

Lest We Forget
The Rev. David Booman
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Psalm 78:1-8, 34-38

I don't know if there's ever been a more challenging time to be a Christian parent. The distractions, the temptations, the dangers of our increasingly anti-Christian culture. You know when I hear about what kids are facing today – the kinds of drugs they're exposed to in middle school, the depravity of the internet they have at their fingertips. It's like nothing I experienced growing up.

And the statistics are sobering. Young people are leaving the church. And what's most troubling is that they're not coming back. Lifeway did a survey and discovered that if a Christian college student stops going to church, there's about a 70% chance they'll not return.

But praise God, He's given us the antidote to these troubling trends. And we find it here in Psalm 78. God basically tells us that there are three things we can give our children to nourish their souls. Three spiritual vitamins. What are they? Glorious deeds, testimony, and law.

In verses 4 and 5 we read:

*We will tell to the coming generation the **glorious deeds** of the LORD...He established a **testimony** in Jacob and appointed a **law** in Israel, which he **commanded** our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them.*

So the first thing to note is that God *commands* us to teach our children. This is not a suggestion, a recommendation, some good advice. This is a divine command. Basically, our fundamental calling as parents, grandparents, godparents, etc. is to tell our children about God. And the reason should be pretty obvious.

Say you're a health-conscious family. Only eat organic. Exercise every day. Do prune juice enemas just for fun. Say you raise your kids in this way and they have an incredibly healthy life and live to be a 120. What good is that, if they don't know Jesus and go to hell when they die?

Or, say you love sports and you do all the travel teams and your kid grows up to star for the NY Yankees. Or you're academically-minded and your kid does all the AP classes and grows up to be president of Harvard.

Again, what good is that earthly success if they spend eternity apart from God and apart from you? As Jesus says, *'What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?'*

And this is why God commands parents to teach their children. As Paul writes in Ephesians, *'Bring up your children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.'* We should take Biblical instruction at least as seriously as brushing teeth or learning algebra.

And the Bible is so wise to focus on parents. Sociology has confirmed that parents have the greatest influence on the spiritual lives of their kids. *Way* more than people like me. Church leaders. Youth ministers. You know, best case scenario the church might get your kids 80 hours a year. But parents are around their kids thousands of hours a year, especially when they're young.

And so God commands parents to give their kids three spiritual vitamins. The glorious deeds of the Lord, his testimony in Jacob, and the law in Israel.

First, let's look at glorious deeds. This certainly includes the deeds in the Bible, but it should also include the glorious deeds God has done in your own life. You know, kids love a good story. And so what are the *God stories* in your life? How has God saved you? How has God healed you? What are the coincidences you can't explain? When have you felt His presence? How did you come to Christ? Tell these things to your kids!

And we can also tell the stories of our ancestors. I tell my boys the story of their great, great, great grandfather, Norwegian Halvor Halvorson, who ran away to sea as a boy, found himself in yellow fever epidemic in the Caribbean, told God that if he were spared, he'd give his life to Christ. By God's grace he didn't die, went to seminary in Oslo, emigrated to Wisconsin to pastor a circuit of churches, was sometimes chased by wolves on horseback as he road between parishes. And at his funeral, there were 5,000 people in attendance. Wagons lining the road as far the eye could see. My boys love these kinds of stories. Tell the Lord's glorious deeds.

But secondly, there are the testimonies of Jacob. The stories of God in the Bible. One of the tragedies of our modern age, is that our children are biblically illiterate. Twenty years ago Wheaton College did a survey of incoming Freshman. A third of these students could not identify Matthew as an apostle from a list of names. A third could not identify the book of Acts as containing the record of Paul's travels. Half could not tell that the Passover is recorded in Exodus.

My friends, we need to get back to reading the Bible to our kids. The healing and revival of our nation depends upon it. As Jonathan Edwards famously noted in his farewell sermon, *'Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ... And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace. If these fail, all other means are likely to prove ineffectual.'*

If families don't educate our children in the Bible, our society will continue to crumble. The good news, however, is that there's hope. During the pandemic one St. Michaelite family started reading the gospels to their kids at the dinner table. And when they'd get to the end of a chapter, the kids asked for more. They were hungry for the Word. My friends, we need to give kids more credit. They were built to run on the Word of God.

So glorious deeds *and* the testimony of Jacob.

And thirdly, there's the law. Kids need to know the truth. That's what sets us free. And the truth is not only story, it's also law. It's doctrine. Doctrine is vital to spiritual flourishing.

I recently read the account of Kyle Dunn. He was a passenger on American Airlines flight 2775 in June. Shortly after takeoff one of the engines failed and they were told to prepare for a crash landing. What would you do if you had 90 seconds to prepare for death? Well, as people wept around him, Kyle and his wife Brittany recited the catechism to each other, *'I am not my own but belong body and soul, in both life and death, to Jesus Christ my savior.'* When your kids are in a plane crash, a crisis, on their deathbed, what do you want them to hold onto? What do you want to be the anchor in their soul?

A couple years ago we were on vacation in the mountains in NC and we were going to be staying at a house on top of a mountain. The gravel road up the mountain was the steepest grade I'd ever driven on in my life. There was a sign that said 'Only four-wheel drive vehicles on this road' and we were in our Dodge Caravan. Not one of my best decisions. About halfway up our wheels started spinning in the gravel and we started sliding off the road. It was scary. But suddenly from the back of the van one of our boys started singing, *'Dear Lord Jesus, bless our family, bless our family every day. Dear Lord Jesus, bless our family, bless our family in every way.'* It's a little ditty we often sing when we travel. And somehow we made it up the road.

And so teach your kids God's glorious deeds, the testimonies of Jacob, and the law of Israel.

But finally, we need to address a looming, unpleasant question. But what if I've failed? What if I've blown it? What if I'm not raising my children in the faith?

It's striking that most of this long psalm is not about success, but failure. In later verses the psalmist records how Israel rebelled against God, refused to obey God, forgot God's works, tested God, lied to God, etc.

The truth is, many of us have and are struggling as parents. We haven't told our kids what they need to hear. So what do we do?

A couple things as we close.

First, if you're feeling overwhelmed, know that parenting is actually supposed to bring us to the end of ourselves. Parenting is meant to bring us to our knees before God. Do you know what is the first description of parenting in the Bible? I once heard a psychologist point out that it's Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel. Every parent's worst nightmare. One sibling murdering another. But in the very last verse of the chapter we read, *'At that time, people began to call upon the name of the Lord.'*

Yes, the challenges of parenting are meant to drive us to our knees, to call upon the name of the Lord. And so don't despair if you're struggling, call out to Jesus.

And secondly, if you're grandparents, and you regret missed opportunities with your own kids, it's never too late to begin. Our own Peter Rothermel, has a passion for empowering grandparents to share Jesus with their grandkids. He'd love to chat with you and give you ideas. I heard of one grandmother who recorded a video message to her grandchildren and said this:

There's a couple of things I want you to know about me...I was not a person of power or prominence, but I was a person of prayer. And I've laid up for you in the throne room of God prayers that you will come to know the great God and Savior I have served for seventy-eight years. The next thing I want you to know is that God has already given me my address in heaven. So write it down. When you get there, come visit me real soon. I'll be living at the corner of Hallelujah and Praise Street.

So call out to God and use the time you do have to speak to your children and grandchildren.

And in closing, there's one final thing we need to hold onto. It's kind of mysterious, but we find it in verse 2: *'I'll open my mouth in a parable; I'll utter dark sayings from of old.'* What in the world does this mean? Dark sayings? You know, deeds, testimony, and law are hard enough! Can we handle one more thing? YES, because these dark sayings are the best thing of all.

In Matthew 13 the apostle quotes this exact verse. Jesus is speaking to the crowds in parables, and we read, *'This was to fulfill what was spoken, 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.'*

What are these dark sayings? Essentially they're things hidden since the foundation of the world. Hidden—but not forever—waiting to be revealed at the perfect moment. They're mysteries and parables that don't fully make sense...until the fullness of time, when God sends His Son. And as Jesus steps into the picture, all of the dark sayings, the mysteries, the parables and prophesies, begin to make sense.

For we see that Jesus is the seed of Adam, crushing Satan under his heel. Jesus is Noah saving his people from judgment. Jesus is Isaac, bearing the wood of sacrifice to the mountain, He's the Passover lamb by whose blood we are saved. He's the manna from heaven, the living water, the true temple, the great 'I AM.'

He's Isaiah's suffering servant. Zechariah's king riding on a donkey. He's the great shepherd Micah said would be born in Bethlehem. He's David's rejected stone that has become the cornerstone. He's the one Daniel saw in a vision, 'like the Son of Man.' He's Isaiah's light of the world dawning on those in darkness. He's the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace. And he's the fulfillment of every parable—the Good Samaritan, who picks us up on the side of the road when we're broken, and loves us back to health.

And the greatest of all dark sayings, is the message of the cross. A stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. But to us it is life and salvation. And we see the cross in the last verse of our reading, embedded in all the failures of Israel: *'But God, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity.'* Yes on the cross, Jesus atoned for all our sins including our failures as parents.

You know my friends, there's no greater pain than family pain and estrangement. But on that tree Jesus experienced the ultimate breakdown of the family. Separation from His father, crying out, 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me.'

Jesus experienced shame and abandonment for us, so that when we fail as mothers and fathers, we can run into our great Father's arms and be forgiven. Jesus experienced separation from God, so that now, nothing can separate us from His love.

And so turn to him my friends, with your hopes and with your failures. He's for you and not against you. He wants your family to flourish. He's compassionate, and remembers your sins no more. Let's pray.