

"Honey, We're Killing the Kids, Part 4" Psalm 78

Introduction

- I don't remember how old I was. I don't even remember where we were going. Our family was driving in the car on the way to somewhere and we passed on the side of the road a dog that had been hit by a car. The dog's back was broken. Horrible sight. Without getting too graphic, the dog was alive but incapacitated.
- What I've tried to do for the four weeks we've been in Psalm 78 is to construct the skeleton, the backbone of a godly, biblical heritage. Are these things the sum of what needs to be passed down? No. But they are the key vertebrae that support the entire skeletal structure. There are countless other smaller bones in the skeleton; carpals, and metatarsals, and false ribs that also need to be passed down. But if we fail to faithfully and effectively pass on the lessons from Psalm 78 to the next generation we deprive them of a backbone and leave them spiritually disabled.

Transition

For the last time, let me remind you of the key teaching of Psalm 78.

Proposition

- **Parents, your chief responsibility is to transmit to your children God's glorious deeds so that your children might trust in Him**

Organizational Sentence

- **Again, there are six (6) lessons in verses 9-72 that must be passed on to our children if they are to grab hold of God and live for his glory.**

Transition

Remember, Psalm 78 is a history. It is a historical record given for the purpose of teaching the next generation about God. And, teens—kids, the goal of handing down these lessons to you is so that you won't be like your parents or your grandparents or like me. Those who go before you are stubborn and rebellious as verse 8 says. And you need to hear what God is like as he interacts with stubborn, rebellious, sinful people. You need to hear of God's great and glorious ways.

- When we, your parents and grandparents persist in sin, when we rebel against God, when we are not loyal to him, when we are faithless this is who God is to us. He is a God who keeps his covenant to not pour out his wrath on our sin but on Christ instead. He is a God who, through Christ, is patient, merciful and gracious. We, your parents and grandparents, are the beneficiaries of his goodness. *Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.*¹ And our greatest desire as parents is that you might know him too.

Transition

¹ Psalm 86:8

Let's focus our attention now on the three remaining lessons from this Psalm. [Lesson four](#), coming from verses 40-55 is that **God is a powerful redeemer**. [Lesson five](#), from verses 56-64 is that **God jealously guards his own glory**. And [lesson six](#), from verses 65-72 is that **God is a God of hope**.

Main Points

- One of the striking features of this psalm is that throughout this record of God's great deeds God's people don't get it. We are thickheaded. Verse 10, God's people break his covenant. Verse 17, they continue to sin. They rebel. Verse 18, they put God to the test. Verse 19, they speak against God. Verse 22, they are faithless. Verse 32, in spite of his goodness, they keep on sinning. And in verse 40, where we pick up the story, nothing has changed. *How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel.* But the lesson of verses 40-55 is that **God is a powerful redeemer**. "Our failure and rebellion...cannot ultimately stymie God's purposes."² We must pass on to our children that it's in God's nature to turn all circumstances, even those caused by sin, to his advantage.
- This section is a retelling of the plagues of Egypt as examples of God's great redeeming power. The Israelites had been enslaved by Egypt for 400 years and God powerfully redeemed them. [Verse 42](#). *He redeemed them from the oppressor. He displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt. He turned their rivers to blood. He sent swarms of flies and frogs that devastated the Egyptians. He gave their crops to the grasshopper and destroyed their vines with hail. He struck down their cattle and their firstborn sons. But he brought his people out. He guided them safely to his land he had prepared for them.* But the people forgot. [Verse 42](#) again. *They did not remember his power.* And the point as it relates to the next generation is this, if God's redemption is forgotten, faith won't last long.³ Faith can't last if stories and examples of God's redemption aren't passed on. Let me restate it this way. "Rebellion is rooted in a failure of memory, a failure above all to remember the time when God 'redeemed'."⁴ If we want our children to grow up and put their trust in God they need to understand this aspect of God's character. *He is the God who restores the years that the locusts have eaten.*⁵ He is the kinsman redeemer in Ruth. He is the divine redeemer who ransoms people from the curse of sin and death through Christ.
- I received my class ring during the fall semester of my junior year in high school. I was far too proud of that ring. And I had it in my possession for just a couple of months when I lost it. I was ice skating with my youth group friends at a rink in Northern Kentucky, about an hour from our home. And the best guess as to what happened is that my ring finger contracted while on the cold ice and the ring slipped off my finger. Just picture forty kids skating in and around the crowd searching for this lost ring. We never found it.
- Fast forward one year. For one year my parents kept encouraging me to pray that the ring would be found and restored. I didn't think they were crazy because I prayed. Faithfully.

² Davidson, p. 259.

³ Kidner, p. 284.

⁴ Davidson, p. 256.

⁵ Joel 2:25

Then, one afternoon my dad received a call from a man who was putting a new roof on the skating rink. This man was walking around in the mud where the Zamboni dumps the ice after sweeping the rink and he found a ring. He recognized my high school, saw my name on the inside of the ring, found a phone book, called the first of several Hesses who might have been an option and my dad answered phone. Later that week my dad put that ring back in my hand. There wasn't a scratch on that ring. To this day that ring I was once so proud of reminds me of 1 Peter 1:18. *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold [like a class ring] that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.* To me that ring is an Ebenezer, a marker of God's great redeeming power through Christ whose blood is far more precious than any gold ring. **God is a powerful redeemer.** He redeemed the Israelites by the powerful plagues and he redeems us now by the powerful blood. He is in the business of taking things that are empty and worthless and dead and filling them, giving them value by bringing them to life. What stories do you have? How has God redeemed your life? Do your children know your stories? Do they know the biblical stories of redemption? Do they realize that this is who God is and how he works? He is our redeemer.

Transition

That's the fourth lesson? God is a powerful redeemer. Now the fifth. Turn to verses 56-64.

- Through God's redeeming power Israel is established in the Promised Land. But again, in spite of God's powerful redemption, verse 56, Israel puts God to the test. They rebel against the Most High. They disobey his commandments. They repeat the mistake of their forefathers who died in the wilderness. Like them they are *disloyal and faithless*. Listen to the word picture used to describe the children and grandchildren of Moses and Joshua. God calls them *faulty bows*. They are *as unreliable as a bow gone slack*.⁶ You bow hunters, think how infuriating that would be. God couldn't count on them. Why? Verse 58. Their idolatry. *They angered him with their high places*. They did what their neighbors the Canaanites did in building little altars on every high hill. And this aroused God's jealousy. Look at the rest of verse 58. *They aroused his jealousy with their idols* in direct contradiction to Deuteronomy 5:6-9. *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 7 "You shall have no other gods before me. 8 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.*
- And so the events described in verses 59-64 directly result from God's jealous love for his people. Like a jealous lover what does God do? He abandons the tabernacle and sends the ark, that golden chest which carried the two stone tablet on which were written the Ten Commandments; he sends the ark off into captivity, as verse 64 says. That would be like the Statue of Liberty in the hands of Al Qaeda. The situation was so tragic that when Eli's pregnant, laboring daughter-in-law heard the news of the ark's capture, she named her son Ichabod, or the glory has departed, then died.⁷ God's glory departs not because he's jealous

⁶ Davidson, p. 257.

⁷ 1 Samuel 4:19-21

of their idols or our idols for that matter, they're nothing to him. He's jealous for their affection which is rightly due him because he's the one who covenanted with them and redeemed them. He cannot tolerate covenant unfaithfulness.

- And the lesson for us within this story is the **fifth lesson** we must pass on to our children. **God is a jealous God.** *For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.* He demands exclusive worship. No dating a second on the side. No two-timing. You dance with the one who brung ya. You know those black silhouettes you see on the sides of the houses of the woman and her rolling pin chasing the husband who's running for his life? I'm obviously exaggerating, but that's a picture of God's jealous love for his people. He chases us down with discipline. That's what happens to Israel in these verses. God withdraws the glory of his presence and then disciplines them, *he gave his people over to the sword*, verses 62-64.
- What our children must realize at a very early age is that the grass isn't greener on the other side of the fence. As parents you have to be intentional and graphic in your explanations and in your examples as to how a life apart from God is utterly foolish. Let your children feel and see and taste and touch smell the folly of sin before they're tempted to live it themselves. Kids, teens, don't bother testing the waters of a life apart from or without God. There's nothing there worthwhile for you. Ask your parents and grandparents who've already tried it and experimented and come back. Listen to their wisdom. Now listen closely. But if you do, if you wander, if you test him, if you rebel you run the risk of invoking the discipline of the jealous lover of your soul. And if you are really His he will hound you. *God disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.*⁸ He will not let you go. You may run to the pig sty like the prodigal but your life will be miserable until you return to his love.

Transition

That brings us to the last lesson. As I said last week, if Israel's record in this psalm is her shame, God's persistent goodness emerges as her hope (and ours) for the unfinished story.⁹ And that's the **sixth lesson** we must pass on to our children. **God is a God of hope.**

- The way this psalm ends is completely unexpected. All throughout this Psalm Israel fails. And God is gracious. Israel rebels. God withholds punishment. Israel wanders. God is mercilessly steadfast in waiting for her to return. And you'd think, especially with the low point of the ark heading off into captivity that the psalm would end on a down note. But it doesn't. Recalling the events of 1 Samuel 5 these verses, 65-72, describe how at Israel's bleakest hour God awakes and restores the ark to Israel. Verse 65. *Then the Lord awoke as from a sleep, as a man wakes from the stupor of wine. He beat back his enemies; he put them to everlasting shame.* There's hope. In spite of Israel's disobedience and stubbornness and rebellion, this last section oozes hopeful anticipation. Not only does God restore the ark, he builds a sanctuary, verse 69, to replace the tabernacle that was abandoned in verse 60. Hope. And he raises up David, his chosen servant from the sheep pens to be shepherd of his people. David was Israel's hope. Ezekiel 34:23 *I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.* Hope. So what must

⁸ Hebrews 12:6

⁹ Kidner, p. 286.

be passed on to our children? What is Psalm 78 trying to accomplish as it closes. The same thing Paul says in Romans 15:4 *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. God is a God of hope.*

- There are few messages that people younger than me want to hear more than this message; that God is a God of hope. If you're in the boomer generation, you might not understand. You're the generation of endless optimism and progress. You've seen vaccines wipe out disease and technology make life easier. But your children see global warming ruining the earth. Right before their eyes they've watched millions in Africa die from AIDS. And so people my age and younger often times feel a prevailing sense of hopelessness about the world. This is especially as it relates to the church. In the eyes of your children, the church doesn't understand them, it can't relate to them. Most people younger than me have lost hope in the church. I think this cartoon perfectly sums up the youngest generation and their hopelessness. [Show slide] As [Jimmy Long](#) put it, "Most of us nowadays have changed from a belief in progress, or future hope, to resignation in the face of human misery, or present despair."¹⁰ But the good news is this longing for hope leaves the door wide open for God to speak to the human condition of hopelessness. God is a God of hope.
- As this psalm ends there is great hope and optimism for the future of Israel. And this hope must be passed on. Not a namby-pamby "we wish this will happen." But a strong solid confident hope—this is what is coming. Our children need to hear what the future holds, how God is in control of history and how an amazing future awaits those who trust in God. *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*¹¹ This present world, what you and I see and experience, that's not all there is. There's more. It's coming. Jesus, the Messiah of hope, ushered in this new dawn of hope. It begins with him and God's story is still unfolding. The kingdom of God is at hand. It has broken in among us and is growing and spreading. And our king's return is nearer now than before. *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God that awaits us.*¹²
- If the next generation is going to embrace a biblical heritage it's going to take work on everyone's part. Parents you are going to have to make a serious, sustained, conscious effort to instill these precepts in the lives of your kids. And teens, children, your greatest challenge will be learning to tune out the cultural noise and tune your hearts to listen to the whisper of God.

Conclusion

- Listen to the words of [Max Lucado](#). "Stefan can tell you about family trees. He makes his living from them. He inherited a German forest that has been in his family for 400 years.

¹⁰ Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, p. 115.

¹¹ Revelation 21:2-4

¹² Romans 5:2

The trees he harvests were planted 180 years ago by his great-grandfather. The trees he plants won't be ready for market until his great-grandchildren are born. He's part of a chain. "Every generation must make a choice," he told me. "They can either pillage or plant. They can rape the landscape and get rich, or they can care for the landscape, harvest only what is theirs, and leave an investment for their children." Stefan harvests seeds sown by men he never knew. Stefan sows seeds to be harvested by descendents he'll never see. Dependent upon the past, responsible for the future; he's part of a chain.

- Like us. Children of the past, are we. Parents of the future. Heirs. Benefactors. Recipients of the work done by those before. Born into a forest we didn't seed. Which leads me to ask, how's your forest? As you stand on the landscape bequeathed by your ancestors, how does it look? How do you feel? Pride at legacy left? Perhaps. Some inherit nourished soil. Deeply rooted trees of conviction. Row after row of truth and heritage. Could be that you stand in the forest of our fathers with pride. If so, give thanks, for many don't.
- Many aren't proud of their family trees. Poverty. Shame. Abuse. Such are the forests found by some of you. The land was pillaged. Harvest was taken, but no seed was sown...And now you find yourself trying to explain your past.
- I came across a story of a man who must have had such thoughts. His heritage was tragic. His grandfather was a murderer and a mystic who sacrificed his own children in ritual abuse. His dad as a punk who ravaged houses of worship and made a mockery of believers. He was killed at the age of twenty-four...by his friends. The men were typical of their era. They lived in a time when prostitutes purveyed their wares in houses of worship. Wizards treated disease with chants. People worshiped stars and followed horoscopes. More thought went into superstition and voodoo than into the education of the children. It was a dark time in which to be born. What do you do when your grandfather followed black magic, your father was a scoundrel, and your nation is corrupt? Follow suit? Some assumed he would. Branded him as a delinquent before he was born, a chip off the old rotten block. You can almost hear the people moan as he passes, 'Gonna be just like his dad.'
- But they were wrong. He wasn't. He reversed the trend. He defied the odds. He stood like a dam against the trends of his day and rerouted the future of his nation. His achievements were so remarkable, we still tell his story twenty-six hundred years later. The story of King Josiah...Born some six hundred years before Jesus, Josiah inherited a fragile throne and a tarnished crown. The temple was in disarray, the Law lost, and the people worshiped whatever god they desired. But by the end of Josiah's thirty-one year reign, the temple had been rebuilt, the idols had been destroyed, and the law of God was once again elevated to a place of prominence and power. The forest had been reclaimed.
- Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh, was remembered as the king who filled "Jerusalem from one end to the other with [the people's] blood. His father, King Amon, died at the hands of his own officers. "He did what God said was wrong," reads his epitaph. The citizens formed a posse and killed the assassins, and eight-year-old Josiah ascended the throne. Early in his reign Josiah made a brave choice. "He lived as his ancestor David had lived, and he did not stop doing what was right." He flipped through his family scrapbook

until he found an ancestor worthy of emulation. Josiah skipped his dad's life and bypassed his grandpa's. He leapfrogged back in time until he found David and resolved, "I'm going to be like him." The principle, We can't choose our parents, but we can choose our mentors. And since Josiah chose David (who had chosen God), things began to happen.

- The people tore down the altars for the Baal gods as Josiah directed.
 - Josiah cut down the incense altars.
 - Josiah...broke up the Asherah idols and...beat them into powder.
 - He burned the bones of the priests.
 - Josiah broke down the altars.
- Not what you call a public relations tour. But, then again, Josiah was not out to make friends. He was out to make a statement: "What my fathers taught, I don't teach. What they embraced, I reject." And he wasn't finished. Four years later, at the age of twenty-six, he turned his attention to the temple. It was in shambles. The people had allowed it to flail into disrepair. But Josiah was determined. Something had happened that fueled his passion to restore the temple. A baton had been passed. A torch had been received. Early in his reign he'd resolved to serve the God of his ancestor David. Now he chose to serve the God of someone else. Note 2 Chronicles 34:8: "In Josiah's eighteenth year as king, he made Judah and the Temple pure again. He sent Shaphan...to repair the Temple of the Lord, *the God of Josiah.*" God was *his* God. David's faith was Josiah's faith. He had found the God of David and made him his own. As the temple was being rebuilt, one of the workers happened upon a scroll. On the scroll were the words of God given to Moses nearly a thousand years earlier.
 - When Josiah heard the words, he was shocked. He wept that his people had drifted so far from God that this Word was not a part of their lives. He sent word to a prophetess and asked her, "What will become of our people?" She told Josiah that since he had repented when he heard the words, his nation would be spared the anger of God. Incredible. An entire generation received grace because of the integrity of one man. Could it be that God placed him on earth for that reason? Could it be that God has placed you on earth for the same? Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil...Perhaps you, like Josiah, were hearing the ten count before you even got into the ring. For you to find an ancestor worth imitating, you, like Josiah, have to flip way back in your family album. If such is the case, let me show you were to turn. Put down the scrapbook and pick up your bible. Go to John's gospel and read Jesus' words: "Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit..." Your parents may be responsible for your body, but God has taken charge of your soul. You may get your looks from yr mother, but you get eternity from your Father, your heavenly Father.
 - By the way, he's not blind to your problems. In fact, God is willing to give you what your family didn't. Didn't have a good father? He'll be your father. *Through God you are a son; and, if you are a son, then you are certainly an heir.* Didn't have a good role model? Try God. *You are God's children whom he loves, so try to be like him.* Never had a parent who wiped away your tears? Think again. God has noted each one. *You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected my tears in your bottle! You*

have recorded every one in your book. God has not left you adrift on a sea of heredity. Just like Josiah, you cannot control the way your forefathers responded to God. But you can control the way you respond to him. The past does not have to be your prison. You have a voice in your destiny. You have a say in your life. You have a choice in the path you take. Choose well and someday—generations from now—your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will thank God for the seeds you sowed."¹³ Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*¹⁴

¹³ Max Lucado, *When God Whispers Your Name*, Word Publishing: Nashville, 1994, p. 97-104.

¹⁴ Romans 15:13