

Tell the stories

Church of the Covenant, Washington PA

Psalm 78:1-8

Sept 18, 2016

Last weekend was the Day of Remembrance for the events of September 11, 2001. Memorials were held in New York City, Washington DC and Schwenksville, PA, where survivors, family and friends, and dignitaries retold the stories of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in NYC. In Pittsburgh and around the country groups held special services to remember 9/11 and to pray for this country. Even here at COTC we had special music, worship, prayers, and even a moving, somber slide show of photos from 9/11. Our church printed a booklet where members shared stories of their experiences and memories of 9/11. People around the country proclaimed, “We must never forget!” and they fulfilled that by telling stories.

Groups hold similar gatherings to share stories about WWII, or the Holocaust, or about their experiences during Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Sandy. It is human nature to tell stories! Even at family gatherings and birthday parties we share stories.

I imagine that every year my family is going to retell the story about my grandson Carter’s 2nd birthday. Last year he wanted that birthday cake so badly that he was determined to get it. He climbed up on the dining room table, so my daughter moved the cake box to the kitchen counter. Then we all got involved in preparing the house for the birthday party. Carter meanwhile stretched and reached up until he got a hold of that box of birthday cake and pulled until it finally slid off the counter and crashed to the floor. What a mess! Now we laugh about it. His third birthday is next week, I’ll have to let you know how it goes!

Are there stories in your family that have been told so often that everyone knows them by heart? Wouldn’t it be great if we knew Bible stories that well?

Psalm 78 was written to remind God’s people about God’s saving acts in history and about his marvelous persistent grace so that they would put their faith in God and his covenant, and obey God’s commands.

This Psalm is one of about 12 written by Asaph or his descendants. Asaph was a worship leader and Levitical music director for the choirs of King David’s worship center. Psalm 78 contains instructions and admonitions to Asaph’s congregation to remember the stories passed down from their ancestors. Asaph said, “Hear my teaching. Listen to what I have to say. I will remind you of the stories about God’s actions in history that our ancestors told to their children.”

This morning we are going to ask investigative questions about this psalm: **who, what, why, when, where.**

Who heard Psalm 78? Asaph wrote, or sang, this Psalm to the people of the tribe of Judah thousands of years ago. His congregation were members of one of the twelve tribes of Israel living around the region of Jerusalem. Even though the psalm was written for a particular people in a particular place and time, one of the marvelous things about the Bible is that Scriptures have value to all people of all generations. The apostle Paul, a NT teacher who wrote letters to early churches, told the Corinthian church that the OT stories were written as examples and warnings for God’s people in later generations. (1 Cor 10:6,11)

In verse 1 of Psalm 78 the speaker says that all of us are to tell these stories to the next generation. God commanded our ancestors to teach their children, each generation passing the stories on to the next generation, from the time of Moses until our time, and we must pass them on to our children and our children’s children.

So **WHAT** is it exactly that we are supposed to tell the next generation?

In verse 2 Asaph describes the stories he is telling as “parables” or “riddles” or “hidden things.” One author defines a parable as “the placing of one incident or story alongside something else so we might learn by

the comparison.”¹In the rest of Psalm 78, Asaph retold the stories that were most important to him, stories about how God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God sent many plagues against the Egyptians until they set free hundreds of Israelite slaves. God then led the tribes through the wilderness of the desert, providing water and bread and meat, and giving them shade clouds during the day and fire light to guide them at night. Psalm 78 goes on for 3 or 4 *pages* recounting all the deeds that God did, how he provided for his people and how they responded – sometimes with faith and gratitude, and other times with rebellion and disobedience.

When you are considering what stories to share with the next generation, think about those stories you remember most easily, the ones that have impacted you the most. One of my favorite stories is the one about Joseph, who was so obnoxious that his eleven brothers ganged up on him and sold him off as a slave to some Egyptians who were passing by. Joseph had hard times and good times in Egypt, and after many years he was made the pharaoh’s chief advisor. A terrible drought and famine affected all of the Middle East, and eventually his brothers traveled to Egypt in search of buying food for their clan. Joseph recognized them, and calmed their fears by saying,

“Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” (Gen 50:19-20)

Remembering this story and its outcome gives me hope when times are tough, remembering God’s faithfulness in overcoming evil with good.

What are your favorite Bible stories? Which ones give you hope or encouragement? Which ones give you incentive to be a better person or to follow more closely in Jesus’ steps? If you can’t think of any in particular, then you better sign up for one of the excellent adult study groups that are starting up next week! See the info table in the Commons after worship!

Many of our most well-known stories are in the New Testament, stories about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and stories about the growth of the early church. I like the story that Pastor Stu preached about a few weeks ago, where the four friends were so determined to have their paralyzed friend healed by Jesus that they tore open their neighbor’s roof and lowered the man down into the living room right in front of where Jesus was sitting! That is true friendship! Jesus told the man, “your sins are forgiven. Take up your mat and walk.” And the man did! Wow! What an incredible example of putting your faith into action!

When you are thinking about what stories to share with “the next generation,” remember also the stories about God’s actions in the lives of people throughout the past 2000 years. Many of you have heard of Corrie ten Boom, a Christian who was sent with her sister Betsy to the concentration camps because they were caught sheltering Jews in their home. Corrie told the story of the awful conditions in the women’s barracks, especially in the one where she and her sister Betsy were forced to live. The women were so crammed in the filthy living conditions that all of them were suffering from fleas and lice. It wasn’t until years later, after Corrie was freed, that she learned that none of the guards would enter inside their barracks because of the bugs. Those bugs protected the women from sexual harassment, persecution, and even made it possible to hold Bible studies without being caught! Corrie realized that God was able to use even lice and fleas for good in the midst of a wicked terrible situation.

Share the stories of God’s actions in other people’s lives, but don’t hesitate to share the stories of how God has worked in your lives too. I remember the first year that I was alone with two kids to raise. God provided one job after another so that I could pay the bills. Winter in New England brought lots of snow. I still remember how Mr. Arvo who pumped my gas and fixed my car came over in the middle of the night to plow my driveway for free because he knew my situation. I praise God for hearing my prayers and taking care of me during a difficult time of my life.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Vol 2*, p.645

In Psalm 78, Asaph has given us examples of what to share. I, too, have given you some examples of the kinds of stories you can share with the next generation. But **WHY** should you even bother telling stories about your faith? In Psalm 78:5 Asaph reminds his congregation that long ago, when God gave the Ten Commandments and other laws to Moses, he commanded that the people teach them to their children. Jesus too told his followers to “go and make disciples of all nations..., teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:19).

Verse 7 & 8 state that by telling the next generation the deeds of the Lord, “Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commandments. They would not be like their ancestors – a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”

If people forget what God has done, if they never even acknowledge God at all, if they reject the teachings of the Bible and ignore what it cost God to redeem us from our sins through the death of Jesus on the cross, then when trials come they will have forgotten they can trust God; when temptations come they won't love God enough to obey him and resist the temptation. Knowing the stories of God's actions in history, his love for his people, his mercy and kindness, knowing Jesus personally, who loved you enough to die on the cross so you could receive forgiveness for your sin, those true stories, handed down from generation to generation, give “strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.” Like the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians in Rome, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Rom 15:4)

Who, What, Why – the next question I want to ask is this: “**Where and When** are we supposed to teach the next generations?” For this one we need to turn back to Deuteronomy 6:4-7 where God said his commandments, his teachings, and his mighty deeds, “...are to be upon your hearts. 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.” Parents, God wants you to teach your children about Him. Try sharing around the dinner table something that happened that day that reminded you of God. Perhaps something you watch together on TV is a stimulus for talking about how God wants us to live. Sometimes the lyrics of a song on the radio can spark a conversation about how God wants us to treat other people. Church of the Covenant has classes Sunday mornings for children and adults. There are small groups that meet during the week to study topics or books of the Bible. Grow in your own faith and knowledge of the stories so that you will be able to share with others.

By the way, the phrase “next generation” is not limited to your own biological children under the age of 16. The “next generation” refers to anyone who is younger than you – whether you are 20 or 40 or 60 or 80 or 100! Tell them the stories of Jesus and of God's actions in history so that they too will have saving faith.

In review:

Who is supposed to tell the next generation? Each one of us, every believer.

What are we supposed to tell them? The stories from the Bible and from our own lives about God's actions in history, God's commandments, the life of Jesus Christ, and the consequences of turning away from God.

Why is it important to tell the next generation? First, because God commanded it, and second, so that those who hear will have faith in the living God and in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Where and when do we tell the next generation? Everywhere and any time!

Remember: the Church is only one generation away from Extinction! But if teachers, parents, friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, repeat those God stories frequently enough, they will make an impact on the next generation. We must simply be faithful on our part, and trust the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of the “next generation,” whoever they may be, to lead them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have One last story I want to share with you. Author and teacher Josh McDowell told this story at the Ligonier Conference in Orlando Florida in January 1990. I believe that it is true.

There was a man in England, Dr. Frances Dickson, who did a lot with Bible Crusades in New Zealand, and Australia. Josh McDowell repeats all the details, but basically, everywhere Dr. Dickson preached, he met people who all had the same experience: The individual was walking down George Street in Sidney, Australia, when out of nowhere stepped a little old gray-haired man. He said, ‘Excuse me, sir, could I ask you a question? I hope you won’t be offended. If you were to die today, do you know where you’d spend eternity? The Bible says it ‘ll either bein Hell or it’ll be in Heaven. Would you think about that please?thank you. And God bless you. Toot-a-loo!’ and the man left. Later they each related how “I couldn’t get that question out of my mind. When I got back to England I sought out a Christian and I came to know Christ as my Savior and Lord.”

When Dr. Dickson was in Adelaid Australia he met another person with the same story. Back in England he shared about Peter and Noel and the fellow in Adelaide. Afterward a woman said she had the same experience when she visited Sidney, and later she was converted to Christ. It happened again in Keswick England, and in India, and in Jamaica. By this time Dr. Dickson had to find out who this guy was. He traveled to Sidney Australia and went to a Christian businessman there and told him what he had experienced. The business man said, “Everyone knows who that is. That’s Mr. Jenner. But he just got out of the hospital and is confined to his bed.” The business man took Dr. Dickson over to meet Mr. Jenner, and Dickson started to share all the stories of so many people come to Christ. The little old, gray-haired man started to weep and weep. He finally said, “That is the first time in twenty-three years that I’ve ever known of anyone coming to Christ through my testimony.”

Don’t ever give up! Persevere! Keep on striving to know Christ and make him known to the next generation, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn will tell their children so that all those people will put their trust in God and their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Amen.

Charge: Let the answers to the questions “Who? What? Why? When? Where? Instruct you as you “tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.” (Psalm 78:4).

Benediction: May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever. Amen.