

Legacy: 1. Next Generation
Psalm 78:1-7
May 27, 2018
Pastor Steve Richards

In the days leading up to this Memorial Day weekend, I remembered a few of the Memorial Days from my childhood when we would visit my Grandmother Richards who lived in Brookings, South Dakota. She would buy a red geranium, transplant it into a clay pot, and then we would drive to the cemetery at the edge of town where we would place that red geranium in front of my grandfather's gravestone. Do people still do that? My grandfather immigrated to this country from England after the First World War in response to the need for Methodist pastors in Minnesota and the Dakotas. At the age of 52, he died while serving a church in Minot, North Dakota. It was years before I was born. The best part of that Memorial Day ritual was how my grandma would tell me once again the story of how she met and fell in love with my grandfather – and through her, I got to know him. One generation sharing that story with another.

This morning and next Sunday, I want to talk about LEGACY. A legacy is something that is handed from one generation to the next. What do we want for the next generation? We want better, don't we? The generation before us somehow wanted better for us, and isn't that what we want for the next generation?

Let's look at who is the next generation. Here's an image. What generation is this? Tom Brokaw called them the Greatest Generation, because they went off to war not because they had to but they wanted to. These are people who were born before 1945. Then we have what generation? Baby Boomers. Born between 1946 and 1964. The soldiers came back from the war and there was sudden increase in babies. They became the largest generation in history. Then we have what generation? This is Generation X. Born between 1965 and 1980. And then we have the Millennials. They brought us the selfie, among other things. Also known as Generation Y, they were born in one millennium and came of age in other. Born 1981-1996. And finally we have Generation Z. This is the generation that grew up with technology. If you don't know how to set up your phone, ask someone from Generation Z.

These are the generations, and for our purposes this morning, the next generation is anyone who is coming behind you. It might even be someone who is in a different season of than you. Maybe you've been single for a while, and you get married again. You are in a different season and others are behind you in this particular season of life. This is not a message only for 60 or 70 or 80 year old people. You can even be in high school and have someone behind you. So, how will we help those who enter this next season of life win? That's the question behind this series: How will you help the next generation win? But what does it mean to win?

Because maybe you are in place where life has not worked out as you thought it would. It's not even what other people told you it would be. What I was taught was if you get a good education, you could get a good job and a good house and a good spouse and good kids and get another house. And the one who dies with the most toys wins. It's the American dream. Just work hard. Stay focused and you win. And maybe you have lived your whole life by this definition or some other definition and now you are sitting where you are in life and realize the one with the most toys hasn't won. It has not resulted in a deep satisfying win. So what is winning? Turns out it's not improving a standard of living. Maybe you grew up without something, and you told yourself that when you got old enough you were not going to do without – you didn't have the car you wanted or a lake home or you want something for your kids that you didn't have. And there's nothing wrong with wanting any of that. Our first house was just 900 square feet and when we

moved in it felt like a mansion, but with each move, we kept buying larger houses. Or maybe you moved into a particular school district so you could upgrade the educational opportunities for your children. That's really okay. There's nothing wrong with improving one's standard of living, but winning is not improving a standard of living but providing a standard for living – for the next generation.

This morning, I want to offer an idea from Scripture. Together, we could come up with a long list of things, but I want us to look to one that we find literally at the center of the Bible. If you take a Bible and turn to the center, you find the book of Psalms, a collection of songs and poems written thousands of years ago. And at the center of the book of Psalms, we find one of the longest psalms – Psalm 78. This psalm was written by Asaph, a musician in the court of Solomon – written 1000 years before Jesus. And what Asaph gives as a standard for living is at the center of the Bible.

My people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable; I will teach you lessons from the past – The past that he is talking about goes all the way back to Moses. **things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us** If you had a father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, what did they know from their season of life that they shared with you? Or did they? **We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation** What did you learn from them that could be passed to the next generation? What are you telling those behind you? Is it? **the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.** Asaph is recalling history – the lessons that he has received and if you read the rest of Psalm 78, you will hear the powers and wonders of what God did – how God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt and split the Red Sea, fed and nourished them for 40 years in the wilderness. What are the praiseworthy deeds that you can recall? What were the powers and wonders of God in the lives of your parents and grandparents? What are the powers and wonders of God in your lifetime? What are you telling and what are you teaching those behind you? It's about providing a standard for living and not just a standard of living. **so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would...** Do this and there is a result. There is a win. Asaph lists three things **put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.**

We find the words “trust in God” in a lot of places. It's even printed on our money “in God we trust.” What does it mean to have those words on your money? Is it the money or is it God — where do we place our trust? In one of the first cars that I ever owned I put a fish decal in the back window. I'm not sure I knew what I was doing. I wanted to make a statement. The Greek word for fish is ichthus, the first letters of the Greek words Jesus, Christ, Son of God, Savior. It's the symbol the earliest Christians used to identify themselves to each other. But by putting the decal on the back window of my car, I don't think I knew what I was doing. I don't think my actions while driving that car matched the symbol in the back window. Every time I hand someone a dollar bill, I'm passing along the message “in God we trust.” But is that really what we are doing? Or is it just the money. Are we passing a standard of living or a standard for living? What will the next generation learn from us?

When the psalm says commands – what commands? I think a good place to begin is with the Sh'ma. That was the central prayer of the Old Testament, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 **Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** To this Jesus would add – **and love your neighbor as yourself.** The greatest command. If this is to stick from this generation to the next, the words and a life built on these words must be what we pass to the generation behind us.

So, how will we do this? 1. Choose to help the next generation. Some of us have lived a life centered on “me.” Maybe it’s time to be “other” centered. Today, choose to focus on the next generation. I think that’s why many of you stepped forward to be a prayer partner for a child. I think it’s why many of you were reading with children at Oakwood Elementary. I think it’s why many of you will be signing up to help with next month’s Vacation Bible Camp. It’s choosing to focus on the next generation. We were made to receive love and to give love – not receive it and keep it to ourselves. We were given life for a reason and the difference we make is not for ME but through ME. Warren Buffett is one of the wealthiest persons in the world, an investing legend – the oracle from Omaha. He’s said that if he were to instill one principle in the next generation it would not have anything to do with money or business. It would be to focus on your inner scorecard – in other words, doing the right things and treating other people well. Choose to help the next generation.

2. Write it down. My Dad died on May 15 a year ago and the next day, we found his autobiography in his desk drawer. Even though my Dad was a preacher, privately he was a man of few words. He left the parenting to my mother and shared only a few stories with us from his life. He was always something of an enigma to me. But in the 15 pages of his autobiography I learned more about him and in some ways received more from him than the 60 years I knew him. Because he wrote it down. What have you written down? Wisdom comes from experiencing failures and not repeating them, learning and getting up again. Do others know that about you? You have life lessons that deserve to be written down.

3. Be the Vision. Be the example. Be the model. Last month, I met Jay and Katherine Wolf. They met each other while attending college in Alabama and married soon after graduation. They moved to southern California where Jay entered law school at Pepperdine University and Katherine pursued a modeling career. In the final year of law school, Katherine gave birth to their son, James. One day, three months later, she placed James in his crib for a nap and went into the kitchen. Jay just happened to be home for a few minutes between classes when Katherine fell to floor, violently sick, calling out to Jay for help. Jay called 911 and as paramedics carried her to the ambulance she lost consciousness and would not wake up for two months. She suffered a massive brain stem stroke as a result of an undetected congenital condition. For the next 2 years, she entered a journey that would determine the rest of her life, reaching a point where she felt the Holy Spirit speaking this truth: you are here for a purpose and your sons will be informed by this in a way that cannot be taught. She is confined to a wheelchair, her hearing, seeing, and speaking has been compromised. But Katherine and Jay started a ministry called Hope Heals to bring hope to others who have experienced life-changing trauma in their lives. And in 2014, Katherine gave birth to a second son, John. As she says, “He is a picture of how new things come from broken things.” That she says, is what she wants her children to see in her.

Maybe you have never experienced a life-defining moment like Jay and Katherine, but what vision are you. What has God done that gives you hope to keep on. Want to help the next generation win? Provide a standard for living – and in the process you also win.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of May 27, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Faithful God, your promises stand unshaken through all generations. Renew us in hope and inspire us to live, not for ourselves alone but for the next generation. Through the witness of our lives in words and actions, may others see there is a mighty God who is alive and

on the move for this and all times. Bind us together in one great, continuous community of love to transform this world. Amen.

Monday, May 28

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham. I will make you very fertile. I will produce nations from you, and kings will come from you. I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you.

God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you will no longer call her Sarai. Her name will now be Sarah. I will bless her and even give you a son from her. I will bless her so that she will become nations, and kings of peoples will come from her."

Observation: A covenant is a promise-based relationship. God's covenant with Abraham begins when the Lord says, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants" (vv. 1-2). God promises to be in relationship with Abraham and make him the father of many. In response, Abraham is asked to walk before God and be blameless. Note that God invites Abraham into this relationship not for Abraham's benefit, but for the next generations. That includes you!

Application: The good news is that God is faithful to the covenant, staying close to Abraham and making him "the ancestor of many nations" (v. 4). God would be faithful to this everlasting covenant, even when succeeding generations would not be faithful. In fact, God is faithful even before you are. God's faithfulness looks further into the future than just one generation. How does God's generosity to you encourage you to ensure you pass this message to the next generation?

Prayer: God of the past, thank you for what you have done in the lives of those who have come long before me. Thank you that you have always been ready to meet me with love and grace. Help others to see your presence in me. Amen.

Tuesday, May 29

Scripture: Psalm 78:4-8

We won't hide them from their descendants; we'll tell the next generation all about the praise due the LORD and his strength— the wondrous works God has done. He established a law for Jacob and set up Instruction for Israel, ordering our ancestors to teach them to their children. This is so that the next generation and children not yet born will know these things, and so they can rise up and tell their children to put their hope in God— never forgetting God's deeds, but keeping God's commandments— and so that they won't become like their ancestors: a rebellious, stubborn generation, a generation whose heart wasn't set firm and whose spirit wasn't faithful to God.

Observation: The psalm revisits a critical chapter in the lives of the Israelites. The writer provides in this song a listing of the awesome things God did for his people. The author,

perhaps a teacher or a priest, announces his intention at the beginning: “Listen, my people, to my teaching; tilt your ears toward the words of my mouth” (78:1). Then he begins to remind his readers or listeners of God’s past activity in their lives. The reason the psalmist recounts these interventions is so they “put their hope in God—never forgetting God’s deeds, but keeping God’s commandments” (78:7).

Application: To model trust in God for the next generation, you have to trust God. In what area of your life do you currently trust in something or someone other than God? What can you do to place your trust in God? How are you living today that is an indication of such trust?

Prayer: Thank you for the wisdom that comes through these words of scripture. Let this wisdom take root in my life so that you, O God, are reflected not only in my words but in all my actions. Amen.

Wednesday, May 30

Scripture: Acts 16:1-5

Paul reached Derbe, and then Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy. He was the son of a believing Jewish woman and a Greek father. The brothers and sisters in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him, so he circumcised him. This was because of the Jews who lived in those areas, for they all knew Timothy's father was Greek. As Paul and his companions traveled through the cities, they instructed Gentile believers to keep the regulations put in place by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and every day their numbers flourished.

Observation: Today’s brief story introduces us to a time when Paul helped the next generation with a standard for living. Paul and his long-time partner Barnabas had just parted company, due to a conflict over a younger man named John Mark (Acts 15:37-40). Paul probably brought Timothy and his mother to Christ during his earlier time in the city of Lystra (Acts 14:6-20). Now Paul asked Timothy to join his traveling missionary team.

Application: Have more experienced Christians ever come alongside you to encourage you, to share their wisdom as you have grown in the faith, as Paul did with Timothy? In what ways has that kind of trust, caring and friendship helped you to grow? What person or persons help to guide and encourage you in your faith today? Are you allowing God to work through your gifts and talents to mentor a family member, a friend, a person younger in the faith?

Prayer: God, you are a force for good in my life. I give thanks for those who cared enough for me that they shared with me messages that I have not forgotten. Help me to come alongside those who are behind me so that the great heritage of faith will be a force for good with the next generation. Amen.

Thursday, May 31

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:18-3:10

We wanted to come to you—I, Paul, tried over and over again—and Satan stopped us. What is our hope, joy, or crown that we can brag about in front of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Isn't it all of you? You are our glory and joy!

So when we couldn't stand it any longer, we thought it was a good idea to stay on in Athens by ourselves, and we sent you Timothy, who is our brother and God's coworker in the good news

about Christ. We sent him to strengthen and encourage you in your faithfulness. We didn't want any of you to be shaken by these problems. You know very well that we were meant to go through this. In fact, when we were with you, we kept on predicting that we were going to face problems exactly like what happened, as you know. That's why I sent Timothy to find out about your faithfulness when I couldn't stand it anymore. I was worried that the tempter might have tempted you so that our work would have been a waste of time. Now Timothy has returned to us from you and has given us good news about your faithfulness and love! He says that you always have good memories about us and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you. Because of this, brothers and sisters, we were encouraged in all our distress and trouble through your faithfulness. For now we are alive if you are standing your ground in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God? Night and day, we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith.

Observation: Timothy quickly won Paul's full respect. In 1 Thessalonians, maybe his earliest letter, Paul said he was blocked from going himself to visit the Christians in Thessalonica. He sent Timothy, his "brother and God's coworker in the good news about Christ," instead, and was thrilled by Timothy's report. (Luke also told about these events in Acts 17-18.)

Application: Timothy's mission to check on the well-being of the Christians in Thessalonica blessed not only them, but also the apostle Paul. Timothy's report, Paul said, brought him peace of mind, courage, joy and a focus for gratitude (3:6-9). Who could you bless this week by doing something to lighten their load and bring them encouragement and joy?

Prayer: Lord, you continually place opportunities in my path to love and serve. Keep me alert to what is happening and how I have something to share. May your joy be complete as I live into the follower of Jesus that you want me to be. Amen.

Friday, June 1

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:4-16

Everything that has been created by God is good, and nothing that is received with thanksgiving should be rejected. These things are made holy by God's word and prayer. If you point these things out to the believers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus who has been trained by the words of faith and the good teaching that you've carefully followed.

But stay away from the godless myths that are passed down from the older women. Train yourself for a holy life! While physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything. It has promise for this life now and the life to come. This saying is reliable and deserves complete acceptance. We work and struggle for this: "Our hope is set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially those who believe." Command these things. Teach them. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Instead, set an example for the believers through your speech, behavior, love, faith, and by being sexually pure. Until I arrive, pay attention to public reading, preaching, and teaching. Don't neglect the spiritual gift in you that was given through prophecy when the elders laid hands on you. Practice these things, and live by them so that your progress will be visible to all. Focus on working on your own development and on what you teach. If you do this, you will save yourself and those who hear you.

Observation: Timothy was younger than many other teachers. But God had called him to use his particular set of gifts to preach and teach. The elders of the church and his mentor, Paul,

had affirmed Timothy's call. As Timothy accepted his calling, and developed and honed his gifts, he would find purpose and satisfaction in filling the place God equipped him to fill.

Application: Verse 8 says, "While physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything." Our culture is quite right to focus on improving health through exercise and diet, but that's only one part of life. In what ways (including, perhaps, by guarding your physical health) are you preparing yourself to live a healthier spiritual life? What lessons from the way you live are you sharing with the next generation?

Prayer: As Paul invested in the life of Timothy, I want to be able to invest in the lives of those behind me. Let it be said of me that there is a future filled with hope because I lived fully and faithfully as a follower of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, June 2

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-29

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed."

When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

Observation: "Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice..." With these words, Jesus begins the final story in a message that began with chapter 5, teachings intended to put the principles of faith into practice. In today's reading, Jesus presents two options (foundations). One foundation was likened to a solid rock and the other to sand. The foundation determines the ability of a structure to withstand the elements (rain, wind, and flood). Jesus calls the person wise (Matthew 10:16; 24:45; 25:2, 4, 9) who builds his life upon the Rock. Notice that no one actually builds upon the eternal foundation of Christ until s/he acts or obeys the teachings/commands.

Application: What is our responsibility to the next generation? When you were growing up, did previous generations focus on improving your standard of living or providing you with a standard for living? Was that standard "rock" or "sand?" How did that influence you as you grew into adulthood? The next generation doesn't need a better standard of living. It needs a standard for living. It is every generation's responsibility—and privilege—to pass along the "praise due the Lord" (Psalm 78:4) to generations that follow. When we help the next generation win, we win as well.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the "standards for living" that are given to me in Scripture. Give me the strength and determination to put these standards into practice so there is a solid foundation that I am sharing with the next generation. Amen.