

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, May 8, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

PSALM 78:1-8

1 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. 8 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.

DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION

Intro: - Video (I'll Need You Mom – 1:26)

“I'll need you mom, to point me towards Christ when no one else will.”

What a motivating video!

Happy Mother's Day, Moms! We love you. We appreciate you. And, today, we honor you and remember the great task that you have as you raise your children and grandchildren.

Study after study confirms that this generation of American children is the least evangelized generation of children in the history of our country. That is a startling statistic that reminds us of the importance of the task that has been given to Moms and Dads, Grandmas and Grandpas, and those who mentor children.

Take a moment this morning to look around the room. What do you notice? It's full of people. There are several generations in this room. On any given Sunday you might see three or four generations in this room. It's one of the special things about Woodbury Community Church. Many in this room have their parents and grandparents in the same room. On some occasions we have had four generations represented with children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. It is a special thing when generations of people gather for the purpose of worshipping God. It's special in our generation, and it was special in previous generations.

To the ancient Jew, there was no greater task for a parent, grandparent or loving mentor than the task of sharing the faith that they had in God with the next generation. No responsibility superseded the responsibility of discipling the next generation. The most

important education a child could have was his or her spiritual education. In a way, that is what Brandon and Meghan Lerch committed to today when they brought their son Avery to be dedicated to the Lord. In essence they were saying, “The most important thing that we can do for Avery is to introduce him to our Savior, Jesus Christ.” And, they are absolutely correct.

Listen to these words from Psalm 78:

1 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. 8 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.

Remember, the Psalms were written as songs of worship for the Children of Israel to sing in worship to God. They were also reminders of God’s commandments to His children. As they sang these songs, they were reminded of God’s faithfulness, His statutes and decrees, they were reminded of His attributes and power, of His deliverance and His love. When Asaph wrote, Psalm 78, he was reminding the Israelites of the chief duty of parents.

Parents, it is imperative that spiritual truth is passed down from one generation to another. Look at the words that Asaph uses in this passage: “I will utter hidden things, things from of old – things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us . . . we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD . . . he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born . . .” On and on goes Asaph about the responsibility that parents have to make it a priority to disciple their children.

In an oral culture, where the written Scripture was available only in scrolls, and only for the use of the religious leaders, the story of God was passed down from parents to children through communication. It was passed down from teachers of the law to students through temple school. If you look at Psalm 78:8, it’s clear that at least some generations of Israel had hearts that were not loyal to God. It was a small remnant that kept the faith alive.

Maybe that’s how it will be for our children. Maybe those who are growing up with very few peers who have any spiritual background will shine bright in their generation; for God is clear that there is always a remnant that remains faithful to Him in every generation.

Many years ago, Robert Ingersall was on a lecture tour of colleges and universities across our nation. He was a notorious skeptic, determined to shake the faith of college students.

“When Ingersall was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, ‘Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn’t he?’ The other said, ‘No, I don’t think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my mother’s life, and until he can explain my mother’s life I will stand by my mother’s God.’”¹

What an amazing testimony! I have worked with thousands of students over the years. It’s common for those growing up in a Christian home to go through at least one period of doubt in their lives. Many of my students have told me that even as they doubted, they were impacted by the faith of a mother or father.

Earlier this week, I had a chance to spend two days with my parents. My siblings and I helped Mom and Dad pack up their basement as they prepare to move into a retirement home. I love my Mom and Dad. As I spent time with them this week, I had some time to reflect upon their love for me, and the influence that they have had on their children and grandchildren. Mixed in with the cleaning was a lot of reminiscing about the years spent growing up in the Schulenburg home. My parents are the parents of five children. They have twelve grandchildren. All five of their children are followers of Jesus Christ. All of their grandchildren have made professions of faith in Christ as well. They are a great example of people who have been proactive in sharing their faith with the next generation. So, this morning, I want to share with you several things that my parents did right.

1. They were the same people at home as they were in front of other people.

I have heard it said that teenagers can sniff out a hypocrite a mile away. I believe that to be true. When it comes to disciplining our children, nothing will undo it like hypocrisy. One of the things I admired most about my parents growing up was that who they were in public was who they were in private. They didn’t put on a show to impress people with how spiritual they were, or how they had it all together. If they were struggling, they were open about it. If they had an issue with someone, they addressed it. They didn’t speak one way about people in front of them, and another way about people behind their backs. And, when they went to church, they didn’t try to pretend to be some super-spiritual Christians. They were authentic, and I loved it. It made me feel safe and made their faith seem real.

2. They lived what they believed.

Their faith wasn’t something that was just talked about on Sunday, it informed the decisions they made throughout the week. When decisions needed to be made,

¹ James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1972), p. 381.

they were made prayerfully. If a person was in need, my parents tried to help meet that need in practical ways. Their Christianity wasn't just for show. It permeated every aspect of their life. They made being a God follower attractive to me.

3. They loved each other and showed affection every day.

It's been said that the greatest gift that a father can give his child is to love that child's mother. My Dad and Mom to this day show love and affection for each other in practical ways.

I remember a time a time after my freshman year in college that I returned home for the summer. I was visiting the graduation open house of a friend who was a year younger than me. My parents were at the open house too, and they were holding hands. I was a little embarrassed, but friend after friend told me, "Your parents are so amazing. I can't believe they still hold hands." They modeled love in their affection, and it spoke volumes about what a Christian marriage could be to my best friends, my siblings and me.

4. They went on dates.

My parents made their relationship a priority. They have never stopped dating each other. It's one of the things that allowed them to pour into the lives of five children and countless people that they have mentored. Their relationship was a greater priority to them than the relationship that they had with their children.

5. They spent time with God.

I love looking at my Mom's Bible. It is marked up and very well worn. I have my Grandmother's Bible and my Great-Grandmother's Bible. They are marked up too. Spending time with the Lord doesn't guarantee that your children will follow God, but it makes an imprint on your kids. My parents' public faith was born in the deep times that they spent privately seeking the face of God.

6. They communicated and demonstrated their love to us every day.

I spoke with a high school guy not long ago who told me that his Dad has never told him, "I love you." I can't imagine what that would be like. Some of you have experienced that from your Dad or Mom, but you don't need to set that example for your children. Tell your kids, with words, that you love them every day. But, show it too.

7. They prayed with us and for us every day.

I'm not sure that I remember a day in my childhood where my parents didn't pray with me and for me. They are some of my greatest prayer warriors. Discipling the

next generation will not happen if prayer isn't a part of it. Our kids need to know that we are praying for them, and one of the best ways that we can show that is to pray with them. You might not feel comfortable praying aloud, but don't let that stop you from praying with your kids. Praying acknowledges our dependence upon Almighty God. It shows our children that we don't have all the answers. It shows that we believe in power of prayer and makes space for God to work.

My mom has been such a prayer warrior for me. She has had some health issues of late, so this week I got to pray for her, with her. It was a special time, and it reminded me of how grateful I am for her prayers.

8. They listened before they spoke.

My parents weren't afraid to speak, but learned to take the time to listen before speaking. That can be a tough thing for parents, especially dads, to do. My parents showed me that they understood me because they took the time to listen.

9. They set boundaries and stuck to them.

I didn't always like the boundaries that my parents set up, but I was sure glad they had them. We need to set boundaries with our kids and be willing to stick to them.

10. They stayed up until we came home.

This was another one that I wasn't a fan of at first, but now, as a parent, I see the value in it. Some of the best conversations that I had with my parents happened well past curfew. Staying up showed me that they cared. It also gave my parents an opportunity to speak truth into my life during some of the most difficult days of dealing with temptation.

11. They took each of their children on a date at least once a year.

I know some families that do this at least once a month, but given the number of children in our home, and given our financial constraints, once a year was a workable number. My spot with my parents was J.J. Finnegan's, a restaurant in a mall several towns away.

Some of the most important conversations that I had with my parents happened during these times; where I would go to college, conversations about boundaries in dating, conversations about God.

12. They knew our friends and invited their families over to our home.

I've said many times that the greatest difference between a person today and five years from now are the places we go, the books we read and the people we meet.

Our friends have a huge impact on the person that we become. My parents had a great commitment to getting to know our friends and the families of our friends. My best friends as a child were the children of people who had been to our home.

13. They made our home the place to be on Friday and Saturday nights.

We didn't have the largest or the best home, but that didn't matter to my parents. They made our home the place to be on the weekends. This meant that they slept less than other parents. They spent an awful lot of money on food for teenage boys. They had a noisy house. But, it was a house that was full of love. By hosting parties at our home, I found myself in a lot less trouble than many of my teenage friends.

14. They didn't sweat the small stuff.

One of my Dad's favorite sayings is, "Don't sweat the small stuff." In other words, "Don't worry." My dad did a great job of helping me to have faith in God. I still find myself getting stressed all too easily, but I'll never forget my Dad's admonition to me.

15. They didn't show favoritism.

It should go without saying, but good parents don't show favoritism. The Bible is littered with stories about the devastating impact of parents showing favoritism to one child over another. My mom and dad love all five of their kids.

16. They vacationed with a purpose.

Vacations in the Schulenburg home always included at least one week at a Christian family camp. If we could afford only one vacation as a family, which was often the case, it would be family camp. It was my favorite week of the summer. Family camp allowed us to spend time together as a family in fun activities, shared events, and spiritual growth. Even our vacations had a discipleship aspect to it!

17. They loved their parents.

In Exodus 20:12 we read, "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." It's one of the Ten Commandments. My parents understood this to mean that you continued to honor your Mom and Dad long after you had children of your own. I loved watching my Dad and Mom love their Dad and Mom. They modeled what a biblical family looked like.

18. They didn't fight in front of us.

My parents weren't perfect. I would find out long after I grew up that they had plenty of arguments, but it was always done behind closed doors. They sought to protect their children from any fear that might come from watching them argue. It was a way for them to honor each other in front of their children.

19. They didn't embarrass us.

Not only did my parents honor their marriage partner, they honored their children by not embarrassing us. Sure, my dad would tease from time to time, but he would never tease me in front of my friends. I appreciated that my parents made me feel safe. I never had to worry what they might say or do in front of my friends.

20. They didn't expect us to be perfect.

In highly affluent and successful areas like suburban St. Paul and Minneapolis, our children can feel the expectation to be perfect. Many of you were high achievers in school, sports, business, etc. But none of you were perfect. None of us are. We should never expect the perfection that only belongs to God. My parents allowed me to learn from my mistakes and not be afraid to fail.

21. They made sure that our family was involved at a church that ministered to their children.

It wasn't always easy for my parents to find a good church. I remember moving from Wheaton, Illinois to St. Charles, Illinois, and not being able to find a decent church. My parents looked everywhere until they found a tiny church with just 50 people in it. It may have been small, but it had a good children ministry and a fledgling youth ministry. They could have found a larger church to meet their needs, but they wanted to make sure that they would find a church that would come alongside of them in the discipleship of their children. I will forever be blessed because of the men and women in my home church who ministered to me. They were the volunteers in the children's ministry and youth ministry. They were the pastors who took a risk and allowed a 19 year-old college kid to preach his first sermons. These men and women partnered with my parents to live out the principles taught in Psalm 78. They were passionate about helping the next generation know the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

22. They always made time to bring us to church events.

Mom and Dad loved when we desired to be involved in church events. They helped pay for retreats and mission trips. They encouraged our involvement in teaching Sunday School and volunteering for various events. They were our human taxi and

ATM, but never complained. It was worth it to them to change their schedules around to that we could grow in our faith.

23. They attended our games, plays, events, etc.

Even when no one else had parents around, our parents showed up. They were at basketball games, soccer games, baseball games, and school plays. They were at tennis matches, chess meets, debate tournaments and choir concerts. My parents were incredibly busy people, but made our schedules their priority.

24. They invited missionaries, pastors, teachers, refugees, and Christian role models into our home.

My parents made spiritual leaders, heroes in our home. We had missionaries from Pakistan, Japan, France, Romania, Liberia, Ohio, and many other places into our home. We had pastors from all over the country spend time in our home. And, we had refugees from Cambodia and Sunday School teachers over for dinner. The conversations about people in faraway lands fascinated me, and helped craft a passion for missions into my heart.

My parents were far from perfect. They would be the first to tell you that they would have done many things differently. But, I wanted to share with you what they did right. I could have listed much more.

Abraham Lincoln has always been my favorite president. He once said, "No man is poor who has had a godly mother."

How true! If you have given your children the gift of godliness, then you have given them a gift that money can't buy. May you be proactive in discipling the next generation!