Psalm 78;1-7 *Socially Distant: Tell the Next Generation*

***Build Rome in a Day***On February 1st, 2003, the **Space Shuttle *Columbia*** was returning home after more than two weeks in space. Unbeknownst to the crew, when the *Columbia* had lifted off 16 days earlier a piece of foam insulation from the external fuel tank broke off and damaged one of the shuttle’s wings. When *Columbia* re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere, this damage allowed hot atmospheric gases to penetrate the heat shield and destroy the internal wing structure, which caused the spacecraft to become unstable and break apart. All seven crew members were lost.

The Commander of the Shuttle flight was **Rick Husband**. It was his second Space Shuttle mission. Four years earlier, he had shared this testimony with his Houston area church:

“I finally realized, and it became my desire, that I would be the best man that I possibly could for God, that I could be the best husband that I could for Evelyn, and be the best father that I could for my children, and to do everything I can to make sure that they know about Jesus and hope that they come to a point in their lives where they ask Jesus to be their Savior. And I thought if I could do that, and at the end of my life look back, that would be what really mattered to me, not whether or not I was an astronaut or anything else.”

Spending time with Lord had become a priority for Rick. His wife Evelyn described him sitting in a particular chair with a giant cup of coffee, extremely early every morning, reading scripture and praying and studying. Sharing this faith with his two children was extremely important to him as well.

In her book about Rick, ***A Higher Calling***, Evelyn Husband describes the hectic days of preparation before the launch:

Saturday, January 4, began the last weekend Rick had at home before he went into quarantine, and he had a to-do list that just never ended. Rick was famous for his lists, and sometimes at the end of them he would write “Build Rome in a Day,” because he knew it was impossible to get everything done. That day, he had an impossible list: he wanted to be sure the cars were in good shape, the finances were in order, and small repairs were done around the house so that everything was in working order for us during his absence.

But, in spite of all there was to be done, Rick made sure he took the time to sit down and record 18 five-minute videos—one for each day of the mission. Evelyn explained:

"Rick had a very strong belief in the Lord and led our family amazingly, strongly, and would pray with Lauren and Matthew. So much so that he even made devotional tapes for them when he was in Space. Each day they would watch a little five-minute video that he had prepared for them each morning. And he would read out of their devotional books the Bible verse, a little story, and say a prayer and then just talk to them for a moment… they watched them every day and watched them the morning of the landing. And Rick said in those tapes that he was so proud of them and so grateful to be their dad and couldn't wait to see them."

No one knew that the mission would end in tragedy the way it did, but you can imagine the way Laruen and Matthew treasure those tapes to this day. A huge part of Commander Rick Husband’s legacy is that he led his family to the LORD.

***The Frontlines of Faith Formation***Today we are wrapping up a 4-week sermon series we’ve been calling **Socially Distant.** The idea is that, with our normal church activities so disrupted (not to mention nearly every other aspect of life in quarantine) we need to think about how we maintain our relationship with God. It can’t be something we just outsource to the church.

Already we’ve talked about friendship with God—how we each need to have a personal relationship with Jesus. We’ve talked about prioritizing spiritual conversations with our families. And we’ve talked about what it means to live our days in the name of Jesus: dedicating each day to Him, living with Him at the forefront of our minds; and approaching every task as an ambassador for Jesus.

Now, since it is Mother’s Day, I want to talk a bit more about how we teach about God in our homes.

One of the things that this pandemic is reminding us is that the home is where life is really lived.

We may have been forgetting that. One article I read talked about how we have started to treat **home as the launching and landing pad of life**. That is, we get up in the morning and then we all scatter to the various places where life happens. The kids go to school. The parents go to work. We go to our various sports teams or dance classes. We go to work out or to shop. On the weekends, we get up and go out to the lake or to the movies or to church. The home is the launching pad at the beginning of the day, and then it’s the landing pad at the end of the day, but all the things we think of as life: the learning and the working and the entertainment and the worship—that all takes place someplace else. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-family-is-the-frontlines>

But with the quarantine, that’s changing. Now, suddenly, we’re all homeschooling. Lots of us are learning to work from home. Our dining options and our entertainment options are pretty much confined to home. And that means home is where we need to work on our relationship with God, especially with our kids.

**Home is the frontlines of faith formation.**

Part of the point of this series is that it has always been that way; but the current situation is really driving that home. If we want our kids to develop a relationship with God, parents need to be the primary teachers.

***Psalm 78***My text this morning is **Psalm 78.** Psalm 78 is a teaching Psalm. It’s 72 verses which recount Israel’s history with God—starting from the Red Sea Crossing and ending with King David. The history pays special attention to the many times Israel doubted or rebelled against God; as well as God’s repeated acts of mercy. It’s not just history, but a way of remembering the goodness of God. And the first seven verses serve as an introduction. It sets the stage for the story, and explains why it is important. **Psalm 78:1-7:**

**1**My people, hear my teaching;  
    listen to the words of my mouth.  
**2**I will open my mouth with a parable;  
    I will utter hidden things, things from of old—  
**3**things we have heard and known,  
    things our ancestors have told us.  
**4**We will not hide them from their descendants;  
    we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,  
    his power, and the wonders he has done.  
**5**He decreed statutes for Jacob  
    and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our ancestors  
    to teach their children,  
**6**so the next generation would know them,  
    even the children yet to be born,  
    and they in turn would tell their children.  
**7**Then they would put their trust in God  
    and would not forget his deeds  
    but would keep his commands.

My interest in this passage, especially for today, is what it says about teaching our children. Especially **verses 3 and 4**: “The things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation.”

This is a very consistent message from the rest of the Bible—remember Deuteronomy 6: as parents, as adults, it is our responsibility to pass faith on to the next generation. Trust in God must be passed from one generation to the next.

Let me run through the passage and point out 6 purposes of God in telling the next generation.

**First, God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that God would be Supreme.**

This begins with a passion for God. This begins with a desire to see that God is first and central and preeminent.

**The end of verse 4:**

    we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,  
    his power, and the wonders he has done.

All Christian parenting begins with God. As believers, our priority should be passing on a belief and appreciation for God.

He is the one ultimate, unchanging reality. All else in parenting and education comes from him. All else is for him. He is the first and the last and the center of parenting and education.

He is the main thing in how you rear children and teach children and discipline children. It all begins with God and it all is built on God and it all is to be shaped by God.

If there is one memory that our children should have of our families it is this; they should remember God. God was first. God was central. There was a passion for the supremacy of God in all things.

**Second, God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that the Bible would be treasured.**

When we teach about God we teach from the Bible. The Bible is the main sources of our knowledge of God, so we should help our children to savor and value God’s word.

Verse 5:

**5**He decreed statutes for Jacob  
    and established the law in Israel,

God has established a record of what He wants us to know. The Hebrew word translated "law" (*Torah*) means "teaching." So God has laid out the textbook for learning about Him.

The Bible is the way God, the ultimate and all-important Reality, reveals himself to us with clarity and authority today. If God is more important than anything, then the Bible is more important than anything but God.

That means the Bible will be the sun in the solar system of all that we teach our children. It will not be one among many books. It will be the central book, the all-permeating book.

All other things we can learn are dark planets; the Bible is the light-giving sun. All other books will be read in the light of this book. All books will be judged by this book. All books will find meaning in the worldview built by this book. Which means that this book must be known first and known better than all other books.

**Third, God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that parents would teach.**

Others can help us with this task. Sunday School teachers and youth pastors and camp counselors and Sunday morning preachers can supplement and equip parents for what they pass along to their children, but ultimately it is a parent’s responsibility to teach their children about God.

**The end of verse 5:**

which he commanded our ancestors  
    to teach their children,

We are commanded to teach the testimony of God to our children. It is not enough to preserve the deposit of truth in a book, and tell them it is there. We are commanded to teach it. [Ephesians 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Eph%206.4) says, "Fathers, bring up [your children] in the discipline and *instruction* of the Lord." Instruction! We are to instruct them in the testimony and teaching of God.

God did not intend each generation to learn about Him the way the generation that came out of Egypt did. They walked through the parted waters. They stood at the base of Mt. Sinai. They saw the wonders of God first-hand. But succeeding generations must learn about God’s will and mighty acts from their fathers. Those who experienced the Exodus needed to tell the story to their children, and then they needed to tell it to their children, and so on and so on.

If faith and love for Jesus is to continue in the world, then the current generation of Christians need to pass it on to the next. Our children must learn about Him from us.

It has been said that the church is only one generation from extinction. You could say that about a lot of things: things like deer hunting or knitting or being a fan of the Vikings.

Let’s face it, the Vikings never win anything, so the only explanation for why anybody is a fan is because they learned it from their parents.

There are a lot better reasons for being a follower of Jesus—I think there’s a lot more proof of the resurrection than there is that the Vikings will ever win a game that matters--but still, it is God’s purpose that faith will be passed from parents to children.

**Fourth, God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that children would know.**

We teach for knowledge. We want our children to know the stories and to know God’s values and to know God. Well enough that they will be able to tell it to the next generation. From our teaching comes their knowing.

**Verse 6:**

**6**so the next generation would know them,  
    even the children yet to be born,  
    and they in turn would tell their children.

You might think that this point is virtually the same as the one before. But they aren't the same. Teaching is not the same as learning and knowing.

We cannot make our children know. We can make ourselves teach. But we cannot make them know.

Knowing is a precious thing. The kind of knowing God has in mind here is more than mere memory or raw mental awareness. Knowing is seeing into the real beauty of truth and embracing it for the treasure that it is. Parents cannot make that happen. Church cannot make that happen. We can do our best in putting God in the center and loving and praying and teaching. But in the end there is a chasm between teaching and knowing that only God can carry our children across.

**It is much like gardening**. The gardener has no control over whether the seed grows into a plant. God must cause the growth. The gardener can put in the work. The gardener can tend the soil, water and weed. The gardener provides the conducive environment, to the best of her ability. She employs all the tools and knowledge at her disposal. But she can’t guarantee the growth, cause the growth, or demand the growth. Only God can do that.

The same goes for parenting. We put in the work. We provide the best environment possible. We can teach and discipline and establish godly patterns, but the results are ultimately up to God.

Which leads to number 5:

**God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that we would all put our trust in God.**

This is the ultimate goal. The goal is not that we would have nightly bedtime prayers or that we would read our Bible at every family meal. The goal is not that our kids would know the difference between Noah and Jonah or that that they would be able to recite the books of the New Testament. The goal is that our children, as well as us, would put their trust in God.

The **first part of verse 7**:

**7**Then they would put their trust in God

As believing parents this is what we should desire for our children above all things: that they would put their confidence and trust in God. That God would be such a treasure in their lives that they would count all else as secondary and subordinate to Him. That God would be such a solid and constant presence in their lives that every decision they make: from the career they choose to the person they marry to the way they raise their own children would be influenced by a desire to honor and glorify Him.

Remember the testimony of Astronaut Rick Husband, at the beginning of the sermon? He said he wanted to be:

the best father that I could for my children, and to do everything I can to make sure that they know about Jesus and hope that they come to a point in their lives where they ask Jesus to be their Savior. And I thought if I could do that, and at the end of my life look back, that would be what really mattered to me, not whether or not I was an astronaut or anything else.”

We cannot make the decision for our kids. That relationship between them and Jesus is ultimately up to the Holy Spirit and the condition of their own hearts.

We cannot choose for them. But we can do our best to provide them with the right environment. We can model what it means to worship and trust in Jesus. We share our own love and faith in Him. We can tell the next generation.

And then, sixth, **God’s purpose in telling the next generation is that the cycle would repeat, again and again.**

This is from generation to generation. **As verse 6 says**, this is about the children yet to be born, and their children after them.

**Verse 7** puts it like this:

**7**Then they would put their trust in God  
    and would not forget his deeds  
    but would keep his commands.

This is about not forgetting. It’s about sharing a passion for the supremacy of God and treasuring the Bible from generation to generation so that we will know and trust in Him. It’s about celebrating God’s grace and love in a way that carries the message of His majesty right up to the time when He returns to take His place as the universally recognized ruler of all.

***Read, Sing, Pray***So let me encourage you, again, to establish patterns of family worship. Not just a routine of going to weekly church—or watching the weekly livestream—but patterns of regular family worship in your home, on the frontline of faith development.

Family worship does not need to be complicated. The most common outline is simple: **Read, Sing, Pray.** That’s the goal: some daily mechanism for reading God’s Word together, Singing His praise, and saying a prayer. Maybe it’s bedtime. Maybe it’s at the dinner table. Maybe it’s in the car right before dropping off at school.

It doesn’t need to last too long — probably, if you’re just beginning, it shouldn’t. As your family grows in this simple practice, you may begin to ask questions, discuss the passage that you read, and sing a song or two. But, especially with younger kids, it doesn’t have to be more than 5 or 10 minutes.

It doesn’t need to be perfect. Even five minutes can be a long time for toddlers. Attention will wane. There will be interruptions. One of the benefits of daily family worship is knowing that you will have another opportunity tomorrow. You don’t have to fit everything in each time. The main thing is that you are intentionally turning everyone’s attention to God.

And it doesn’t have to be intimidating. In fact, if it is, you might be thinking about it wrong. As with every time we enjoy God’s presence, our goal is not to add religious burdens, but rather to enjoy God as a delight. Imagine what it would mean for your children to call family worship a delight! Of course, this might not always be the case (for your children *or* for you), but as parents, we should do what we can to remove obstacles from the easy enjoyment of Christ.

If you miss a night, or three nights, or a week, just start right back up again. It isn’t a wheel that needs to be cranked up afresh or a huge project requiring a new relaunch. It is a means of grace God provides to his children. It isn’t meant to be a burden.

In family worship, we simply put ourselves and our children in the way of Christ’s blessing.

It’s how we live out the Bible’s mandate to tell the next generation. It’s our privilege to share our love for Jesus with the people we love the most.