

Teaching the Generation to Come

PSALM 78:1-8

**Baxter T. Exum (#1649)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
July 3, 2022**



It is a great blessing to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today, you might want to make sure you have the elements for the Lord's Supper from the table in the entryway, as we will be partaking of the supper right after our study this morning. And we would also invite you to fill out a visitor card online. We would really appreciate having a record of your visit with us today.

In terms of our schedule over the next two weeks, we are heading toward Florida this afternoon. We hope to see my in-laws in Ohio for a few days before heading south from there. You know that I love cold and the snow, so I am getting a bit nervous about this trip. It looks to be around 95 degrees with a thousand percent humidity down there. It looks like we might avoid any hurricanes the first week, but the second week is unknown, and I don't know whether it's just me, but I've been hearing more about shark attacks the last few days. Keep us in your prayers as we travel.

By the way, several weeks ago, a college buddy was looking for a place for he and his wife to camp somewhere near Chicago, on their way to Mackinac Island. I said, "I'm not sure you really want to be camping in Chicago!" And then he asked about southern Wisconsin. I had a few suggestions, and then he asked whether I knew of a good church in south-central Wisconsin. Why, yes I do! Then he told me that he would try to be with us on July 10. At that point, I told him that we would be in Florida that Sunday, but then I asked whether he might consider preaching here on that day. I really hesitated to do that to him. I know he needs a break. But I also know that it can be very encouraging to preach in far off places. And I also know that my friend, Danny Boggs, is a wonderful gospel preacher. He is on vacation, though, so I do hope you will go easy on him next week. I think I have actually told you about Danny before. His speech is the only thing I remember from my first speech class at Freed-Hardeman University. We had to give a "demonstration" speech. We had to show the class how to do something, and Danny Boggs demonstrated how to remove a fishhook from your finger. And for this speech, Step #1 was obviously: Insert fishhook into your finger. And then, he proceeded to show us how to remove it – snip off the barb, and then pull it out the way it went in. I will never forget that! In fact, that is the only thing I remember from that entire semester. But, Danny will be preaching here next Sunday, if the Lord wills.

As our custom has been over the past couple of years, we are starting today with the good news that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to save us. Jesus came to this earth and offered himself on the cross, he was buried, but he was raised up on the third day. We respond to what God has done in faith, believing the

message, turning away from sin, publicly confessing our belief that Jesus truly is the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

And this morning, we have an example from Danny Boggs. I thought this might be appropriate! I believe that although Danny is from Missouri, he is actually a camp director down at Green Valley Bible Camp in northwest Arkansas. Right after their recent summer session, Danny posted online and says, "Making disciples—that's what it's all about. We have all been pushing forward this week. Eight have started the race; they are in Christ where their sins are forgiven, they have new life, they are children of God, and more! Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:26-27." Amen to that!

And we had so many others this week: Olo and Pasami in Hawaii, a new brother under a bridge in Uganda, ten new brothers and sisters in Liberia, three new brothers and sisters in Columbia, one new sister from Ukraine who was baptized in Poland this week, Maria down at the Dellcrest congregation in San Antonio, Emma at the Palm Beach Lakes congregation in Florida, Willow at the Glendale Road congregation in Kentucky, three more new brothers in Uganda – there were many this week, and if you would like to follow these examples, if you are interested in learning more, please pull me aside after worship today, and we would love to study together.

This morning, I would invite you to be turning with me to Psalm 78 as we think about the importance of teaching the generation to come. Some of you know that I plan on preaching at the church in Key West, Florida, in two weeks. It has been a life goal to visit Key West, only because my grandfather, Tommy Exum, helped establish the church there, back when he was in the Navy, in 1942. I had heard bits and pieces through the years. I knew he grew up in Miami, I knew he served in the Navy. The picture on the wall up here is of my grandfather, probably on leave, in the early 1940's. I wish I knew the story of the car. Someone suggested he might have been a driver of some kind, driving officers from place to place.

All I know is that he served as "Shore Patrol," which, as I understand it, is the Navy's version of the Army's "Military Police." He always told me that his role in WWII was protecting the shores of Miami from drunken sailors.

The next picture here is of my grandfather (Tommy Exum), and I believe he is with his own father in this picture, Fred Elijah Exum. Fred worked for the Life and Casualty Insurance Company and was based out of Miami. He wrote a number of tracts about the Lord and his church and would pass those out on the train as he travelled back and forth from Miami to Nashville.

The next picture is of my grandfather, his parents, and one of his brothers. The caption under this one in the scrapbook says, "Two Sailors Who Helped Shorten WWII Jim (left) and Tom (right)." I believe their parents are pictured in the middle - Fred Elijah and Alma Jewell Selley Exum. Alma, by the way, was a successful piano teacher in Miami, despite becoming completely deaf as a teenager. By the way, if I ever try to learn piano, I think I'll be looking for a deaf piano teacher. I hope to see their graves in Miami this week.

The next picture up here is of my grandfather (Tommy) with his parents, and the caption on this picture says, "I think daddy slept in his pants to keep his pajamas looking nice." I love that! His fashion sense has carried on through the generations, I believe. But I also love my grandfather's sense of humor. By the way, we are hoping to visit this house in the background on our trip next week. They lived there for several decades and referred to it as the "homestead."

I am not here to preach an extended Exum family history, though. We are here today to learn something from the word of God. So, I want to bring it back to the establishment of the Lord's church in Key West, Florida. I am very thankful for my grandfather's service in the United States Navy; however, I am even more proud of his service in God's kingdom, the church. As he explained it to me through the years, when he was stationed in Key West, his home congregation, the Central Church of Christ in Miami, was interested in starting a church in Key West. So, they took out an ad in the local paper down in Key West, looking for members of the Lord's church. Basically, "If you are a Christian and if you are interested in meeting together as a church, please get in touch." My grandfather is 19 years old at this point, serving in the Navy, and he volunteers to use his leave time to go door to door in Key West, following up on those leads. Six people responded to the ad in the paper. He took those six names and found every single one of them. I remember him telling me about walking all over the island following up on those leads and getting a sunburn in the shape of his Navy outfit. As he describes it, one of those contacts was a Cuban woman working as a court reporter. She arranged for them to have the first meeting of the new congregation in the courthouse, in a courtroom – similar to the way we used Elvehjem Elementary School. They set a date, June 7, 1942, and my grandfather tells me that they had eleven people that first Sunday, so they sat in the jury box! And that is how the church began in Key West, Florida. They went on to purchase property and construct a building, and they are still in that building today. They are a small congregation, but they are a valuable resource for Christians who travel to the Keys.

Now, here is a weird twist for us: Several years ago, after a hurricane hit the area, a group from Freed-Hardeman University traveled down there to do some cleanup work, they stayed in the church building in Key West (using it as their home base for meals and for sleeping). That group was led by Caleb, the son of Danny Boggs, who will be preaching here in Madison next Sunday as we are on our way down there!

Anyway, as we think about God's word being passed along from generation to generation, I would invite you to look with me at Psalm 78:1-8, and then I'd like to bring some practical lessons from this passage. This Psalm, by the way, is written by Asaph, a chief musician in the temple, during the reign of King David. This is Psalm 78:1-8,

- 1 Listen, O my people, to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.***
- 2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,***
- 3 Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.***
- 4 We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.***
- 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,***
- 6 That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born,
That they may arise and tell them to their children,***
- 7 That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments,***
- 8 And not be like their fathers,***

***A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.***

As we allow these ancient words, long preserved to give us strength and help us cope, let's apply these words from God's own heart by looking, first of all, at the mission that God has given us to accomplish here. And then I want us to notice the goal of all of this – Why must we do what he tells us to do here?

I. But, first of all, let's look at the MISSION, let's look at the COMMAND THAT IS GIVEN.

A. And the command comes in two parts, starting with the encouragement for us personally to LISTEN to what is being said in this Psalm.

From 1 Chronicles 25:2, we know that Asaph is a prophet. Asaph, then, speaks with God's authority. Asaph is inspired, and in verse 1 he is encouraging us to *"listen."* We are to listen to his instruction. We are to *"incline"* our ears to the words of his mouth. To *"incline"* is to lean in, to stretch out, or to perhaps turn the head. It's the picture of a Beagle sleeping on the couch; when she hears a plastic wrapper, her eyes may still be closed, but the ear twitches and then her head very quickly turns to the direction of the sound. So also, our ears are to perk up when we hear the word of God. We pay attention. And specifically, here in this Psalm, Asaph tells us that he will be speaking in *"parables"; he will be uttering "dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us."* In other words, this is an ancient message; but, it is relevant for today; the message is timeless. Verse 2, by the way, is quoted by Matthew with reference to Jesus. In Matthew 13, Jesus speaks parable after parable, and Mathew explains that *"...this was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'I WILL OPEN MY MOUTH IN PARABLES; I WILL UTTER THINGS HIDDEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.'"* The *"prophet"* there is Asaph, and the quote is from Psalm 78! So, the first command in this passage is that we listen, that we pay attention to the word of God. Listen carefully, because if we don't, we might miss something.

Let's take this passage as a reminder, then, to spend time listening to the word of God. We live in a world full of distractions, so we need the constant reminder to listen to the word of God. I was just talking to somebody last week about getting off the ferry in Ketchikan, Alaska, finding a New Testament at a thrift store, and reading through it over the next three days on the ferry. I've packed that same New Testament for our trip this week, and the goal will be to spend some time in the word of God. This one is "The Message," a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson, but it is good to get a new perspective every once in a while. We can listen in the car, we can read a hard copy, or we can read it through an app or on a device, but Asaph wants us to pay attention. If you'd like a real challenge, resolve to spend as much time reading God's word this week as we spend listening to the news or scrolling through social media. But the point is: We are to listen to the word of God.

B. The second command given by Asaph in Psalm 78 is that we are to TEACH the word of God.

We will not *"conceal"* his word from our children. The word of God is valuable. These ancient words have been handed down to us. The word of God is a valuable treasure, an inheritance, and this inheritance must be passed along from one generation to the next. Imagine having an inheritance and hiding it from your children. Imagine burying it in your backyard and not telling your kids where it is before you die. What a waste! If we love our children, then, we will pass along this treasure, the same treasure of God's word that we have been given. And we have some content to our teaching here, all focusing in on God.

Notice, first of all, we must tell the next generation about the PRAISES of the Lord. In other words, we explain to our children and grandchildren why God is worthy of our praise. We speak of God's attributes – he is eternal, he is immortal, he is loving, he is merciful, he is good, he is just, and so on. He is worthy of our praises. Secondly, we tell of God's STRENGTH. We tell them of God's power. We tell the stories – we explain the account of creation, we describe the great flood, we speak of the exodus from Egypt, we teach the crossing of the Jordan River, we explain the conquest of Jericho, and so on. We describe his WONDERFUL WORKS that he has done. We think back to the Ten Plagues, and BEFORE one of those plagues (in Exodus 10:2), God tells Moses that he is doing these signs among the people *"...[so] that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I performed My signs among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."* Isn't that amazing? God performed these signs, not so much for Pharaoh's benefit, but for the benefit of Moses' children and grandchildren. In our case, we teach about Jesus and the miracles he performed – the healings, raising people from the dead, giving sight to the blind, and so on. And then, finally, we pass along God's LAW, his testimony. He gave us his word. We warn, we admonish, we explain that God has every right to make demands of us. He is God and we are not. In all of this, notice how God is the focus of our teaching. When we teach the generations to come, we speak of God's praises, God's strength, God's works, God's law. When we teach the generations to come, we are not to focus on how great things were back in the good old days, we are not to focus on how lazy and undisciplined kids are these days; no, we tell them how great God is. God is the focus of our teaching. And, indeed, this is what we see throughout the rest of Psalm 78. We're just looking at the first 8 verses. The rest of this Psalm is the text of Asaph's lesson. In verse 13, he refers to the crossing of the Red Sea. In verse 14, he refers to God leading them with a pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. In verses 15-16, he refers to God providing water from a rock, and so on throughout the chapter. God is the focus of our teaching. In a world of immorality, we don't throw our hands up in despair, but we get busy teaching the next generation the praises, strength, works, and Law of God.

- II. **As we come to the last few verses in Psalm 78, I want us to consider the GOAL: WHY DO WE LISTEN AND TEACH? WHAT IS THE POINT OF THIS? This is the "SO WHAT?" section of this lesson. WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO? WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?**

And once again, God is the focus!

- A. **In verse 6, we teach so that the generation to come might come to KNOW God.**

Yes, we are to love God, yes, we are to serve God, yes, we must obey God, but we cannot skip this most critical step of KNOWING God. Some may try to skip this step and go straight to the emotion part of it, but taking that detour will almost certainly get us lost in the process. If we try to love God without knowing God, our love is superficial. Love without knowledge is empty. To love without knowledge is to create a god in our own image. So, to love, we must know. Our goal, then is to teach in a way that the next generation comes to know God. And he makes himself known to us through scripture.

- B. **Our second goal, our second mission, is that we are aiming to teach the next generation to TRUST GOD, to PUT THEIR CONFIDENCE IN GOD.**

The goal is much more than just hoping that our kids do well on some kind of Bible test. Our goal is for the next generation to take what they know about God and translate that knowledge into faith – the kind of faith that causes them to truly put their confidence in God. And we teach this by the way we live. We demonstrate what it means to live by faith. We put God first. We show them what it means to trust God. We cannot lead any further than we are willing to go ourselves. I can't say, "Hey kids, trust God!" when I am unwilling to trust God

myself. They need to see me stepping out in faith – giving beyond what I am able, serving in ways that go above and beyond what is expected. Maybe we share stories of how God has blessed us. We show and tell, so to speak, with the goal of seeing the next generation demonstrate their own trust in God. What begins in the head must move to the heart.

C. A third goal also comes in verse 7 as we find that we teach in such a way that the next generation will KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

Our mission, then, is not just knowledge and faith, but our goal is to encourage OBEDIENCE. What starts in the head and moves to the heart must continue through to the hands and feet. Knowledge and feelings must express themselves in behavior. Our goal in teaching is to encourage the next generation to ***“keep His commandments.”*** Our goal in teaching is to encourage the next generation to be doers of the word, not just hearers who delude themselves (going back to James 1:22). Perhaps we apply and demonstrate God’s law of sowing and reaping (summarized in Galatians 6:7-8). We show that following God’s law has some very practical benefits, and ignoring his law has some very uncomfortable consequences. And like those others, we demonstrate this by the way we live ourselves.

Obedience or disobedience has a way of being passed down from generation to generation. I’ve mentioned before that many years ago we went door-to-door down in Janesville, and I teamed up with one of the young men from church. We were in a rather new subdivision on the south side of town, and we hear a man running down the street after us, “Hey you! Hey you!” I don’t answer to “Hey you,” but he continued, “Get this trash off my door!” and on and on. I was not backtracking, I was on a mission, so I told him, “If you don’t want what I left on your door, feel free to chuck it.” Well, we kept going, but I noted the address: 1618 Arbutus Street. Months went on, and I noticed in the news that a young man, a teenager, was arrested for violently attacking and robbing a elderly woman in the Wal-mart parking lot. He beat her up, and pushed her to the ground, and took her purse. And in the article, they gave the young man’s address. You know what it was, don’t you? 1618 Arbutus Street. And I thought to myself, “I’ve met that young man’s dad! I know where he learned that kind of abusive behavior.” Both obedience and disobedience have a way of being passed along from generation to generation. Our goal is to raise up kids like Joseph, who (although far from home and abandoned by his own family) ran from temptation and reasoned to himself, ***“How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?”*** (Genesis 39:9). Joseph not only knew God and trusted God, but he obeyed God as well.

And, as Asaph indicates in verse 8, one way of teaching obedience is to use negative examples from the past as well. Later in this chapter, we come to verses 40-41, where he refers to his own ancestors and says, ***“How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness and grieved Him in the desert! Again and again they tempted God, and pained the Holy One of Israel.”*** We learn from the mistakes of others (even from our own ancestors).

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this passage, I know we’ve been thinking in terms of our own children. And I know, it is important to bring up our own children in the ***“discipline and instruction of the Lord”*** (Ephesians 6:4). It’s very easy to think, “As long as get our children through to the age of 18 or maybe 21, our job as parents is done. However, as look back at what Asaph tells us in this passage, it’s a bit more than that, isn’t it? As we close, let’s think for just a moment about the generations involved here. In verse 3, Asaph refers to ***“our fathers.”*** Those are the grandparents in this picture. They have taught ***“us”*** the word of God. We are the parents here. He then says that we must not conceal these things our ***“children.”*** These are the grandchildren (the third generation in this picture). But then he says that we are to teach this third generation (even the ***“children yet to be born,”*** in

verse 6), so that they (the third generation) ***“may arise and tell them to their children.”*** I don’t know about you, but I’m seeing at least four generations in this passage, maybe even five. I’m just saying that this is much bigger than our immediate families. And I’m saying that this is a team effort. This applies not just to those who still have children at home, but this applies to the elderly. This applies to the youth. This applies to young married couples.

One thing that strikes me about this picture up here is that my grandfather was 19 and 20 years old when he helped establish the Lord’s church in Key West, Florida. I think of the date of that first meeting in the courthouse – June 7, 1942 – my dad (Ray Exum), my grandparents’ oldest child, would not be born for another three years. I am not sure whether we have anybody with us today who’s 19 or 20 years old, but you have the ability to start a congregation of God’s people in a far-off place. You have the ability to be a tremendous blessing to God’s kingdom. You have the ability to teach God’s word to the next generation, even if you don’t yet have children of your own. You may never have children of your own, and that is okay, but you have the ability to make a lasting difference. Eighty years later, and more than ten years after his own death, the church in Key West is still active, still teaching and preaching in a pretty difficult mission field.

Back in 1942, do you think a 20-year old sailor might have found something a little more fun to do on his days off in Key West, more fun than going door-to-door following up on contacts and arranging for a place for the church to meet? I’m guessing he could have had a lot of fun, but he chose to do something eternally significant. And we can do the same.

I’m thinking of Chuck and Kathy Oppermann. Some of you know that Chuck retired as a pipefitter from the John Deere plant over in Horicon, in his 50’s. Many who retire in their 50’s might choose to coast on out, living lives of luxury. Chuck decided to train to become a gospel preacher. He and Kathy moved to Florida and enrolled in the Florida School of Preaching. They then moved back to Wisconsin and gave the next few years of their lives to the church in Beaver Dam, doing a great work. We have members here in Madison using their senior years to sort clothing. Others correspond with prisoners. We have young men using their skills to get our services online. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations. And yes, the gospel must travel from one place to another, but the gospel must also travel through time, from one generation to another. And all of us have a role to play.

We LISTEN to the word of God, and then we TEACH it. We teach it so that the next generation will KNOW God, so that they will TRUST God, and so that they will OBEY God (learning from the mistakes of the past).

Before we prepare for the Lord’s Supper, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the everlasting God, king of all ages. You are eternal, immortal, the only wise God. Today, we are thankful for your message, delivered to us many years ago through Asaph the prophet. We pray that you will give us wisdom and strength as we look for opportunities to teach your word to the generations that will come after us. We pray for our children. We pray for our children’s children. We pray for those not yet born, that we would have the opportunity to see them come to know you, and trust you, and obey you. Bless us, Father, as we come before you this morning in worship.

We come to you today in the name of your Son, Jesus, our King. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com