

## **“BACK TO SCHOOL: TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Psalm 78:1-8**

### **Introduction:**

Let me begin by apologizing to all the school age kids here for using those three bad words in my sermon title. Nothing is more depressing to a kid than those words, “Back to School.”

But the reality is this week all the Lynden schools are starting up again. No doubt for those of you with kids in school the new clothes are bought, the new backpacks are full of school supplies. It’s time to start teaching and learning again.

Education is important. Without it life is pretty hard. Psalm 78 is known as a teaching psalm or an instructive psalm, it has something to say to us about teaching and learning. It comes with a warning about what happens if we don’t pay attention and learn what we are being taught.

### **Forgetting is a problem.**

Psalm 78 is the second longest psalm in the Bible after Psalm 119. It is a history lesson with a purpose, so that the people don’t forget their history, because when people forget history, they are doomed to repeat it. To forget our past, to forget what we have learned is dangerous to the soul. Our text puts the problem in verses 7-8.

**Psalm 78:7 so that** they ... not forget the works of God, ... 8 and ... not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

This is the burden of this psalm and this psalmist, Asaph. How do we not forget, how do we not be like those before who forgot and were stubborn and rebellious? Forgetting is a problem. Many who have gone before us have forgotten.

How many of you know that you can go to a Christian school for 12 years and still forget and later deny your faith in Jesus?

How many of you know that you can spend \$100,000 on a Christian college education to come out doubting more than when you started?

How many of you know that you can be raised in a Christian family and go to church a lot and in adulthood turn away from everything you heard and were taught?

The psalmist points to past bad examples and says don't be like that. Don't be like those who have forgotten the truth, who have forgotten what they have been taught.

Parents play a key role in not forgetting. It is God's intention that the things of God be made know by the passing on of them from one generation to the next, from father to son, from parents to children, until Jesus returns.

#### **Knowing the main thing, the central thing, to know God, vs. 4.**

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.

Of all the things we can learn in this world, of all the education we can attain, of all the knowledge we can Google, the most important thing, the central thing, the main thing is God. God is the one, ultimate, eternal, unchanging reality. Everything else flows from Him. God is the creator of all things and the source of all knowledge and wisdom.

Our son Zach is at Bethlehem College and Seminary. During freshman and sophomore year they basically take one class called Christian Worldview Integrated Curriculum. They start with God and creation and then read and study all the history and science and philosophy and theology and world religions as it follows the course of God's redeeming works in all of human history.

If our kids grow up being good at math or science or history or geography or shop; if our kids graduate with honors or maybe even valedictorian; if our kids excel in sports or academics and get scholarships to a good college; giving our kids that kind of foundation and background and opportunity is all well and good, but it isn't enough and if that is all they get then we have failed.

They must know the God who made our world and who made us. They must know the Word of God and the great and glorious works of God. They must know the love of God manifested all around us.

#### **Telling the next generation, teach the Bible, vs. 5.**

5 He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law [torah] in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children,

If God is the central subject then the Bible is the central textbook. If the Bible is the sun then every other book is like a planet. They should be read in the light of Scripture, they should be tested and judged by the one true light. God has not left us in the dark. You have to know the first book before you can rightly understand all the other books.

The psalmist calls this the testimony and law, the source of our knowledge of God.

The primary teacher of this spiritual knowledge is parents. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 is the classic passage in Scripture for teaching and passing on our faith to the next generation.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9** “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Notice how the teaching takes place. Some of it is *structured*, planned, intentional, like daily reading from Scripture at meals or bedtime. And some of it is *spontaneous*, capturing a teachable moment, while life is happening, riding in the car, while watching a movie, in response to something in the news. The Olympics had many teachable moments, good and bad examples (Ryan Lochte; New Zealand runner Nikki Hamblin and American Abbey D’Agostino became the 18th and 19th recipients of the unusual Pierre de Coubertin award).

There is no room in Scripture for parental neutrality. Dads don’t get a pass, they can’t check out. Kids are watching and listening because parents are always teaching, even when they don’t think they are or even when they think no one is watching or noticing.

The most important place for passing on the faith is not the church or the school, but the home. One of the reasons God created families is for passing on the truth and passing on the faith.

I know none of us feel very good about our parenting and I know that most of you feel very inadequate to the task of passing on the faith.

Some of you have met my dear friend, *Tim Bayly*. He wrote a book for fathers that came out on Father’s Day called *Daddy Tried*. In it he tells the story of how his own father was less than a perfect father, but that he failed gloriously. He died trying the best he could with what he had.

Moms and dads, the task at hand is hard, impossible without God’s help and grace, but may it be said of us all, we failed gloriously, we gave it all we had with however much or little you had. May it not be said that we didn’t try. Young dads, start now and do something. Pray hard and do something. At least fail falling forward. Too much is at stake not to try.

Parents, you are one of the instruments God uses to instill a heart of true worship toward God, and you are one of the means the Holy Spirit uses to bring the souls of your children to salvation. May this very thought stir your souls to prayer and action.

Remember that salvation comes to children only in imperfect, sinful, dysfunctional families. Show kids grace, that we aren’t perfect and aren’t called to be perfect. We show grace by

confessing our sins to one another. In this way our kids see that the Gospel is about forgiveness. They will love a Gospel that is about Jesus forgiving our sins.

If we leave no other inheritance, leave this inheritance. No other inheritance comes close to being as important or valuable or helpful than to know the truth about God and to have a relationship with God.

It is of no benefit and profit to our children to leave them riches if they don't have Christ.

Make sure your children know the truth about God, about our Savior Jesus, about sin and how we can be forgiven through repentance, about heaven and hell, about worship and prayer and Scripture, about grace and our response to so great a gift through humble obedience.

Embrace your role to be the primary educators of your children especially when it comes to spiritual matters. This includes being involved in and attentive to what is going on in their schools and what is being taught. And you can't be less attentive just because they are at a Christian school. I don't know how many times we had great table conversation challenging certain things they were taught at the Christian schools that was contrary to our Reformed faith.

How many times did I have to warn my sons at Christian colleges to be vigilant and discerning? Learn to be Bereans who tested what Paul said against Scripture. Learn to eat the meat and spit out the bones. Help your kids connect their education to knowing God.

Parents, know your kids teachers, pray for them, pray for their lives, their families. Know your kid's friends and pray for them and their families. Know the influences in your kid's lives and pray for them and pray for discernment to wisely shape those influences.

When this life is done, we parents will be the ones finally held accountable for our children's spiritual training. Teach your children the Word of God and the works of God.

**Romans 10:17** Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Saturate your children with the Scripture. Make the reading of it a priority in your home.

**That the next generation might learn, vs. 6.**

6 that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,

To all children here, and really that is what we all are, this is our inheritance. An inheritance is something passed on from one generation to the next.

It can take all kinds of forms and different forms in different cultures. It can be assets like money or property or possessions; it can be titles or rights; and it can sometimes be debts or obligations.

We generally think of an inheritance as material, something of monetary or sentimental value. But our greatest and most important inheritance is spiritual. All other inheritances will be lost and burned up someday. But a spiritual heritage and inheritance is eternal.

Parents can teach, but they can't make their children learn. The church and Christian schools cannot make children love the truth and make it their own. Only the Holy Spirit can make their hearts receptive to the good seed, only the Holy Spirit can make their hearts fertile soil.

Children, consider how great a gift it is from God to be born into and raised in a Christian home and in a Christian church. Consider how rich and valuable this inheritance is that is being held out to you. But you have to receive it and not reject it. You have to listen and learn and make it your own.

Honor the father and mother God has given you by honoring their God. Don't be like those Scripture warns us about "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7)

Since this is the most important thing to know, if we are at all wise, we will set our minds and hearts to know it.

Put away any rebellious spirit or attitude. Put away any hard heart or stubborn will. Put on a spirit of meekness and humility, put on an affection for God, put on a commitment to faithfulness to the Lord. Your calling in life is to learn, especially the most important things.

**So that they may have confident hope and joyful obedience, vss. 7-8.**

*7 so that* they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;

This is the goal, the so what, the so that. The Psalmists says three things here.

**First**, put our hope and trust in God and no one or nothing else. This is the first step in receiving our inheritance, faith in God. Saying, "Yes, Lord, I believe."

**Second**, you can do the first because you have some knowledge of what God has done for us and our salvation. And when you really think about it, and all that means, then ....

**Third**, in response to all His grace, we offer our obedience. Our confidence in God will be most clear and most demonstrated when we obey God.

The point of teaching our children the Bible is so that they will have a source of confidence and hope, a source of faith in God. Faith, hope and love come from the Bible, without the Bible they won't have that. Do you want your children to have hope in the days ahead? Scripture is the kindling for that fire.

**Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

### **Implications and applications.**

To not forget takes intentional effort. It takes intentional prayer and intentional action. Pray for your children and your children's children. Pray for godly seed. Pray against the enemy of the sowing of the seed of the Word of God.

And not just until they make profession of faith. Pray for your children all the way to the grave, that they will persevere in their faith against all the attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil.

And if you have no children, pray for the children of our baptismal vows as a church and pray for the children of your relatives. Pray for the generations, that God will raise up a witness, a testimony, a remnant for His glory and for the sake of the future of the church of Jesus Christ.

Pray that the Holy Spirit who is the great teacher will come and teach our children and open their minds to the truth about God and open their hearts to love God and open their wills to obey God.

Come tonight to pray for our church and her future. The future of our families and our church and our nation depends on it. Amen.

Parents and children, pray with me as I pray:

God, don't let me forget; don't let my conscience grow cold and my heart grow hard; don't let me fall into such sin and selfishness that I cast off and reject your will and ways, God, don't let me make shipwreck of my faith on the rock of this culture; God, don't let me give up and quit the race; God, don't let me fall into temptation; God, don't let me sell my birthright for a mess of porridge; God, don't let me end up like that prodigal son; God, don't hand me over to Satan. Teach me the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done, so that my hope will always be in you and I will joyfully keep all your good commands."