

Family Matters: Raising Good and Godly Kids

Psalm 78:1–7 (NIV)

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.

Introduction. On an early Saturday afternoon some 39 1/2 years ago, Patty and my life changed drastically as a small infant gasped for his first breath. As a new parent, I had little clue regarding the challenges before us in raising a good and godly child. I thought we had plenty of time to learn and failed to realize how quickly the time would pass until he would be on his own.

Thirteen years ago on June 24, Patty and I received a call from that same son telling us Anastacia Grace had been born. I can hardly describe the joy I felt. Once again our lives changed and we took on a new challenge of being grandparents and doing all we could to spoil her. It is hard to believe Ana is a teenager. (Honestly, I think if I could I would skip parenting and go straight to grandparenting.) Our hope for our grandchildren is that they will be good and godly kids.

What you heard from Psalm 78 is a huge challenge to us regarding raising our children. Will we raise good and godly children? Will our children come to know the story of God and live into that story? Will they experience the fullness of life our God intends for them?

The stakes are high.

Our children and youth are living in a world filled with possibilities; the sky is the limit. (For many of them they will probably soar beyond this earth's atmosphere if Musk, Sir Richard and Bezos's efforts are successful.) Our children and youth can live prosperous lives filled with meaning and make a huge difference in the world around them. It is truly a great time for them to be alive and growing up. They can learn the faith, be firmly grounded and grow into godly women and men. Most of us here believe with all our hearts that God wants to bless them beyond measure.

But this world in which our children and youth are living and will grow up has a dark side that can bring enormous suffering and pain.

SLIDE 1

- In their world, they will be confronted with cultures of violence. They may be bullied or be the bully. They may associate with groups where they are in danger of being shot or being the shooter. They can be caught up in systems where they can bring intentional personal pain or even death on themselves.

SLIDE 2

- In their world they will be confronted with addictions that can rob them of their freedom and make the captive slaves. A seemingly innocent experiment that others promise will bring ecstasy can start them down a path of struggle, pain and bondage. They can be robbed of all the positive possibilities our world offers.

SLIDE 3

- In their world they will face challenges to long held and fundamental values that will cause them to question their true identity and true meaning of life. The pathway of following these alternative values will lead many to great confusion, pain, damaged relationships and hopelessness.

SLIDE 4

- Many will experience emotional dysfunction that will leave in its wake confusion, disruption and anxiety that will haunt them throughout their lives.

SLIDE 5

- Many will be offered pseudo-love that promises much but only delivers destructive and broken relationships that cause living on earth to seem like living in hell.

The stakes could not be higher for our children, grandchildren and those children and youth in our networks of our families and friends. This high calling of God to nurture our children is so vitally important. Our children need every advantage possible to escape the dark snares of our world. Our children need to know of and live into the amazing blessings of God. They need to be part of a community where they can be with a community of people whose faith is real, love is genuine and healthy.

Role of Parents, Grandparents and Surrogates.

Psalm 78 lays on us the huge responsibility of instructing and nurturing the next generations. The psalmist reminds his readers that they know the story and ways of God because they were told by their parents and grandparents. Had it not been for this, those things may have remained hidden from them and their fate would have been extremely dark. Now what one received is to be shared with the next generation..

In many ways our children enter into this world as a blank slate onto which their lives will be written. While they do come with some genetic markers and given human traits, what is written on each child's slate will largely determine who and what they become. As people of faith, we have a huge responsibility in writing the story of God onto their slate. If parents, grandparents or people in their lives who love them don't do the writing, it is likely something will be written on the lines intended for matters of faith. What may be (or probably will be) written will be a distortion or aversion to the faith. Most of the children in our families and networks are not likely to learn the things of God on their own.

The psalmist makes it clear that the act of sharing the story of God and God's desires and design must be intentional. If a parent hopes it will happen or says, "I will get around to it," it is not likely to happen. In homes and families when we fail to be intentional in setting aside the time, energy and resources to nurture our children in the faith, other parts of life will quickly crowd it out. There are a lot of authors wanting to write on the slate of our children and youth and these can fill up the slate in a short time. While not all these stories are bad (some are), all are inadequate substitutes for the ultimate value and effect of the story of God and God's design.

To make the need to share the story with our children even more urgent is found in the fact the time passes quickly. Listen as Chrissy, our children's director explains this.

Show Video here.

So how do we as parents, grandparents and surrogates go about teaching our children the stories of God and God's desires?

SLIDE 6

The first and most powerful way this happens is by modeling being a follower of Jesus Christ in your home. Do your children or grandchildren hear you praying? Have they ever seen you opening scripture and reading it? Have they seen you and been with you as you have served in helping others? Have they seen how you spend your money and how you give? Have you paused to listen to and carefully respond to their questions of faith? Have they seen you loving or cursing your enemies?

SLIDE 7

Closely related to this is committing to **doing spiritual exercises with your children and youth**. Do you set aside times to pray with each other and/or have family devotions? Do you make time to share good Christian based resources with your children and youth? (My 6 year old granddaughter loves to get my ipad or phone to play on the Bible for Kids app? Do you watch good movies or shows with the family that stimulate godly and life questions?

SLIDE 8

The next is one that is dear to my heart - **bringing your children to church and helping them to engage in the community of faith**. If parents or grandparents don't bring their children, it is not likely the children will come. Sometimes a neighbor or friend might be able to do so but immediate family plays a critical role. Know this, the church is here for you and to walk alongside you and to equip you in this important adventure.

My dad has often said, "I don't have to decide whether I am going to church each Sunday. I made that decision long ago." Guess what? That was the way we functioned as a family. As children and youth, our dad made a family decision that we would go to church. That decision made such a difference for my siblings and me. It was not an option for us but what we lived into. We enjoyed participating.

The final way is to set the right goals for your children and grandchildren. Now there are lots of good goals - great education, well-paying and fulfilling vocation, marrying a wonderful spouse, being able to care for themselves, *not moving back into your home*.

The psalmist provides the goals for raising the next generation. He believed that by sharing with our children the story of God and God's desires, they would place their trust in God, remember what God has done and keep God's commandments. The psalmist knew that if these were accomplished, their lives would be filled with meaning, they would live in God's blessing zone and would avoid the snares of the dark side of this world.

These four activities - modeling the faith, doing spiritual exercises with our children, bringing them to church and setting Godly goals are more than a checklist. These are to be integrated into the whole of life. These become who we are and how we related to our children and youth.

We have a huge responsibility as parents, grandparents and people who care. Let us do all we can to share the story of God and God's desires with the next generations.