

# From Generation to Generation

Psalm 78:1-8 on July 6, 2025

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson



*Please read Psalm 78:1-8 before going further in this transcript.*

All throughout human history, for thousands and thousands of years, God has been calling His people to pass along their faith to future generations. Some 3,000 years ago, the psalmist wrote Psalm 78; it begins, “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.”<sup>1</sup> The psalmist isn’t just reminding us of one particular generation, nor is he reminding us of just the youngest generation. This psalm reminds us of generation, after generation, after generation, right on up to the generations that are alive today, as well as every generation that will follow after us, right on up until the Lord returns. Psalm 78:5-6 clarifies: “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.” In other words, **each generation of believers is called to disciple the generations that come after them**; so this applies to everyone in our church today: from the youngest person to the oldest.

This includes people all the way back to “The Greatest Generation.” People born before 1928, people who are currently in their late 90s and into their 100s. According to a quick AI overview on Google, among other things, this generation is known for “their resilience, strong work ethic, and sense of duty, shaped by experiencing the Great Depression and World War II.”<sup>2</sup>

We’re also called to disciple those from “The Silent Generation.” People born between roughly 1928-1945, people who are currently in their 80s and 90s. Among other things, this generation is known for “their strong work ethic, respect for authority, and a tendency towards traditional values, [as well as a frugal approach to life].”<sup>3</sup> This generation tends toward silence rather than bucking the system. (We might also mention that this generation is significantly less savvy about technology.) *(By the way, keep in mind that all of these are all generalizations, not necessarily hard and fast truths that apply to every person.)*

We’re called to disciple those from the “Baby Boomer generation.” People born between roughly 1946-1964, people who are currently in their 60s and 70s. This generation is characterized by a strong work ethic, individualism,

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:5 comes to mind.

<sup>2</sup> AI Overview in Google.

<sup>3</sup> AI Overview in Google.

self-reliance, optimism, and a sense of responsibility. Although they are also less tech savvy, they are fairly adaptable and resourceful.<sup>4</sup>

Our gospel mandate extends to Gen X as well. People born between roughly 1965-1980, people in their mid-40s and 50s. This is my generation (*although my wife says I behave more like a Boomer*). My generation is known for its pragmatism, adaptability, and independence (we're known as the "latch-key" kids). Our characteristics include "a strong work ethic, a desire for work-life balance, and a knack for navigating both traditional and digital landscapes."<sup>5</sup>

We then have Gen Y, lovingly referred to as "The Millennials" ("Gotta love those Millennials!"<sup>6</sup>) People born between roughly 1981-1996, people who are currently in their 30s and early 40s. Millennials are known for being tech-savvy, being the first generation to grow up with access to the internet and mobile devices. They value work-life balance, collaboration, and meaningful work. They are adaptive, creative, and want to make a social impact. They value diversity and inclusion.<sup>7</sup>

And then we have Gen Z. People born roughly between 1997-2012, teenagers and people in their 20s. Gen Z is known for its digital fluency, which has shaped "their communication styles, social interactions, and approach to learning." They are highly influenced by social media, and they are very aware of mental health concerns. They care about things like taking care of the environment, racial justice, and equality.<sup>8</sup>

Back to the beginning of the alphabet now, we get "Generation Alpha." Born roughly between 2013-2024, these are our children and pre-teens. Generation Alpha is deeply immersed in technology, experiencing a 24/7 online connectedness as a natural part of their everyday lives. They create content, rather than just consuming it. They have diverse perspectives, informed by a global awareness. They have a strong awareness of environmental sustainability.<sup>9</sup> (It remains to be seen what effect experiencing the Covid Pandemic during their formative years will have on them.)

Finally, we have "Generation Beta." Born in 2025, this year begins a whole new generation. It's still too early to say much about the general characteristics of Generation Beta.

---

<sup>4</sup> AI Overview in Google.

<sup>5</sup> AI Overview in Google.

<sup>6</sup> Meaning no offense, but I do chuckle at this viral video from a long time ago: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLpE1Pa8vvl>

<sup>7</sup> AI Overview in Google.

<sup>8</sup> AI Overview in Google.

<sup>9</sup> AI Overview in Google.

Psalm 78 connects nicely with the Great Commission which Jesus gave His deeply devoted followers in Matthew 28:19-20, “19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” You see, making disciples of all *nations*, includes making disciples of all the *generations* who live in those nations. Our mission is to pass along our faith to every single generation. Each generation, is a generation of souls; souls in need of the Good News about Jesus!<sup>10</sup>

Psalm 78 teaches us at least 4 things about generations.

**Psalm 78 teaches us that each generation should...**

**1) LEARN from the songs of former generations, songs both old and new.**

Psalm 78:1-3 says, “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.” Just above verse 1, many of our Bibles have a notation explaining that Psalm 78 is a “maskil<sup>11</sup> of Asaph<sup>12</sup>.” Scholars aren’t exactly sure what a maskil is, but it’s likely: “a description for how this particular psalm should be performed.”<sup>13</sup> (It may also be emphasizing this psalm’s particular teaching aspect, but we’re not entirely sure.<sup>14</sup>) The mention of Asaph refers to: “one of King David’s key priestly musicians.”<sup>15</sup>  
<sup>16</sup> We might think of him as one of the primary Music Directors, like our very own Laura Engelstad or Jason Robeck.<sup>17</sup> The *ESV* translates verse 1, “Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth!” So the psalmist is urging those who are reading this psalm, and originally those who were singing this psalm, to pay attention to the lyrics. In fact, Jesus Himself cites Psalm 78:2 in Matthew 13:35, to refer to His

---

<sup>10</sup> I can’t help but hear Keith Green’s voice in my head, “This generation of believers, that you and me are a part of, we’re responsible for this generations of souls.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxidP6EHylM&list=RDHxidP6EHylM&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxidP6EHylM&list=RDHxidP6EHylM&start_radio=1)

<sup>11</sup> Maskil = “MAHS keel.” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 111.

<sup>12</sup> Asaph = “AY saf.” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Maskil = “Hebrew term in the superscriptions of 15 psalms... perhaps a musical cue denoting the manner in which the designated psalms were to be performed.” (Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Maskil,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1414.)

<sup>14</sup> Maskil = מִשְׁכִּיל = “contemplative poem... didactic poem... skillful, artistic song.” (Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 968.)

<sup>15</sup> Asaph = “one of David’s chief musicians, a Levite.” (Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 63.)

<sup>16</sup> Asaph = “1. Berechiah’s son, an important tabernacle musician during King David’s reign (1 Chronicles 6:31, 32, 39). Along with Heman the head singer and Ethan, Asaph was appointed to sound bronze cymbals during the ceremony when the ark was brought to the new tabernacle (1 Chronicles 15:1–19). David appointed Asaph to serve “by giving constant praise and thanks to the Lord God of Israel” (1 Chronicles 16:4, 5) and to lead Israel in a special psalm of praise (1 Chronicles 16:7–36). Along with his relatives he ministered daily before the ark (1 Chronicles 16:37; 25:6, 9). He was also described as David’s private prophet (1 Chr 25:1, 2).” (Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Asaph,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 209.)

<sup>17</sup> 1 Chronicles 25:6-8 makes a clear reference to trained and skilled musicians who served the LORD through music. “All these men were under the supervision of their father for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. 7 Along with their relatives—all of them trained and skilled in music for the LORD—they numbered 288. 8 Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties.”

own style of teaching through parables. Psalm 78 is a worship song, but it's also a parable, which is designed to teach God's people from one generation to the next.

This brings to mind Colossians 3:16, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." Psalm 40:3 says, "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him."<sup>18</sup> You see, some of our songs are oldies but goodies, and others are newbies but goodies, written and sung by new generations of believers.<sup>19</sup> All of them serve to honor God, and to teach and admonish His people.<sup>20</sup>

The *ESV* offers us an intriguing translation for Psalm 78:2, "...I will utter dark sayings from of old."<sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> Whoa! That sounds a bit ominous! The Hebrew word being translated here has a range of meaning that includes something mysterious or perplexing. So by dark, it doesn't mean something evil or bad, it simply means something obscure or not immediately obvious – like a parable, a parable that teaches you by making you think, and by requiring the enlightenment of God's Spirit to bring it out of the dark.

### **Psalm 78 also teaches us that each generation should...**

#### **2) TELL the next generations of God's praiseworthy, wondrous deeds.**

Psalm 78:4 says, "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." Now, Psalm 78 is 72 verses long, so it actually goes on to give many specific examples of the LORD's praiseworthy and wondrous deeds:

> Verses 12-16 tell about the wonder God performed when He split the Red Sea. And how He then guided His people through the wilderness with a cloud by day, and a fire by night.

> Verses 23-31 tell about God's praiseworthy deeds of sending His people manna from heaven, and quail so that they could eat in the wilderness.

---

<sup>18</sup> See also Psalm 33:3; Isaiah 42:10; and Revelation 5:9.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 5:18-21 urges Christ-followers to, "...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>20</sup> Consider Acts 16:25 and 1 Corinthians 14:15. Also check out this sermon link from January 2, 2022:

<https://efcbemidji.org/sermon/a-new-song/>

<sup>21</sup> חידה = "riddle, enigmatic, perplexing saying or question." (Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 295.)

<sup>22</sup> חידה f. (from the root חוּד, which see; compare Dan. 5:12), properly, something *twisted, involved*; whence— (1) *subtlety, fraud*, Dan. 8:23. (2) *a difficult sentence, an enigma*, compare חִידָה. In proposing enigmas, the verb commonly used is חוּד which see; in solving them, חָגַד Jud. 14:14. (3) i.q. חִידָה *a sententious expression*, Prov. 1:6; *a parable*, Eze. 17:2; *a song, poem*, Psalm 49:5; 78:2; compare Hab. 2:6; *an oracle, a vision*, Num. 12:8. Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 273.

> Verses 42-55 tell about the many plagues which God sent on the Egyptians in order to convince them to let His people go: turning the water to blood, sending swarms of flies and locusts, and all kinds of frogs and hail and on and on. The next generation needs to hear teaching about the wonders our God has done.<sup>23</sup>

> Verses 65-72 tell about Mount Zion and God's provision of King David to lead His people.

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." (*That's our grandchildren.*) Now unfortunately, some of us weren't taught about the Lord when we were children. Not all of us had the privilege of growing up in a Christian home, and even some of us who did, didn't necessarily have parents who fully engaged in teaching us the things of the Lord. And this is one of the primary reasons why we need local churches who disciple all generations, not only the children and youth, but also the young adults and the middle-aged adults, and even the adults who live to be 100+ years old!

**Psalm 78 goes on to say that each generation should...**

**3) TEACH the next generations God's statutes and laws.**

Psalm 78:5-6 says, "5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children,<sup>24</sup> 6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children." Our disciple-making mandate in Matthew 28:20 agrees, "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...." Many children learn about the Lord from their parents, but many do not. This is one reason why we need active and thriving children and youth ministries. Yes, these ministries are a blessing to our own church families, but they are also essential in helping us fulfill our mandate to reach the children who wouldn't otherwise have an opportunity to hear about the love and truth of God.

The psalmist makes it clear that he means one generation, after another, after another. In verse 6 he talks about children who haven't even been born yet, those in Generation Beta, and whatever generation comes after that, should the Lord tarry. God's people are called and commissioned, to teach God's statutes and laws to ongoing generations.<sup>25</sup> I appreciate one of the footnotes in my *Study Bible*: "The Lord's saving acts and his covenant

---

<sup>23</sup> See Exodus 10:1-2, 12:26-27, and 13:14.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding God's statutes, see all 176 verses of Psalm 119!

<sup>25</sup> The song, The Blessing, by Kari Jobe comes to mind:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDMijhOUOqk&list=RDjDMijhOUOqk&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDMijhOUOqk&list=RDjDMijhOUOqk&start_radio=1)



statutes – *both* must be taught, and in relationship, for together they remain the focal point for faith and obedience down through the generations.”<sup>26</sup>

That leads into our final point...

**Psalm 78 teaches us that each generation should...**

**4) WARN the next generations not to forget God and become disloyal.**

Psalm 78:7-8 says, “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.” In the first three points of this message, all of the learning, and telling, and teaching, provide a safeguard: LEARN FROM HISTORY. Don’t repeat the mistakes of former generations. Psalm 78 goes on to remind us of several examples of times when God’s people forgot about Him, and became disloyal to Him:

- > Verses 9-11 warn us about the time when the men of Ephraim<sup>27</sup> refused to live by God’s law, and they forgot the wonders God had done.

- > Verses 17-22 warn about the times when God’s people complained against Him during their wilderness wandering. After He’d given them water, they complained about the food. They spoke against God and tested Him.

- > Verses 32-42 say that in spite of God’s wonders, they didn’t believe and kept on sinning. They vexed the Holy One of Israel. They didn’t remember His power and they became disloyal to Him. (Were it not for God’s abundant mercy, they would have been destroyed.)

- > Verses 56-64 say that God’s people rebelled and didn’t keep His statutes. They were disloyal and faithless. Their hearts wandered after idols and God’s glory departed from the tabernacle of Shiloh.<sup>28</sup>

Friend, we need to guard against becoming like the generation mentioned in verse 8. May we not be stubborn and rebellious, with hearts which are disloyal to God, and with unfaithful spirits. Instead, may we be faithful to the LORD and heed the call in Psalm 78:4, “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.”

---

<sup>26</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 943 footnote on Psalm 78:4-5.

<sup>27</sup> Ephraim = “EE fra ihm” W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That’s Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 65.

<sup>28</sup> See Joshua 18:1.