

## “The Next Generation’s Hope”

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Scriptural Foundation: Psalm 78, NIV

### A maskil of Asaph.

<sup>1</sup> O my people, hear my teaching;  
listen to the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will utter hidden things, things from  
of old—

<sup>3</sup> what we have heard and known,  
what our fathers have told us.

<sup>4</sup> We will not hide them from their  
children;  
we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,  
his power, and the wonders he has  
done.

<sup>5</sup> He decreed statutes for Jacob  
and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our forefathers  
to teach their children,

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

<sup>7</sup> Then they would put their trust in God  
and would not forget his deeds  
but would keep his commands.

<sup>8</sup> They would not be like their forefathers—  
a stubborn and rebellious generation,  
whose hearts were not loyal to God,  
whose spirits were not faithful to him.

The rest of this psalm records the history of Israel through the exodus and entering into the land. The last verse reads,

<sup>72</sup> And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.

When Robert Ingersoll,<sup>1</sup> the notorious skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street, after hearing the lecture, one said to the other, “Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn’t he?” The other said, “No, I don’t think he did. You see, Ingersoll did not explain my mother’s life and until he can explain my mother’s life I will stand by my mother’s God.”

We cannot underestimate or overstate the powerful influence of a godly mom. Moms are God’s choice servants for the next generation, to help the next generation to put their hope in Him. For all the tasks a mom engages in today, car pooling and laundering, budgeting and cooking, disciplining and scheduling, organizing and nursing, doctoring and comforting, and counseling, the great goal for the Christian who rises as Mount Everest above the rest of the mountains is the goal of having children who walk with God.

Here is the first stumbling block for the 21st Century mom: having inferior hopes for our children dominate our thoughts and our minds. We will fail our children and, more importantly, we will fail our God if we do not force inferior hopes from our hearts.

I remember eighteen years ago when God gave my wife and I our first child, a beautiful boy. In worship Kimberly and I consecrated Alexander to the Lord for His use, for God’s pleasure, to do with as God pleased. We wanted only one thing for our son. We wanted him to enjoy God, to know God, and to glorify God with his life. However, throughout our lives, and throughout Alexander’s growth from the time he was a baby, inferior hopes knocked on the door of our hearts.

For instance, from a very early age, a little past one, Alexander loved balls of any kind: footballs, basketballs, baseballs. Whatever kind of ball you would put in front of him his hands were on it and he was delighted to catch it

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<sup>1</sup> Robert G. Ingersoll, 1833-1899), American politician and orator known as “the great agnostic” who popularized the higher criticism of the Bible, as well as a humanistic philosophy and a scientific rationalism. Ingersoll’s principal lectures and speeches, published as *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879) and *Why I Am Agnostic* (1896), Encyclopaedia Britannica On-line.

and throw it. It seemed as though he had great skill and acumen with hand/eye coordination. There is an inferior hope: maybe he will become a great athlete; maybe he will be able to get a college scholarship someday; maybe he will be a professional basketball player and provide for his mom and dad. (Laughter)

Then, around age three Alexander began taking interest in letters. He began to put them together with, what we considered at the time, unusual accuracy and intellect. We thought, “Boy, this guy is really, really smart. Maybe he will be come great inventor. Maybe he will be some great intellect and do something incredible in this world.”

Not long after that, around age four or five, my wife, who loves music, set Alexander before the piano. It seemed as though Alexander had an acumen and an ability behind that instrument. We thought he may become the next great concert pianist, the one who would thrill the world with music to the glory of God, of course, but nonetheless with music flowing from his fingertips.

These and many more inferior hopes came knocking at the door of our hearts. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with wanting our children to excel in many fields throughout life. In fact, I believe it is very healthy to help our children to gain knowledge, skill, and wisdom in all kinds of fields, but when these other goals for our children do not serve the one great goal, the great goal of worship and the glory of God, these goals become idols and they actually harm our children rather than help them. The challenge for us is to keep God focused and in clear view.

Over one hundred years ago, G.K. Chesterton<sup>2</sup> asked this question: “Can anyone tell me two things more vital to the race than these: What man shall marry what woman and what shall be the first things taught to their first child.” Through Psalm 78 God instructs us as to the second part of that question: what are the first things to be taught to our children.

This is a message for moms, but it is also a message for dads, but more than that, it is also a message for grandmas and grandpas as they have opportunities to invest in the lives of little ones. It is also a message for Sunday school teachers and AWANA leaders. In fact, it is a message for every adult Christian who knows a child because God intends for each one of us to be part of this great process of passing on this hope in God to the next generation. God calls us to help children to put their hope in God.

There are three great convictions which rise out of Psalm 78 to lead children to put their hope in God and which we must teach. The first great conviction is: God is great. The second great conviction necessary for children to put their hope in God is: The Bible is God’s Word. The third great conviction Psalm 78 reveals to us is: Obedience brings blessing.

We will look at the first conviction which is absolutely essential and central to God’s plan for our instruction of children: **God is great**. God is central to all of life. He is not peripheral. He does not stand at the outside edges of our thoughts, dreams, motivations, goals, and pleasures. God is not only in the center, He is the Center. He is the core of life itself for us. He is the sun of our personal solar system. Everything revolves around Him, is created by Him, and is created for Him for His pleasure and for His glory. He is not to be given a Sunday morning nod and then a walk throughout the rest of life as though He is on the outer-lying edges.

Rather, He great and as such He is to be our constant focus and our constant joy. God is infinitely great and that is the reason why it is so vital for us to have Him at the very center of our being, thoughts, hopes, and dreams for our children.

Asaph begins Psalm 78 this way,

<sup>1</sup> O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.

Asaph is pleading for people to listen to the wisdom of God as God has revealed it to him and as he communicates it. This reminds us of Solomon’s entreaty throughout Proverbs. In Proverbs 1, Proverbs 4, and Proverbs 5, Solomon says, to the effect, “Listen my son. Listen to your father’s instruction. Pay heed to your mother’s teaching. Listen.”

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Keith Chesterton, 1874-1936, *ibid*.

Jesus also echoed this same kind of plea when He says, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>3</sup> Take care what you listen to.”<sup>4</sup>

Peter’s very first sermon after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is begun this way, “Listen carefully to what I have to say.”<sup>5</sup> This would be incredibly arrogant if he spoke only from his own authority, save Jesus the Son of God. It would be arrogant for Asaph or Solomon or Peter to say, “Listen, because what I have to say is of utmost importance,” but it is not arrogant because it is God’s revelation they are communicating. All this emphasis upon bending the ear and listening to God’s revelation, they understand to be the very source of life itself. It is from Scripture one gains salvation.

Proverbs 29, the King James Version, reads,

<sup>18</sup> Where there is no vision, the people perish...

I read that verse much today, but unfortunately I read it in a twisted manner. Many church-growth gurus will read this verse, and it is the only verse they quote from the King James Version because other versions do not connect with the word “vision”. They promote the idea that God intends for His church to have a forward-thinking, goal-oriented plan for the future of ministry and if ministry does not have that it will die. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with having a goal-oriented plan for the future, but that is not what this verse is saying and it is not the basis upon which a church lives or dies. Many churches have great visions in terms of an expressed statement for the future, and they are dead churches spiritually. It is not the vision a group of leaders comes up with which create spiritual life, but what is Proverbs 29:18 saying?

We read from other translations, “Where there is no revelations, its people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” (New King James Version) The idea is, of course, without God’s revelation communicating who God is and what His will is for us and what His ways are and what is His leading and what is His direction God’s people will perish. That is true for your sons and daughters as well. It is true for our children.

The earnest call is, as God gives us this truth, that we would listen and give our complete attention. Shall God speak and His children refuse to listen? The application for moms and dads and Sunday school teachers and anyone who knows a child and the first order of business for ourselves as we anticipate readying ourselves to be able to be a blessing to the next generation is to listen to what God has to say through His revelation through Scripture. If we do not listen we will not be equipped to teach the greatness of God because it is the revelation of God alone which teaches us of His greatness,

<sup>2</sup> I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old— <sup>3</sup> what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.

Asaph is going to review all he has learned from the older generation and of the revelation of God and God’s working throughout Israel’s history. The emphasis, of course, is going to be on teaching the next generation,

<sup>4</sup> We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation...

Asaph is echoing for a later generation of adults what Moses first taught in Deuteronomy 6,

<sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Every where, through out the day, we are to impress this truth of God’s revelation upon our children. Our culture promotes a values-free and God-absent education for children in which children find out for themselves the values they would adopt. What is right and wrong is to be discovered from within the educators would tell us. There is no greater point of reference for direction in our lives than one’s own person. We should not be surprised when we read

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 4:9

<sup>4</sup> Mark 4:24

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:14b

in the papers week after week of the tragic consequences which comes from over fifty years of experimenting with such educational philosophy. But, Christian, God intends for us not to merely be frustrated by this philosophy, by this form of education upon our children in the public realm, and God does not intend for us to be complaining about such, but what does He intend for us to do? He intends for us to get busy and start laboring to see the children around us are hearing Scripture for themselves. Each one of us has a great responsibility in their life.

When we see a child, one of the first things we should think when we talk with them is, “What little bit of God’s Word can I impart to them? Can I tell them a Bible story? Can I tell them a biblical principle? Can I share something with them about God and His greatness? Can I let them know some little picture?” Would it not be great, with little children walking the halls, that they would be stopped four or five times on a Sunday by different people on a Sunday saying, “Let me tell you a little bit about God’s mighty works.” Would that make a difference? I tell you it would.

Everyday, throughout their week, they do not have anyone except their parents, and this is the time when we, as Christians, can begin to say, “We need to have a singular focus upon helping our children understand the greatness and the glory of God Himself.”

Moms and dads, your children need you to feed them. A mom or dad may protest at this point and say, “But, it is hard and my children resist being taught. They do not like it.” I know children do not often naturally enjoy being taught the revelation of God, but I tell you, use patience, creativity, and persistence to help them learn about Him.

It is the same way when our children are babies and we must feed them. They get to the point where they can take baby food and we do the “airplane” and we finally get the food in their mouth. What happens? Sometimes there is something they do not like at all and they make a face and out it comes. Sometimes, even if they like it and they cannot take it all in, out it comes. Sometimes one tenth stays in and nine tenths comes out and we gather it up. What do we do? Do we throw up our hands because they do not like it and we give up, “Fine, I am not going to feed you!” No, we apply creativity, persistence, and patience because the baby needs to be fed. That is what we do all through our lives as parents. We need to apply creativity, persistence, and patience because they need to know the greatness of God.

Asaph continues,

<sup>4</sup> ...we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

The focus of our teaching is not on morality, but it is on the greatness of God. Morals will only be effective and powerful in our instructions, if those morals are attached to the context of a God who is a God of righteousness, holiness, truth, power, sovereign wisdom, goodness, and love.

The first focus is not, “Am I teaching my children right from wrong?” That is a part of our responsibility, but the first focus is, “Do my children know God is a great and awesome God?” Christian, our priority in teaching our children is that they would have a true knowledge of God. Such a knowledge is the chief goal of our very existence. Why are we born? That we would know God. What is our end? That we would know Him and enjoy Him.

I love Jeremiah’s words in Jeremiah 9,

<sup>23</sup> This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

Let not the parent boast that their children grow up and become very wise and learned. Let not a parent boast their children grow and become strong and athletic. Let not a parent boast their children grow up and become very wealthy and successful. If we, as parents, boast about anything, let us boast that our children know and understand the Lord, that He is good and kind and awesome.

This must not be merely a theoretical knowledge, but it must be a knowledge of the most personal kind. A larger, magnificent knowledge of God is the only cure for idolatry and all its forms,

<sup>7</sup> Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

<sup>8</sup> They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

It is the greatness of God which connects all obedience to a heart. It is a magnificent knowledge of God that is the only cure for idolatry and all of its forms.

Our children will be able to resist the siren songs of the idols of sex, materialism, drugs, power, and sloth, not simply because we have told them how horrible these sins and lesser gods are, but rather they will be able to resist the siren songs these gods sing when they have presented before them and they have embraced the greatness of the God who reveals Himself by His Spirit's Word and they understand He, and He alone, is worthy of worship. That is when they are going to be able to say, "No!" to these false idols.

In one of Martin Luther's letters to Erasmus, he said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." Psalm 51:21 says something similar to the apostate nation of Israel when God says, "You thought I was altogether like you." That is the god painted by a world which does not have Scripture. If we ask a person on the street, "What is God like?" As we listen to their description, if they are applying their description not from Scripture, their description is going to be someone quite like them, "Here is what God is like: He is a bit like me. He is a little bit better than me, but He is quite a bit like me." Only in the Bible do we find a description of God that is Holy Other and Holy Transcendent.

Friends, could this be said of us, that our thoughts of God are far too human? Are we unveiling for our children and the children who are near to us a God of infinite greatness? This is why I confess I am a passionate Calvinist. The Bible reveals a great God whose will cannot be successfully resisted, whose designs are never frustrated, whose purposes are always fulfilled, and whose power is absolute and sovereign over all creation,

2 Chronicles 20:6 "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."

Job 23:13 "But he stands alone, and who can oppose him? He does whatever he pleases."

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted."

Psalm 115:3 "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him."

Whatever God pleases that is exactly what God does. God is no paper king. Let us listen and let us consider and let us fall down on our faces and let us worship the God who is infinitely great.

Why is this idea of God so practically significant? Is this not some sort of academic interest? Verse 7 reminds us, "Then, when they are taught the greatness of God they will put their hope and trust in Him," trust so they might have hope and life. The application is this, we must pursue a view of God that is wholly worthy of Him and then we must worship Him.

The second conviction is: **The Bible is God's Book.** In Verse 5 of our text, Asaph speaks of this Book. They were the Scriptures of Moses, the Old Testament saint,

<sup>5</sup> He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children...

All through Scripture, the testimony of this Book, is this Book is a book written by God, about God, for the glory of God. In the Bible we have a fixed reservoir of truth about God and about ourselves. God is the One speaking to us through this medium. If we wish to know God we must listen to the record God given us. It is a living record; it is an active record. It is a powerful record to us of a revelation about His person and about our lives.

John Piper writes, “If God is more important than anything, then the Bible is more important than anything but God.” The implications of this for parenting are staggering. It means the Bible will be the sun in the solar system of all we teach our children. It will not be one among many books. It will be the central Book, the all-permeating Book. The other books are dark planets. The Bible is the life-giving sun. All other books will be read in 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 this Book must be known first and be known better than all other books.”

Can we say that is true? How thankful I am that I had a mom and dad who taught me the Bible as being God’s very Word and they taught me that, not only through their words to me and their encouragement to me to read the Bible on my own, but through their practice I saw their worn out Bibles worn out from use. I am thankful they took me to a church that taught me how precious the Bible is,

“The B-i-b-l-e  
Yes, that’s the Book for me  
I stand alone on the Word of God  
The B-i-b-l-e”

That was one of the very first songs I learned. I do not remember when I first learned that song because I was so young.

I am thankful I had an elderly lady, who was in her 70’s at the time, who taught children’s church. Can you imagine a person in their 70’s investing in children? Yet, here she was and what could she teach children? I tell you, she taught me a whole world of truth and preciousness about God’s greatness and this Book. I remember she would say, “O, children, it is so important for you to memorize the Bible while you are young. When you get to be my age it is much harder to memorize Scripture. What you memorize now will be precious truths about God you will hold throughout all your life.” Little did I know how much truth she said on that Sunday. Sunday after Sunday she would open up the Bible and teach me God’s precious Word to reveal Himself to us.

Recorded by the Holy Spirit, super-intending human authors, what the writer’s wrote was a perfect, inherent, authoritative record of His will and of His person. It is given for us to be the compass to navigate the dark forest of this 21st Century. It always, always points us to true north.

The third conviction is: **Obedience brings blessing.** Asaph, from Verse 9 on, reviews some big chapters in Israel’s history. He reviews the exodus and God’s mighty miracles and works in the exodus. He reviews the entrance into the land of Promise. He reviews this history with all the works included and all the times the people of Israel rebelled. Why did he do that? That is not the way to build a national spirit by telling all the failings. He did that so future generations would learn, not through the sad, bitter, and painful experience of their own personal life, suffering underneath the consequences of personal disobedience, but so they could learn from others who had gone before them.

There are two ways children learn. They learn the easy way and they learn the hard way. Unfortunately, many children choose to learn the hard way, do they not? “Don’t touch that. It is hot.” They do and they learn, “You are right. That is hot!”

It is so important for us to teach children so they at least have the opportunity to learn the easy way. They will not always receive it, but we must make it available and make it available constantly before them. We teach them the easy way through the examples which are written in the Bible for our comfort and, also, as warnings to us as to the consequences of sin.

Obedience brings blessing and the converse is also true: sin always brings cursing. But, also, it is important for us to teach our children through Scripture about the consequences of sin through the examples in the Word, through our own examples, and the examples of others around us.

Little children love to hear stories of their parent’s lives. When my children were little they would often say, “Daddy, tell us about when you were a little boy.” I do not want to just tell stories at that point, but I also want to teach them something about a lesson. I told of some of my friends who went wayward and what happened to them. I told of the

times I was disobedient and what happened. I told them of the times when I was obedient and what happened. But, I wanted to connect them with this truth: God is great. The Bible is the Word of God. Obedience brings blessing. These are lessons filled throughout the pages of Scripture.

Does obedience to God really bring blessing? Yes, always. Does disobedience really bring cursing? Yes, always. We must not think as the people of Israel did, that God's mercy and patience is a sign that God is ambivalent about sin because He is not. As we read through this psalm we will see that is what the people actually thought about God,

<sup>18</sup> They willfully put God to the test... <sup>40</sup> How often they rebelled against him in the desert... <sup>41</sup> Again and again they put God to the test... <sup>56</sup> But they put God to the test...

We see a theme of a people who would not God's Word at face value, but they continued to put Him to the test. What does it mean "to put God to the test"? It means to look up to God and say, "God, do you really mean what you say? I am going to test you to see if you really mean what you say. Does sin bring cursing? Does obedience bring blessing? I am going to test you in a negative way."

The application for biblical parenting is this: we are called to see that our children understand obedience to God is found inside the context of God's redemption,

<sup>42</sup> They did not remember his power—the day he redeemed them from the oppressor...

Why did they put God to the test? They forgot and they did not remember God's power and His greatness and they did not remember the day He redeemed them. Obedience outside the context of God's redemption is a very frustrating thing because the Law cannot deliver us from the power of sin. The reason why the people of Israel kept going back to sin is because they were enslaved to it, and that is where you and I are and that is where our children are. It is not enough to say, "This is wrong," but we must point them to the Savior.

The message of God's redemption is now fuller than what Asaph had because God has sent His Son, who lived a sinless life, to fulfill all the requirements of the Law for us, and who died upon the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, to pay the penalty so we can be free from guilt. He arose from the dead to show His power is greater than the power of sin and darkness. If we connect to Him we will be free from the guilt of our sin and from its power. That is what our children need to remember.

We cannot think because we told them the Gospel once we can walk away from that and say, "That is a lesson we do not need to return to." We must go back to the story of God's redemption each and every day so our children will know in the context of God's redemption there is an opportunity for obedience and for blessing.

The application I close with is this: make some plan to get the Word of God, with the themes of His greatness and redemption, to your children. We make plans for things which are important to us, but, parents, you must have a plan so they would learn and know the Living God. Let us, also, make a plan for when we come to church that we might be ready on Sunday morning to share the reason for the hope that is within us. It is in this way the next generation will put their hope in God.