

"Honey, We're Killing the Kids" Psalm 78

Introduction

- I don't remember when. It was a couple of months ago I think. Miriam and I were channel surfing and we came across a reality show on *The Learning Channel* called *Honey We're Killing the Kids!* The premise of the show is that parents need a wake-up call concerning the childhood obesity epidemic in this country. The host of the show is a nutrition expert who bluntly explains to parents how their everyday choices impact their children long-term. The title of the show reveals that these parents by their choices, by the junk food they eat and their sedentary routine are in essence killing their kids. The most intriguing and dramatic moment of the show is when sophisticated computer imaging software analyzes all of the family's lifestyle choices and projects the future faces of the children. Often times, the pictures presented to Mom and Dad are utterly frightening.
- What if it were possible to project the future spiritual lives of our children based upon the choices we as parents are making in their lives right now? What would the results be? By your choices for them, by what you teach your kids or your grandkids what will their spiritual lives look like thirty years from now? Are you killing your kids spiritually? I hate to break it to you but children do not naturally drift toward holiness. They naturally drift toward spiritual Twinkies, Ho Ho's and Ding Dongs. Children don't drift toward godliness and prayer and obedience to Scripture. They need to be taught it. It needs to be handed down to them. As [Don Carson](#) has said, "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."¹
- I just don't understand. How is it that we can spend so much time and energy and effort finding the perfect soccer shin guards for our kids, or spend hours and hours shuttling our children to the ends of the earth for athletic competitions, or fill their lives with music lessons or gymnastics or hunting and fishing trips and then wonder when they are grown up why their spiritual lives are anemic, dormant, or even dead? Please hear me. I'm not against these things. I can't wait for the day when Ethan plays in his first soccer game or Micah his first piano recital or the three of us go on a trout fishing trip. The problem is that these things are simply not as important as the spiritual heritage we are commanded to pass down to them. I am deeply concerned that the long-term consequences of the everyday choices we as parents make for our children now project a spiritual future that is utterly frightening.

Transition

¹ D. A. Carson, quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today, October 2006, p. 134.

This morning, as we turn to God's word in Psalm 78, the message for us as parents and grandparents is clear...

Proposition

- **Our chief responsibility as parents and grandparents is transmitting to the next generation God's glorious deeds so our children might trust in Him**
- One of the *The Songs of Life* we sing is the song for our children. Our hearts yearn for our children. We birth them, we toil for them. We live and die for our kids. We long to give them every good thing. And even if we are unable to have families of our own, we realize we live for those that come after us. Psalm 78 is God's way of reminding us of our top priority as parents so that we give our kids what they need the most. More important than the food you put on the table or the roof over their heads or their education or the cultural experiences you give them, your children need a spiritual heritage in Christ.
- But our kids will not embrace a spiritual heritage by osmosis. Your children aren't going to mysteriously absorb your faith or a biblical worldview without some intentionality on your part. How many of us take the words of Deuteronomy 6 seriously? *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 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. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*² If your children are going to learn to live for the fame and glory of God you are going to have to impart it to them. The role of the church and children's ministry is to equip you to do your job and reaffirm and support what is being taught in the home. But, if your children are going to embrace your spiritual heritage in Christ it's got to come from you. They've got to hear how God is working in your life. You've got to take the time to teach them. Fathers, you've got to take ownership of this. God has asked you to take leadership in this area. And along with your spouse, together, the two of you—**your chief responsibility as parents is to transmit to your children God's glorious deeds so they might trust in Him.**

Background

- I think one of the reasons our kids wander from God when they are old enough to assert their independence is because the picture of the Christian life we present to them when they're young is not as compelling or captivating as all the other fluffy junk food like things we fill their lives with. By what we choose to fill their lives with—often times at the exclusion of Christ—we communicate to them that the Christian life is an add-on, something second rate, a Sunday only event. Our kids are astute observers. If they see in our lives no romance, no mystery, no excitement, no largeness, no wonderment in following Christ it's not difficult to project that they will grow up bored with the god of their parents and turn to other things in adolescence and adulthood.

² Deuteronomy 6:6-9

- That's where Psalm 78 comes in. Psalm 78 is a selective history of Israel. It is history retold with a purpose. It's not a dusty record disconnected to real life. It's the compelling, captivating, romantic, mysterious, wondrous story of Israel's God transmitted to the next generation so that they might trust in Him. Kids, do you realize how awesome the God your parents love and serve is? He's awesome in his deeds, he is glorious in his miracles, he's majestic in his power, his grace and mercy is worth bragging about. And even if we as your parents or grandparents don't always model it perfectly, the only thing that matters in life is living for His glory.

Transition

Look at Psalm 78. I want to look at verses 1-8 because these first eight verses give the purpose statement of the psalm. The lengthy history starting in verse 9 is recorded to fulfill the purpose outlined in verses 1-8. Listen again to [verses 1-8](#).

Main Points

- *O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old-- 3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 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. 5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers 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. 8 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 purpose of this selective history told in parable form is to drive a lesson home—that's what parables do, right? And the lesson is that if our children grow up to be stubborn and rebel against the things of God, if they leave the home and their hearts are proud and disloyal to Him, the reason is because they have not been captivated and compelled to belief by our instruction and teaching. Yes, kids grow up and have a choice to either follow God or reject him. That's not the point. The point is that while we have them we are to do everything we can to unlock their hearts to his grace, we are to shape and mold and form our children with such passion and diligence and vitality that when the time comes for them to make their faith their own, the choice is easy—they choose God.
- Again, the purpose, the reason we are charged with the responsibility of telling the next generation about *the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done*, as it says in verse 4, is very specific. These things must not be hidden, they must be passed on so that our children, even those yet to be born, might put their trust in God and not forget him. Look at verse 7. Verse 7 is key. *Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.* Let me try to explain what I think this verse is saying. If we faithfully pass on what God has commanded, if we talk about these things when we rise in the morning, if we

use all of life's experiences to illustrate a biblical worldview, if we stamp his teachings on their heart, if we point our kids to God's praiseworthy deeds, his power through the cross of Christ, the wonders of his merciful and gracious salvation—if these things are constantly on our hearts spilling out in our speech and consistently modeled before our children all of this together—cumulatively—will produce a threefold cord of faith in their life as verse 7 says: personal trust, informed and humble thinking in the form of *not forgetting*, and an obedient will.³ Isn't this the prayer and dream of every Christian parent? A child who personally trusts God and has experienced his grace, a child whose spiritual memory keeps them from the practical atheism of forgetting about God in their day to day life, a child whose pliable will obeys and keeps God's commands. Let me say it this way. Whether or not our children follow Christ depends on God's grace and they must personally respond to that grace. But God's grace, more often than not, works itself out in the home through parental training and instruction. And if our kids are not being drawn to God and his grace through our teaching and instruction while in the home then, "honey, we're killing the kids."

- Miriam and I by no means have things figured out but I just want to take a couple of minutes to share with you how we are working with Ethan. Again, I'm not saying these things to put ourselves on a pedestal but to encourage you so that together we can raise a generation for His glory. I asked Ethan's permission and he said it was okay to share these things. Most days we begin at breakfast with a short reading from a children's bible. Ethan can't wait to read and usually reminds us when we forget. He often prays at our meals. Near the end of breakfast all of us practice saying our weekly scripture memory verse. Following breakfast, Ethan frequently sits on the sofa flipping through his illustrated comic strip-like bible—sometimes for hours at a time. One of his favorite things to listen to is a CD with stories about missionaries to Muslim nations and the amazing demonstrations of God's power that brings those Muslims to Christ. Before bed, we again try to read several bible stories or work through a children's catechism. The catechism contains questions and answers which Ethan is asked to memorize. Here's are some examples.
 - Who made you?
 - God
 - What else did God make?
 - God made all things.
 - Why did God make you and all things?
 - For His own glory.
 - How can you glorify God?
 - By loving Him and doing what he commands.
 - Are there more gods than one?
 - There is only one true God.
 - In how many persons is this one true God?
 - Three
 - What is God?
 - God is Spirit and has no body as we do.

³ Kidner, p. 281-2.

- Who wrote the Bible?
 - Chosen men who wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 - What did God give Adam and Eve besides bodies?
 - He gave them spirits that will last forever.
 - What is sin?
 - Any thought, word, or deed that breaks God's law.
 - What does every sin deserve?
 - The wrath and curse of God.
 - How did Adam and Eve change when they sinned?
 - Instead of being holy and happy, they became sinful and miserable.
 - What did Adam's sin do to you?
 - It made me guilty and sinful.
 - How sinful are you by nature?
 - I am corrupt in every part of my being.
 - Can you go to heaven with this sinful nature?
 - No. My heart must be changed before I can be fit for heaven.
 - Who is able to change your heart?
 - The Holy Spirit alone.
 - How, then, can you be saved?
 - By the Lord Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace.
 - What kind of death did Jesus die?
 - The painful and shameful death of the cross.
 - What is meant by the atonement?
 - Christ satisfied God's justice by His suffering and death in the place of sinners.
 - What must you do to be saved?
 - I must repent of my sins, believe in Christ, and live a new life.
 - How do you repent of your sins?
 - By being sorry enough for my sin to hate and forsake it.
 - What does it mean to believe in Christ?
 - To trust in Him alone for my salvation.
- Will Ethan embrace his spiritual heritage by osmosis? No. Will he mysteriously absorb a biblical worldview without some intentionality on our part? No. Is Ethan bored with the picture of the Christian life he has so far? Not one bit. Are some of these concepts beyond him as a four year old? Yes, but he understands far more than I would have thought. And the conversations these questions have elicited—amazing. Does Ethan understand that nothing is more important than Christ and that Christ is the center of our home? I think so. Will Ethan follow Christ when he's my age? Only God knows. But while Miriam and I have him we want to make him so sensitive to his condition apart from God and so sensitive to God's grace in answer to that condition that when the Holy Spirit prompts him with the good news of the cross of Christ he'll readily—he'll willingly receive Him. **Our most important responsibility as parents is transmitting to the next generation God's glorious deeds so our children might trust in Him.**

Transition

It's in this spirit that the remainder of Psalm 78 is written. Verses 9 through to the end are in some sense a catechism that instructs the younger generations. We're going to take a closer look at the rest of Psalm 78 next week and from those verses I'm going to share with you [six lessons](#) we need to pass on to our children.

Conclusion

- I want to conclude this morning with a true story. In 1993 FBI agents conducted a raid of Southwood Psychiatric Hospital in San Diego, which was under investigation for medical insurance fraud. After hours of reviewing medical records, the agents had worked up an appetite. The agent in charge of the investigation called a nearby pizza parlor to order a quick dinner for his colleagues.
- According to the website snopes.com, a site dedicated to sleuthing out urban legends, the following telephone conversation actually took place.
 - **Agent:** Hello. I would like to order 19 large pizzas and 67 cans of soda.
 - **Pizza Man:** And where would you like them delivered?
 - **Agent:** We're over at the psychiatric hospital.
 - **Pizza Man:** The psychiatric hospital?
 - **Agent:** That's right. I'm an FBI agent.
 - **Pizza Man:** You're an FBI agent?
 - **Agent:** That's correct. Just about everybody here is.
 - **Pizza Man:** And you're at the psychiatric hospital?
 - **Agent:** That's correct. And make sure you don't go through the front doors. We have them locked. You will have to go around to the back to the service entrance to deliver the pizzas.
 - **Pizza Man:** And you say you're all FBI agents?
 - **Agent:** That's right. How soon can you have them here?
 - **Pizza Man:** And everyone at the psychiatric hospital is an FBI agent?
 - **Agent:** That's right. We've been here all day and we're starving.
 - **Pizza Man:** How are you going to pay for all of this?
 - **Agent:** I have my checkbook right here.
 - **Pizza Man:** And you're all FBI agents?
 - **Agent:** That's right. Everyone here is an FBI agent. Can you remember to bring the pizzas and sodas to the service entrance in the rear? We have the front doors locked.

- **Pizza Man:** I don't think so.
- Sometimes because of our choices, the words we say, no matter how truthful or well-intentioned, simply aren't credible. We can talk about Christ and teach about God till we're blue in the face but if by our choices our words have lost their credibility then our children will respond to Christ like the Pizza Man responded to the Agent. "I don't think so." They're not going to buy it.
- Passing a spiritual heritage on to your children is not only dependent upon your words it's dependent upon how you live. It starts with you as parents. It's dependent upon how your children see you and observe you day in and day out. Does Dad really believe all this stuff about Jesus? Does it really affect his life and his conversations and his priorities? Has Mom's life really changed because of Christ? Is she a different person because of Him? If you've blown it as parents. If by the choices you've made or by the neglect of your responsibilities you've let your kids down, then you need to repent of that and confess that breach of integrity to God and your kids. There is grace. It's never too late, even if you're children are grown have kids of their own. Children, even if you're grown and out of the house, if you're parents have tried to pass on to you a spiritual heritage and you've wanted nothing to do with it, then you need to repent of your stubbornness and remember that your parents are trying to hand down to you something that is worth more than all the gold in the world. *But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, 21 so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Let's pray. Parents, by the grace of God through Christ *I urge you, in the sight of God, to live lives worthy of the calling you have received.*⁴ And children, *Remember your leaders—your parents, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.*⁵

⁴ Ephesians 4:1

⁵ Hebrews 13:7