages. The church is going to spend time and invest in one another to the end that our marriages are demonstrating the character of Christ. We want to strengthen one another’s marriages.

Then if moms and dads are given—especially when we’re talking about Christian moms and dads responsible for the spiritual instruction of their children... We want to equip and strengthen parents to make disciples in their homes; to fill their homes with the Word; to saturate their children with the Word. For Christian moms and dads to be equipped to make disciples; going, baptizing, teaching, their children to obey everything Christ has commanded us. And not just in their homes but to make disciples through their homes. So that the homes spread across this church are platforms for the spread of the gospel.

If there’s anything that coaching T-ball has taught me—and coaching T-ball has taught me a lot! There’s nothing like 10 five-year-olds in a sport that requires them to stand and watch for so long when dirt and rocks sit beneath their feet. And so I’ve learned a lot. It’s been sanctifying on so many levels. But amidst everything, it has been crystal clear that my family is designed by God to be a unique platform for the gospel all across this community and people’s lives that would never interact with Brook Hills otherwise. I have seen that in the relationships that we have formed, the people we have met. And to think of that multiplied all across this room? In all the things children and students are involved in?

If we want the gospel to advance to the next generation in this community and all nations. Then, yes, we will strengthen parents, marriages, future parent to make disciples in their homes. To make disciples through their homes. But that's not all. That's one part—a non-negotiable part—but there's something bigger here. The church must streamline a process. A process for passing the gospel to the next generation that involves every member of the church. We are all brothers and sisters. And we all together have a unique responsibility before God to pass the gospel on from generation to generation.

This is the picture we're going to see in the New Testament: older men teaching younger men; older women teaching younger women. Some people married for the sake of the kingdom. Some people single for the sake of the kingdom. All of us working together in a process—every one of us—that involves every member of the church and it intentionally trains children and students for the world. We want children and students going out with the Word into the world. That's what we're responsible for.

We don't want the next generation to just survive in the world with the gospel. Our goal is not to just prepare them to make it with the gospel in the world. That's why I use the word train. We want the next generation to thrive in the world with the gospel. We're going to give our lives and our church toward this end: that in the generations to come, more and more and more of them know God, love God and spread the glory of God.

We want the witness of The Church at Brook Hills not to be surviving 50 or 100 years from now—unless Jesus comes back. We want a witness of this gospel thriving 50 years or a 100 years from now, and that affects the way we “do church”—we act as a church now. When we're not just living for the moment, “What can we do right around us?” When we're saying we have a responsibility to make sure that generations behind us know and love and spread the glory of God. What can we give them that will last forever? What can we pour into them that lasts forever? And that leads us to Psalm 78 and what the psalm tells us to do.

So this Psalm was written most likely by a guy named Asaph, who was a Levite, a musical leader in service to King David. He said to the people of God then and by implication to us now, this is what we do: We teach the scriptures to the next generation. This is all of us. It's not just parents—certainly including parents in this room—but all of us. We teach the scriptures. Look at verses 4, “*We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children...*” (Ps. 78:4-5).

There's teaching here. God has spoken. We must not hide His Word from the next generation. God has commanded those who have gone before us to each us, so by God's grace people have taught us the Word.

There's a reason why we have this Word in this context, 2,000 years after it was finished and sealed. There's a reason why we're gathered around in this room studying it because people have passed it on. It's like a baton. How do the people of God survive from generation to generation? They survive by passing on the Word. We teach the Scriptures.

We teach them who God is. “*The glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might*” (Ps. 78:4). We tell children and students that everything begins with God and everything ends with God; that He is the Creator and the sustainer and the ruler of everything. And the world does not revolve around us and the world does not revolve around our kids. The world revolves around God.

There's a word there for us and our culture—we'll try to not to go off here... But children are not our highest value. Christ is our highest value. God is the supreme one around whom everything revolves. That changes everything about how we perceive even our children. We teach them who God is. We don't just teach them convenient rules to obey that make our lives easier. We don't just teach them religious rituals to follow and that they're expected to do in this culture. We don't just teach them life skills to know. We teach them God. So they know God. We teach them Who God is.

We teach them what God has done, "*the wonders that He has done*" as the end of verse 4 says. When you read the rest of this Psalm, and it just recounts the history of God's work among His people. This is the Psalmist, Asaph, he's saying: Tell them about the plagues. Tell them about God feeding people with bread from heaven. Tell them about how God miraculously and powerfully provided for His people from generation to generation, so they know what God has done.

We teach them who God is, what God has done and we teach them what God has said. His laws—His commandments—teach them. Pass them on. Make this Book the center of instruction to children. What God has said will endure forever. So parents and non-parents alike, the best thing we can give to children in our culture is not how to play baseball or basketball or football or ballet or...I only have sons so I don't know what else girls do besides ballet. But, we don't teach them games without giving them what will last forever. This is a rock they can stand on a billion years from now. The reality is that at the end of this life, all that other stuff is going to burn up. What's going to matter is what you have given them to stand on for eternity. So we teach the Scriptures to them. We teach the Scriptures.

We tell the stories. That's the beauty of this Psalm. We just read 8 verses in this Psalm, but it's the longest historical Psalm in the Bible. The longest historical Psalm recounting the history of God's work among God's people. This is what we do. We tell children that we're part of a long line, like we were praying earlier. This is big, grand story here that we're part of when we gather together with our children at night for family worship like we did last night and do every night we can. We tell them stories about what God has done among His people and we realize, "Wow! I'm doing the same thing that Hebrew families did in a little home when they were celebrating the Passover. Telling stories to kids of how God provided and miraculously delivered His people. I'm telling the same stories that for literally thousands of years have been told to the people of God. I'm passing it on." I'm going to be faithful to pass this on to give them a sense of history and for them to realize that this didn't start with us. It's much bigger.

Joshua's favorite song request in family worship right now is "Father Abraham." You know that song? They like the motions and it's fun for my sons. It's okay to have fun with these motions and "Father Abraham had many sons" and all these things. But for them to realize, "Wow we've got a forefather in the faith who believed God and trusted God to do the impossible and God did it. God showed Himself strong to Abraham. And we're in a line of all kinds of other people. We're sons and daughters from this line of faith, trusting in God; believing God to do the impossible. That's good to pass on to children and students.

Next, we warn against sinfulness. The whole context of this Psalm is really a warning. You read through it and what you'll see is the stories of how God's people turned from God at this point and that point; how they rebelled against Him. It's what you see at the end of verse 8. They were told they "*should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation...*" To see in history, "Okay, children... Okay you are 13 and you're facing temptations. These temptations are not new. People have been tempted. Maybe they way

they look is a little different but they have been tempted not to trust God for years and years and years before and look what happened—destruction happened—judgment from God.” God’s judgment is real. To show it to children and students, to say, “Fear God. Trust God. Don’t trust sin and the ways of this world that always lead to destruction. Trust God.”

Warn them against sinfulness and in the process we exalt the Savior. When we tell them, as the Psalmist does throughout Psalm 78, God is merciful to His people. You see a cycle all throughout this Psalm. When you read the rest of it you see a cycle. You see God working among His people. His people rebelling, turning against God and then you see God’s mercy drawing His people back. And it’s a cycle over and over again. To say to children and students that God saves us from our sin. All the scriptures are pointing us to Christ.

One of our favorite books that we have used particularly at this age is *The Jesus Story Book Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name*. It basically walks through all these different stories in Scripture and points to Christ in all of them. So when we were reading this last week—Daniel in the lion’s den. It wasn’t just about Daniel being delivered from lions. The story is about how God would send a deliverer to save us from death. It’s what we walked through all last year to see Christ and His supremacy in the middle of the Scriptures. We see their eyes light up at the end when we ask, “Who is the deliverer who will come?” They say, “Jesus!” Yes, everything pointing to Him. He’s the one who saves us. To tell children and students that in Christ, God responds to our failures with His forgiveness. His forgiveness is what keeps the story going. Right? In Christ, God responds to our failures with His forgiveness, and God responds to our faithlessness with His faithfulness!

Ah, this is good, for every child, every student, every person in this room, for that matter, to know that God is good. We have turned against God, rebelled and gone our own way. But God is gracious and loving and compassionate. Slow to anger, abounding in love. God sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins—in our place—to spare us from the judgment we deserve so that we could be saved from His wrath and judgment, to know Him and walk with Him. That’s good news for we want every child and student in this church and this community to know that. We want them to know that. We want to work hard in the church to make sure generations to come know that.

What We Do...

We teach the Scriptures, tell the stories, warn against sinfulness, exalt the Savior so that... You see the words “so that” mentioned three times in the verses that follow in Psalm 78. So we do these things and when we do what will happen? This is what Asaph says we do these things so that first, “they will know God in their minds.” Verse 6: So *“that the next generation might know them”* (Ps. 78:6).

What Will Happen...

This is what we want. We want them to know God. We want those who come behind us to know God—intimate knowledge of God. Not just facts about God. We want them to know God. We want them to know God in their minds. We want them to trust God in their hearts—“...so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments...” (Ps. 78:7).

Yes! What a great phrase. Not just that they have intellectual knowledge but that they have hope in God. They have trusted in God. They know when they see all the pleasures and pursuits of this world around them that there's someone better. They know when things fall apart around them, there's a God they can trust with all their hearts. ...That their hearts would belong to God! Isn't this what we want for children and students?

...That their hearts would belong to God and that they will obey God in their lives. They will "keep His commandments" (Ps. 78:7), and "not be like their fathers" (Ps. 78:8) "whose heart were not steadfast, whose spirit were not faithful to God" (Ps. 78:8). We don't want them to turn away. We want them to keep His commandments faithfully. Isn't this what we long for?

Yes, obviously parents with our kids, but even bigger. This is bigger. Church—all of us. Among children and students around us, don't we long to send children and students out from our midst, this church, this community when they graduate with deep knowledge of God. So that when they sit in that classroom and an atheistic professor starts railing on Christianity, their faith won't collapse because they don't just know some things they've heard, they know God. So that when they get on the college campus or they get in that context where all the pleasures and the pursuits of the world are pulling at them, that they are able to look at all these things—money or sex or popularity or fame or applause in the world—and look at it all, and they know that none of that compares to the supremacy of God and the satisfaction that their hearts have found in Him. So that even when they taste it, they immediately spit it out of their mouth because it doesn't taste anywhere near as good as what they know.

From among us, they wouldn't even just walk into the world with the Word but that they would run into the world with the Word, ready to make disciples of all nations and spend their lives, their education, their resources, their experiences, everything God has given them for the spread of His gospel to the ends of the earth. That's what we want.

The Bottom Line...

So the bottom line is this: Church, if we're going to be successful at making disciples of all nations, we must be intentional about making disciples in succeeding generations. This is part of the Great Commission. This is a charge from our God and we cannot neglect it.

Ah I was so challenged this week... Part of what I do in studying the Word, just meditating on the Word; just letting it soak in. And I got to verses 5 and 6, I was struck by the generations represented here. In verse 5, "*...he commanded our fathers to teach to their children...*" (Ps. 78:5). So you've got fathers, children. In verse 6, "*...That the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn*" (Ps. 78:6). So you've got fathers, children, then their children yet unborn, "*...and arise and tell them to their children*" (Ps. 78:6). You have four generations right there, at least. The picture has gone on for a long time before.

But it really challenged me in my own life—on a personal level and even a parenting level in my own life—to look at Caleb and Joshua and to think how can I love them and lead them? Not just for their sake, not even for the sake of their children, but how I can parent them now with their grandchildren in view? What can I give them that's going to last forever? How can I pour that into them so they will know how to tell this to generations that will come after them? Not just know it but internalize it. Then to think, again on a personal

level, as long as I have breath I want to give my life for the accomplishment of the Great Commission. Make disciples of all nations. Tell every people group about the gospel.

There's a day coming when that will be accomplished and I want to spend every breath I have working hard toward the accomplishment of that commission. But I was struck even as I was reading this. What if it doesn't happen in my lifetime? What if Caleb and Joshua get to accomplish it? Or maybe, what if not even them, what if their children and their grandchildren? So this is what I was thinking in my own heart and was just humbled by this text and then began to think about us as a church.

Okay, we're going to give ourselves for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, to all people groups as a church, hoping that we get to be a part of it. But if, in God's providence, we don't see it accomplished in our lifetime, how can we make sure to do ministry to children and students among us so they might see it accomplished? This just raises everything to a huge level. You begin to realize that our lives, this church, we're on a grand stage, a part of passing the gospel on from generation to generation until all nations know Him. And that changes the way we interact in our marriages and our parenting, and as singles and as the church.

So let's live today so that generations to come know, love and spread the glory of our God. That's the bottom line. What I want to say as your pastor today: Let's live today so that generations to come know and love and spread the glory of our God.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical.
Website: Radical.net