

August 26, 2018  
The Blessing of the Educators  
Series: Summer in the Psalms

**Psalm 78:1-8**  
**Judges 2:6-15**  
**Hebrews 10:23-25**

Legacy

*That which we have heard and known, and what our ancestors have told us, we will not hide from their children. – Psalm 78:3*



In the 1970's there was a hit TV show called *Sanford and Son*. It was a sit-com starring Redd Foxx as Fred Sanford, an erasable old man, and his son, Lamont. Fred was constantly trying to come up with some scheme to get rich, because he wanted to leave something to his son. Most of his hair-brained ideas involved the junk shop that Fred owned. Every once in while Fred would wave his arm across the vast expanse of litter and say, "Just think, Lamont, someday *all this* will be yours."



Redd Foxx was a funny man.

It's good to think about our legacy. Most of us want to leave something to our children to make their lives a little easier. Have you ever stopped to think about the kind of faith legacy you will be leaving to those who come after you? Another related question, and perhaps an even more important one is: what kind of children are you and I leaving as our legacy to the world?

Today is Educators' Sunday, and Psalm 78 is sometimes called The Educators' Psalm. Here are the first 8 verses:

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,  
things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.*

*He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded to our ancestors to teach to their children;  
that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn,  
and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God,  
and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments;  
and that they should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.*

Before we go deeper into the scripture, let me see a show of hands. How many of you are now, or have ever been teachers? Teacher's aides? Administrators? Coaches? Youth advisors? Counselors? (Keep them up) God bless you. We are here to thank God for you, and to pray for you as the new school year begins.

How many parents do we have? Grandparents? Aunts and uncles? Great-grandparents? You are teachers too, the first teachers, the most important teachers of all. Every study on faith development reveals the same thing -- parents and other family members are **the primary educators and the imparters of faith to young people.** I know; you don't believe that. I never did when my kids were young. We are convinced that our children aren't listening to us at all. We think that they are only influenced by what their peers think, but the fact is, they are listening. This is our legacy – these little ones you teach, the ones who gather down here for Children's Moment, the youth of this church, and your sons and daughters who live at home, or away – they expect to receive something from you, they **deserve** to receive something from you, and it isn't a trust, an IRA or an insurance policy. The one thing they most need to receive from you is a sustaining faith.

Did you hear about the Jewish man who received a letter informing him that one of his distant relatives had died, and he was to receive a valuable inheritance? He rushed right down to the address on the letter, which turned out to be his synagogue, the synagogue he rarely attended. His rabbi told him that the relative who died was Moses, and his inheritance was his own, sublime faith tradition.

Yeah, we're not gonna do that! What we are going to do is help each other get over our shyness about talking of things pertaining to faith. My friend Valerie told her kids she wanted them to go to church when they were in college. They said, "College students don't do that." She said, "Well, if you want me to pay your tuition..." They went. Two of them became youth advisors at their churches...turned out to be the best experience of their college years!

Today we've read the first eight verses of Psalm 78. It begins with a declaration –

*These are the stories we have heard and known  
And what our ancestors have told us,  
We will not hide them from our children.*

Why does the psalmist need to say that? Who would purposely withhold knowledge of God and God's ways from his or her children? We all do. We withhold God's truth from our children when we place other priorities above our spiritual practice and our devotion to God. You know that there are children in this church that we only see when it's raining (when the game is cancelled). The parents know what is happening to their kids, they feel awful about it, but are trapped between their children's desires, and a sports culture that demands everything of them, including their children's knowledge of God.

To be fair, there is nothing in the Bible that says that kids have to learn the stories of faith in Sunday school. Parents can teach their children the things of faith at home; the problem is --

most of us don't. A lot of parents and grandparents don't feel confident in their own knowledge of the Bible. So we have kids who get to high school never having heard of Moses, Daniel, Lydia or Paul. They're hamstrung before they begin. We need to do right by these kids, so adult Christian education is important too!

Children can learn the stories of faith at home, but one thing they cannot learn at home is how to worship God in community. This worship gathering is the single most important thing we all do each week. Our weekly worship sets the tone for every word we speak and every choice we make throughout the week and throughout our lives. Worship is our identity maker. The 78<sup>th</sup> psalm perfectly describes what we are doing here:

*We will recount to generations to come  
The praiseworthy deeds and the power of the Lord,  
And the wonderful works he has done.*

“We” plural. “We will recount and give praise.” Together. With one voice. Kids can't do that on the sofa! They can't...they have to be in the company of believers – worshipping God, serving in Christ's name, together. Now some of us have disabilities that make it impossible to be in the sanctuary, and that's why we have livestream. “Hi,” to everyone joining us by livestream. But listen: these folks who are watching on livestream will be the first to tell you, it's not the same thing.

God wants us to be together in the sanctuary. It's written all over the scriptures. We ignore God's word and God's instruction at our own peril. When we withhold the opportunity to worship from our children, we rob them of their own sublime faith tradition and identity.

Hebrews 10:23-25 says,

*We have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith...And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another all the more as we see the Day approaching.*

I love that phrase, “provoke one another to love and good deeds.” No one knows how to provoke better than a 10-year old, right? So let's teach them to provoke one another to love and good deeds! That can only happen when we are together. And here is the purpose.

*That the generations may come to know,  
and the children yet unborn;  
that they in their turn might tell it to their children  
so that they may put their trust in God  
and not forget the deeds of God,  
but keep God's commandments.*

That is the reason you teach, the reason we learn.

You might say, “I can’t do that; I’m a public school teacher. I’m not allowed to mention God or even infer anything about God in the classroom.” Untrue. Jesus said that the law of God and the commandment of God, can be summed up in one word: Love.

Remember the story of the lawyer who asked Jesus what it meant to “keep God’s commandments”? He answered,

*‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>i</sup>*

The Greek is *agapeo*, which means more than emotional love; it means sacrificial love, self-giving love. That’s why you teach! Teachers, administrators, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, all the grown-ups – **We** are the keepers of the stories, the accounts of all that God has done. Don’t let that memory die!

There’s a story, a true story recorded in the Old Testament book of Judges. It’s the story of what happened when Joshua died. Joshua was the successor of Moses, the leader of God’s people. Very quickly after Joshua died, the Israelites forgot their legacy of faith that had been handed down to them by their forebears. The last verse of the book of Judges says, “In those days there was no ruler in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.”<sup>iii</sup> This is Judges 2:6-15.

*When Joshua dismissed the people, the Israelites all went to their own inheritances to take possession of the land. The people worshiped the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred ten years. So they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work that God had done for Israel.*

*Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD, and worshiped Baal and the Astartes. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and God gave them over to plunderers who plundered them, and God sold them into the power of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them to bring misfortune, as the LORD had warned them and sworn to them; and they were in great distress.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The people of Israel worshiped God in the days of Joshua, when they entered the Promised Land after the death of Moses. The great prophet had gone up against the brutal king of Egypt. God intervened with plagues of frogs and locusts and eventually God’s people passed through the Red

Sea in safety. And they worshiped God. But now Joshua was dead, and another generation had grown up, a generation who did not know the Lord or the things that God had done.

One generation, that's all it took, for Israel to forget their sublime heritage of faith. Just that quickly they started worshipping other gods, all the local gods, called Ba'als. Every community had its own deity, kind of a Redskins vs. Ravens thing. The Ba'als were a big deal. The Israelites figured they'd better go along to get along, so they bowed down to them.

That did not go well for the Israelites. Remember the first Commandment. What is it? "*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt...You shall have no other gods before me.*" It happened because Israel forgot the story, the story that explained who they were and all that God had done for them. One generation forgot their stories and everything fell apart. It took one generation for everything Israel had to be lost.

I can see how it could happen. They were busy. Settled in the land, they had to make a living. They weren't in the wildness anymore; they weren't dependent on God for everything. They had to take care of themselves and their families, and prepare for the future, and they forgot who they were. And if you don't know who you are, and you don't know whose you are, then it doesn't matter where you are or how much you have. If you don't know who you are you have nothing.

It's true for us as well. Maybe you've heard it said that every Christian is first generation because the church is always just one generation from extinction. Teachers, youth advisors, administrators, parents, grandparents -- this is why what you teach is so important.

I brought something today that is very dear to me. I should throw it away; it's a mess. Its back is broken. I took it to South America in 2001 and it was attacked by ants who chewed the pages. It's full of markings; I used it to study for the Bible Content Exam. I should get rid of it, but I can't; it's precious to me because of the person who gave it to me, my maternal grandmother.

We were going through a rough patch in our family. My sister was very ill and in the hospital for an extended time, and my grandmother came to stay. I was at that age, that time in my teens when I was challenging and questioning everything I'd been taught in Sunday school. My grandmother gave me this Bible. It was a brave thing to do. She said I might enjoy reading it because it was a modern translation, one that was easier to understand than the old King James Version I had.

So I read it. Sometimes I read it under the covers at night with a flashlight. I didn't want anyone in the family to see me, and think I was some kind of fanatic, but I read it. And it gave me my stories.

I will always be grateful to my grandmother for that. She was no Bible scholar. She was a banker, and a good one. She knew what it meant to leave a legacy. She might just as well have said to me, "Susan, someday all this will be yours."

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 22:37-38

<sup>ii</sup> Judges 21:25