

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

07.27.2023 | Mission to the Next Generation | Psalm 78:1–8 | Dr. Clark Fobes, Associate Pastor

As we are actually closing out this series in the mission of God, we're ending it on this topic of the next generation. For a number of reasons, it kind of just lined up well that we're leaving for Fuge this coming week and talking about the next generation. Whether or not that was intentional, you can double check with Pastor Ben after he gets back. But also, we've been looking at how God has had this plan, this mission from the beginning of scripture at the beginning of time, and that extends on into the age of the church. We've seen God's different ways and different groups that he desires to be on mission for. We talked about God's mission to make disciples in the world, of all nations around the world. We talked about our role in it as every believer engaging in God's priestly mission, primarily through our work. We've seen the social goodness of God and how God is in the process of restoring creation back to its intended order. We also looked last week at how God desires to seek out the vulnerable and those who are oppressed, specifically with our partnership with Foster the City and caring for the orphan and widow quite literally.

But today, we wanna see another aspect of the mission where it's not simply just the people God's trying to reach, that being the next generation, but also how God wants to use the next generation to engage in his mission and to reach the world. And so to help us do that, we're gonna look at Psalm 78. This is a text that probably most people would not actually go to to talk about God's mission to the next generation, but hopefully, as we'll see, I believe it encapsulates God's heart for the next generation, what we'll see.

So Psalm 78, if you could turn there. So we're only gonna read verses one through eight, don't worry, it's 72 verses, just the first eight verses, and we'll reference the others. Psalm 78, starting in verse one. "Give ear, O my people, to my teaching. "Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. "I will open my mouth in a parable. "I will utter dark sayings from of old, "things that we have heard and known "that our fathers have told us. "We will not hide them from our children, "but tell to the coming generation "the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might "and the wonders that he has done. "He established a testimony in Jacob "and appointed a law in Israel, "which he commanded to our fathers to teach their children, "that the next generation might know them, "the children yet unborn, "and arise and tell them to their children, "so that they should set their hope in God "and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments, "and that they should not be like their fathers, "a stubborn and rebellious generation, "a generation whose heart was not steadfast, "whose spirit was not faithful to God."

When we think about the next generation here in our city, one of the things that caused me to think about was growing up here in the city as a kid, and that's something that my wife and I talk about a lot raising our daughters here in San Francisco, especially in the summertime. There's something about summertime that's all throughout media and movies and TV and even just the vibe in our nation, that summertime's a time when kids can thrive. They're off school, they can do what they want, they get to run around and play. But growing up here in San Francisco, summertime was not really that different for me than any other time. I didn't look forward to summer the way some kids do, because summer meant it was gonna be cold. I couldn't really run around and play outside unless I wore three or four jackets. Summertime meant my parents were working, so I was often by myself or on my own or stuck in camps. And that's the reality of growing up here that we're raising our kids with. Being a kid in San Francisco can be kind of hard, but most of our kids don't really understand that what they're missing out on until they experience something different, because it was just normal for me to know that if I wanted to go to the park or the playground, I had to layer up in the summers.

It was normal for me to not have summer pool time or beach hangouts. Those were just never part of my association with summer until I started visiting my cousins in Southern California. And then I experienced a land of milk and honey there where I could actually wear T-shirts in a short in the summertime. I could go in the pool. I could go play on the beach and in the sand without freezing or wearing a wet suit. I could play on nice big beautiful parks that weren't fog rested from the year-round fog. I could eat ice cream because it was actually hot. I could watch fireworks on 4th of July, not just fog lighting up. And after the fact, I started realizing, man, there's so much I am missing out on on my childhoods. That's something that my wife and I often will argue about. She'll say, you don't know what our kids are missing because you never had it. I'm like, well, yeah, I turned out okay, I think.

But it's also hard for families here in San Francisco, not just because of the summers, but just what it means to raise a family in the city. Raising a family, raising kids in a city like San Francisco or maybe especially San Francisco, it means there's less space. If you wanna plant roots and find a home, you're often struggling to find a home that's even big enough for even multiple kids to share a room. It means that there are cold and wet playgrounds that are not so nice and pristine like the suburbs. It means that restaurants are small. It means whenever you're trying to go out to figure out where to eat out, it's kinda like a treasure hunt on Yelp. Whenever we're looking for a new neighborhood to eat at a restaurant, I go through about two or three pages of Yelp reviews. I click the kid-friendly filter and even that's usually not enough because I'm trying to find a space that's large enough so that when my kids are loud and noisy, it doesn't dominate the whole space, it gets drowned out. I'm looking for a restaurant that maybe has a kid-friendly menu or a kid's menu is golden in the city. I'm looking for a restaurant where if my kids throw food and it's a mess, that the staff will be nice enough to not care or there's outdoor seating so it doesn't matter.

See, often it's a struggle, it's a battle if you're a parent or raising a family here in the city because you know what you're missing out on, so to speak. Compared to your peers that live in suburbs or not cities. And it often leaves us wondering, whether you're a kid or a parent of a kid, is it still worth it to be here or is it still worth it to raise our kids here? It's a constant question and battle that families go through and even as someone that grew up here in the city, it's something that I even think about and wrestle with as I raise my kids and my family here in the city.

When it comes to God's mission, God's mission of the church, it also includes the next generation. But part of that passing on the faith of the next generation means not just going where the next generation could be comfortable. It means not just going where it's easiest to raise our kids, but rather to ask the question, where does God desire for us to be on mission as his people and how does he want to include the next generation in that? And so in this sermon, we're gonna look at how do we pass the faith on to the next generation, especially in a city like ours, but also how do we raise up the next generation in a way where they will be on mission themselves for God and the gospel?

I think God really has a desire to reach our city. There's still a hope for our city that God will reach to the city of San Francisco. And I really do believe and think that God's desire includes the next generation here in our city in our midst. And as much as it's difficult and we wanna think how do we best protect and guard our kids from the city, God also has a plan to say how does he wanna use our kids and our youth to reach the city? And so we're gonna see that just through two questions as we look at this passage. Two questions to understand God's mission to the next generation. First, what is God's mission to the next generation? And then secondly, how can we reach the next generation? So first, what is God's mission to the next generation?

God's mission to the next generation starts with God's love and heart for the next generation. It's something we see in this passage, all by inadvertently or implicitly, but in verse six and seven, the psalmist says, God's desire is that the next generation might know the teachings or the law and the children yet unborn and arise and tell them to their children so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments. God has always had this love and desire for the next generation. It's something we see in the New Testament with Jesus even chastising the disciples when he says, let the children come to meet. Kids that were a little bit lower or despised in society, God had a plan to love and embrace them. And God's love for youth or the next generation is not really like the way our culture seems to love youth or the next generation.

It may seem like our culture loves youth or the next generation, but I think our culture actually just loves youthfulness. We kind of put youthfulness on a pedestal. We celebrate a youthful spirit or youthful looks or youthful adventure or young love as we see in a lot of TV shows. We see it, we kind of admire it. But I don't think our culture actually loves children. You could just look at birth rates that are plummeting, especially in the most secular cities in America. I think I just saw something recently that the birth rate in San Francisco has dropped below one. Now, to have a proper population replacements, you need 2.1 birth rate per family units. And our birth rate in San Francisco is now below one. I think it's like 0.7. Less and less people are having kids. People are just, they just don't want kids.

But even just think about the culture of our city where there are quite probably more dogs than kids. We are not a city that tends to love children. We tend to overlook them. Now, I have both kids and a dog. And so I've experienced this firsthand. I remember after our first daughter was born, I would take her out on walks with my dog at Fort Funston. We

lived near there. We let her dog off leash. I'd be walking her in the stroller. And people would come running up to my dog, say, oh, what a cute dog. Oh, you're such a cute puppy. They use the baby dog baby voice. And my daughter would be kind of like saying, hi, hi. And they would just not even give her a second look until finally she got their attention. They say, oh, yeah, you're cute too. And then move on. It was just fascinating to me how easy it was for people to stop and talk to me about my dog and give my kid no attention. Now, I didn't necessarily expect them to love on my kid. They were a stranger. But the fact that our city loves dogs and yet seems to ignore kids, I think it's just one other aspect that points to the way that we don't love youth the way our culture thinks it does. We love youthfulness. Kids are often simply viewed as a commodity in our culture. They're a commodity for our entertainment or enjoyment.

Kid actors give us enjoyment through Netflix series and other shows and movies. Even families, I think, can sometimes view kids as a commodity, especially those of us that may be from immigrant homes. I remember joking with my immigrant home peers, fellow kids of immigrants. We'd say, I don't know if our parents actually love us. We're just their long-term retirement plan. We're a future investment for their future security.

I think the church, though, can also adopt a similar attitude. Where we don't actually love and value kids, we just love the youthfulness and energy. And so we may craft worship services in a way that seem youthful, but we completely strip kids out of the picture. I think even the way we think about families having children and youth can sometimes just be seen as a commodity. People will often say that you can tell the future of a church by how many kids there are in the church. And so we need vibrant youth and kids ministries to ensure the future of the church. Well, that just makes the next generation a commodity for our own security. I even heard one very prominent conservative Christian speaker say that while the church may not be able to combat or conquer secular culture, we can outbreed them and eventually take them over. That's just another way of saying kids are a commodity, they're a means to some end.

But what does the God of the Bible say about the next generation? Kids are not a commodity because of what they add to God and the people of Israel. Kids are a component of God's mission, a valued component of God's community and mission in the world, simply because of their inherent value, because they're made in God's image, because they're a whole generation that, throughout scripture in the Old Testament especially, God knew that children were vulnerable as a vulnerable population. That's why you have so many instances where God says he enacts justice for the fatherless, for the orphan. So many places where God's heart is for the young ones, because they were vulnerable and simply used as a commodity in society and still to this day.

God's mission in the Old Testament was often focused on new generations versus new nations. As much as we talk about God's reach for new nations, God's focus in the Old Testament especially was more so on new generations. You look at verses five and six, Psalm 78 again. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children that the next generation might know them. This is a common thing throughout the Old Testament where God's desire is to raise up future generations to know him and keep covenant with him. In the entire book of Deuteronomy when God is making his covenant with Israel before they go to the land of Canaan, as much as he's concerned with them living out the covenant in Canaan, his greater concern is that they teach and pass them on to the children and next generations and so on and so forth. The whole books of Proverbs in the Song of Solomon are written to the sons and daughters of the next generation of Israel to raise them up in the law and goodness of the Lord. And we already mentioned Jesus' heart in the New Testament is for the children who are seen as vulnerable. The job of God's people was always to pass on the faith. Yes, we are meant to be on mission in the world for new nations, but we also need to be on mission to new generations within the church passing it on.

And that's something I love about our church is that we include children and youth in our services. We have a lot of kids, mine is always up here with our little gang of friends. We got some up there, sorry to call you out kids. This is about you guys. We got some youth boys I think in the back over there. Hello. I love that we include children and youth in all of our Sunday services and programming. Because it's become increasingly unpopular to include the next generation in church activities and programs. It's really easy to just say, well, it's easier and better to just remove kids out of the picture. We can get some babysitters to do crowd control, chaos control, so the rest of us can do the real work of discipleship. That's the message we can communicate when we remove kids and youth out of our regular church programming. And as inconvenient as kids can be sometimes, I know that to be the case sometimes, if you're a parent like me, it's not always convenient to have your kid with you in service. It's not always convenient for the rest of you to have our kids in service.

You sometimes have to deal with loud noises. Kids get distracted. They have short attention spans. They don't always understand things. And the common message or thought process is, isn't it easier to just give them a smaller, truncated lesson in the Bible on their own so the rest of us can hear what we need to hear? But I think sadly that just follows through with a culture that says kids are better left, relegated to another room, unseen, unheard, so that the adults can get down to the real business. When we involve children and youth in our church programming as inconvenient and hard as it may be sometimes, it communicates a value that they belong here too. That this is also their church. That the church doesn't belong to them just until they turn 18, but actually the church belongs to them from the very moment at birth because they are part of families that are here in our church.

I think it reminds us too that if Jesus welcomed the children to come to the front aisle during his sermons, why would we remove kids from that? See, when we involve kids and take the work of maybe honoring them in these moments, stooping a little bit to levels that they can understand, dealing with the inconvenience, we actually communicate the love and welcome that God has for children by loving and welcoming them in our spaces. See, the church is not just for adults to do the real business. God loves the next generation. He wants to welcome the children and invite them to come. God loves the next generation. He has a heart to pass on the faith to the next generation, but I think there's also a missional urgency of reaching the next generation.

That's something that I think is becoming more and more apparent today. Maybe because of our increasing secular culture, maybe because of our failure to pass on the faith to the next generation, because we have set up whole churches and ministries that have been for the adults and kids are just taken out of the picture, there is a missional urgency to reach the next generation. The current young people, the current 18 and under generation, which is Generation Z and Generation Alpha, they are what's known as the very first post-Christian generation. Some of you young professionals and young working adults are in that category.

To be the first post-Christian generation means they are growing up for the first time in American soil where Christianity is not the dominant religion, nor is it the dominant worldview. It's not the dominant thought process or way to think about how we view the worlds. It's post-Christian meaning our culture no longer views Christianity at the forefront, but in its rear view mirror. What that also means is that our kids, our young people are growing up in a world that's further just simply secular, maybe hostile, or even just unaware of Christianity. Being a Christian today is a lot harder than it was even 20 years ago or 30 years ago for those of us that grew up then.

If you look at national averages of Protestantism in America, it's about 40%. About 40% of America's population are Protestant. But if you look at this generational breakdown, this is from a religious sociologist by the name of Ryan Burge that I follow. The breakdown of Protestants for Generation Z, because we don't have data on Gen Alpha yet, is 22%. That's all 18% less than the national average. On top of that, America is about 29%, estimates about 29% evangelical. Gen Z estimates are that they are about 16% evangelical Protestants. Now on top of all of that, San Francisco is the least religious city in America. Another study that Ryan Burge did showed the cities that had the least amount of religious attendance. San Francisco was number one. People attend religious services or churches, only 12% one times a month. And that figure drops considerably when it comes to weekly. Our city is only 7% evangelical. Now if you take all that into account, that means that we can estimate that teens in San Francisco range in about 4% to 5% evangelical. That's over 10% less than the national average. What that also means is that young people in San Francisco are quite literally the least reached population in America. And just think about that, teens, young people in San Francisco, are the least reached demographic in our entire nation. If you look at all the figures, it amounts to about 16 Christian students per school, based on SF Unified and private school figures. Now what that means is that for our kids that are growing up, they're in the vast minority when they're growing up if they're being raised in any religion whatsoever, but especially Christianity.

That means for those of you that are in high school, our youth students, those of you that are in college, and even our young professionals, you are in places that are the least reached spaces in our entire nation. Your schools and workplaces are probably the most unreached and secular and non-Christian spaces in our entire nation. And I think that shows even more the urgency that we need to have as a church in reaching the next generation. I think that means young people today need a lot of comfort and support when it comes to following Christ. It means that as we think about our children, youth, and our church, we shouldn't see them as an inconvenience, but rather embrace them and welcome them so that

we can support and love them. It means that passing on the faith is not just the job of the youth ministry or the children's ministry or the children's director or youth director or youth pastor. It means passing on the faith to next generation. It's the job of the entire church to come around this unreached generation. And so love and support encourage them in a way where they can stand firm for the faith in these most unreached spaces where they are. And I hope if you're a young person here that our church feels like a welcoming space for you. I hope you can feel the hospitality of our church at times. No, we don't have the largest of children's youth ministries. We probably don't have the most exciting children youth ministries. There's a lot of other churches out there that have a lot more exciting youth programs that you can go do and have a lot more fun with a lot more other fellow youth and children.

But I think there's something that our church does have. We have an intimacy of community where you can feel like a family of faith. You're part of God's new family of belonging. I think we have an amazing group of youth and children volunteers. I might even argue we have the best in the city. I know that's a little bit biased, but the reason why is because the average turnover rate for youth pastors and volunteers is about 18 to 36 months. You know what the average volunteer rate of our children and youth volunteers is? Minimum four years. At our youth team, the least someone has been serving is four years. The most is, I don't know, maybe 10, 12, 15. We have an incredibly committed group of youth and children volunteers. We have an incredibly committed group of young professionals that meet for Bible study for an hour and a half on Tuesday nights. It's one of the few places that young people can gather for intense study of the Bible.

I would argue that while we may not have the hype and fun and excitement of other churches in the city, there's a stability that communicates love and care. There's a depth that communicates the importance of Christ and His word. And if anything, that's what our young people need today. I think young people have seen enough of the hype and the polish and the professionalized ministry. What they need, whether they know it or not, is something that's somber, rooted in Christ, humble and deep. I do think that's something our church can offer as we welcome and support our children and youth. The greatest way to reach a post-Christian culture is through this next generation. I think that includes raising up our children, youth, and young professionals to be a missionary force in our city, but also because you all are the tip of the spear of God's mission in America, as you go to your schools and to your friends that are the most unreached demographic in the city.

But I also think reaching the next generation, the best way to reach our post-Christian culture through the next generation is not just by reaching the next generation outside of the church, but ensuring we lay this foundation of the gospel and the word within the church. A lot of people think that, well, we need better trends or better attraction or better ways to reach young people to draw them into our church building. So we create whole mission ideals from that. You know, one of the most sure way you can ensure adult conversion to the gospel, especially in a post-Christian culture, it's not actually by how the church programs itself, what it does to attract people in, it's not even from outward evangelism. It's actually from laying a foundation of the gospel at the child and youth years.

This is what Missiologist Stephan Paz says. He's one of the foremost missiologists, leading missiologists in the world right now. He's in Amsterdam. And he says this in his 2019 book. It's a long quote, but I think it's worth quoting at length, so we can put it up. Stephan Paz says, "As childhood involvement in church is by far the most reliable predictor of adult church going, the most effective missionary long-term strategy may be to reach out to children rather than focusing on adults with no church background at all. Thus, youth and children ministries may be an important missionary tool in turning around long-term decline, not because they're significantly more successful at attracting non-churched people, but because they play a very important role in making a connection between Christianity and the next generations. Thus, they may sow the seed for future evangelism, because people who decide to join a church later in life are almost always people who draw from childhood experience. This appears to be the case even when these people went to church on a very irregular basis."

Paz did a study throughout Europe, one of the most secular places in the world right now, and he found that over 90% of adult converts had a church background in their child or youth years. And what he found to be the case was that as much as people go out and evangelize the non-churched, well, it's actually the pool of the church that most of adult converts come from. Now, that's not necessarily a figure we wanna hear, because it makes us feel a little bit uncomfortable that, well, do we just not evangelize? I think we should, but what Paz is saying is that one of the best ways to sow seeds for future evangelism is investing in young people today. It's caring about next-gen ministries today. That also means that we

can't actually see the full fruitfulness and success of our next-generation ministries within the first few years. It can be really tempting to say, well, if we don't have a thriving children youth ministry right now, then we're failing. We're doing something wrong. But actually, by what Paz is saying, the best way you can tell whether a children and a youth ministry did its job and had fruitfulness is not in two to three years. It's not in five years. It's in 10 years, 20 years, 30 years, as a pool of those people either stay in the church or come back to the church.

Something that even John Lemmieson Nevius, missionary in the 19th century, said 150 years before Stephen Paz. He said this in his manual for evangelists. And he's talking about evangelism, but what he wrote was this. One must not look down upon young children thinking they are merely little ones of no consequence. For in just a few years, they will become the leaders of the people and the parents of future generations. Given more time, they will shape the affairs of the world as they see fit. As the saying goes, what one learns in youth, one practices in adulthood. The teachings and values instilled in them now, will remain unchanged in the future. Many who receive instruction in youth, even if they strayed for a time, later found themselves naturally drawn back to the faith as the seeds sown in their hearts and never truly vanished. So if reaching the next generation is the greatest long-term missionary strategy in a post-Christian world, then I think that means our church needs to deeply value the future of the future in youth. And we didn't care about it in a way where we are passing on the faith, not just fun to the next generation.

As I was thinking about this, I realized I'm actually a product of these statistics. I was not born and raised in a Christian home. Both my parents did not raise me going to church. But I've talked about my grandmother who was from North Korea. She was born in a shamanistic family. She would invite the shamans to come into her house and lead shaman worship in her house. By all accounts, she was on a path to become a shaman herself. She would sing shaman worship songs, practice rituals and rites. Shamans were just simply these figures that practice songs and worship the spirit world. But then one of her childhood friends in her village brought her to a church service. And through going for a few times, asking questions of the pastor, she gave her life to Jesus at the age of four or five. All through the entirety of the Korean War, oppression, her fleeing from North Korea, she held on to her faith. And when I would visit her in those summers in Southern California, she would take me with her to church.

I was one of those kids that only went to church a handful of times a year. Maybe once a year with my mom, but only in the summers with my grandma. When someone eventually evangelized to me in middle school and they asked me to come to their church, you know, my first thought was, I don't really do church. But my second thought was, yeah, my grandma would be happy about that. So I said, sure, why not? Six months later, I gave my life to Christ based on the legacy of my grandmother. I was one of those kids that very rarely went to church, but because of these seeds of faith sewn early on through my grandmother, that planted a seed that was later reaped by someone's faithful evangelism to me. See, our children and youth ministries may seem insignificant at times, but our whole church, as we care for the next generation, we can be certain that whether we see fruit now or not, we are sowing seeds for future evangelistic fruit.

So that's the what of God's mission to the next generation. He wants to include all young people in it. But what about the how? How do we actually reach the next generation with the gospel? There's a lot of different things that we could say. There's a lot that people write about and talk about this. But I think Psalm 78 gives two very simple threads throughout the rest of the Psalm about how the next generation is reached. And they're not groundbreaking. They're quite simple, as you'll see. Two simple threads that help us proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and the certainty of God's power over salvation.

The first is simply that we're to tell of the failures of mankind. Tell the failures of man. When the Psalmist starts off this Psalm, he talks about some things that are hidden, that he wants to proclaim and make known to the children. If you look at verses one through four again, he says, "Give ear, O my people, to my teaching, and climb your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from our children, but tell them to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders that he has done."

Now from first reading, we would probably assume that the hidden things that he mentions are the glorious deeds that God has done. But he's already talked about the glorious deeds. He's making that plain that those are already known. He says in verse two, "I will utter dark sayings from of old." That Hebrew word is a literal word for riddles. It's the word used

in the book of Job when Job says of God, "You speak in riddles and I do not understand." It's meant to convey something that's hard to understand or hidden, whether it's hidden because of a lack of understanding, but here, what the Psalmist is saying is these hidden things are not hidden because they're not understood. They're hidden because they have not been shared. They've been hidden from future generations, probably due to some shame. That's why he calls them, they're translated as dark sayings. And what are those shameful acts that have been hidden from Israel's generations? Well, throughout the rest of the entirety of Psalm 78, it's all the places that Israel failed. It's all the ways that they were not faithful to God, how they grumbled and complained against him, how God made something very plain and clear to them, and yet they failed to follow him. What the Psalmist is saying is we cannot hide the things we're shameful of because otherwise, if we do so, we are gonna convey a faith or a salvation that's dependent on man's faithfulness, not God's might and power.

When we are honest with man's failures, it does a number of things. First, it helps the next generation be corrected in ways that we want them to grow. I think it's a very common desire while parents want their kids to grow beyond themselves. It's a very common thread in modern psychotherapy that we want future generations to grow from our past failures and mistakes. But I think we also know that that's not entirely up to us. We can't ensure that just sharing things with our children will ensure that they will be better than us because we live in a fallen broken world with fallen broken people. See, being honest with our failures shows people that we can't be dependent on man, but we have to be dependent on God alone. If all we share and celebrate are our successes, we will set up a faith that seems unattainable to our young people. We'll set up a faith that seems like they have to be put together, that everything seems to be, needs to be okay, rather than coming to God with their lack of being okay. I think it also invites young people into a space where they don't have to perform to belong.

You know, young people today have some of the highest mental health and anxiety rates ever seen before. In fact, they are the highest than we've ever seen before. There's a great book by Jonathan Haidt, a sociologist named *The Anxious Generation* that's gotten a lot of awards last year showing how this is the most anxious generation we've ever seen. A lot of that is, there's a number of factors, but a lot of that is because of the self-policing that's happened through social media, because kids are constantly surveilled, because their value and worth is constantly quantified by real-time likes, or people can get easily canceled amongst groups they don't even know for one wrong move or action or word. There's an incredibly performative society, and on the flip side, they see that their good performance gives them greater acceptance in society. And when we produce or proclaim a faith that lacks our own failures, we're no better, we're not, in fact, we're adding to that anxiety because we're saying that you need to perform or live to a standard to belong here in God's people, in God's church. And that's just simply not the gospel.

The gospel says that we belong here precisely because we are not perfect. The gospel says we are here precisely because we are a people that do not have it all together. God had to send Jesus to die on behalf of sin because we could not overcome our sin ourselves. And so our hope as a church, part of the reason we started our discipleship groups is to get us comfortable or exercise that muscle of honest confession and vulnerability, not just before God, but before one another. Because it's as we bring these things before God that we allow the transformative power of the gospel to have its work. See, being honest with our failures invites young people to see that, to experience the transforming power of the gospel vicariously through adults or other people. But it also allows us to experience more deeply the gospel for ourselves.

One of the worst things we can do is set up a faith where we are never honest, where we never share our failures, we can never confess our sins, because that is a faith dependent on man, not God alone. You know, my wife and I were in the home buying process, I mentioned this before, we're just looking, dabbling, trying, it seems like an impossible task. But as we are touring homes and visiting them, we've seen a lot of homes that are newly painted, they look really nice on the outside, they have new fixtures. And then we ask our realtor about it, and they say, well, let me send you the disclosures. Anyone that's done home buying knows what that means. The disclosures are these long like 50 page documents that go through all the nitty gritty of the home, all the things that are broken and wrong. And one of the worst things is when you see a house that looks great on the outside, looks move in ready, you think, oh, this would be a great home for our family, and then we see the disclosures and realize there's minimum of 20, 30, 40, \$50,000, just to bring the house up to code, modern code.

See, that's what Jesus called whitewashed tombs when he looked at the Pharisees. Because those homes, while they're polished on the outside, have so many problems on the inside, that they're not actually fit and ready. There's a work that needs to be done. And see, when we bring our sin, we're honest with our failures before God, when we disclose the ugly before him, that's when we can actually allow the power of the gospel to be at work. And that's what we wanna convey to young people today. That the gospel is not about their performance or their work, but simply what God has done in Christ and how he's forming us into a people that are not perfect, but stake our claim and salvation on the perfection of Christ our savior. And when we're honest with these failures, more than anything, it declares the might of God and the faithfulness of God to save. That's the last point, the second thread of Psalm 78 is that we're to tell of the faithfulness of God.

When we tell of the failures of man, it gives us an opportunity to tell of the faithfulness of God. In Psalm 78, verse seven, Psalmist says, "So they should set their hope on God "and not forget the works of God, "but keep his commandments." And at the very end there, "To raise up a generation whose heart was not steadfast, "whose spirit was not faithful to God." Meaning God desires to raise up a generation whose heart is set on the Lord because he's faithful to them. And all throughout this Psalm, God's faithfulness is highlighted amidst Israel's failures. Just a brief sweeping look at it. First we see Israel refused to keep God's covenant and forgot his wonders, but God continued to guide them through Egypt, through the waters of the Nile, and through the wilderness. Then Israel tested God in the wilderness. They grumbled against him for food and water. What did God do? He provided manna from heaven, water from the rock, and quail from the earth until their bellies were full. Israel sinned against God and were not faithful to his covenant.

What did God do? He had compassion on them and toned them for their sin, redeeming them from Egypt, from slavery, even though they didn't deserve it. Israel turned away from God, made him jealous, and worshiped idols. What did God do? Well, the Psalmist says, He finally awoke in his anger and against Israel, but then he chose a remnant from which would come David, who would become the shepherd of Israel and lead them back to him. See, all throughout Israel's 100 and 1,000 year history, throughout all their failures, there were moments where God deemed himself faithful to them, even when it was undeserving. When we're able to acknowledge the failures of man, both us as a church, you young people as well, and you can be honest with your failures and who you are, it gives us this opportunity to declare the faithfulness of God that is still faithful to us today.

And I think one of the ways we can do this is actually through stories. Psalm 78 does this through stories. You know what's fascinating to me? Psalm 78 is the second longest Psalm in the book of the Psalms. Everyone knows Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm, longest book in the Bible. Psalm 78 is the second longest one. And what's it filled with? All of Israel's failures and all of God's faithfulness. See, in relating these stories throughout Israel's history, the psalmist is calling the generation to come back to God. I think stories are a powerful way where we can think about the ways in history past as we open the service with of how God has been faithful in the past.

In fact, it gives us this historic rootedness that I think the next generation of young people are so longing for today. What's fascinating is that young people, maybe because of the distrust of modern institutions that have been breaking down, maybe because there just have not been institutions that have been trustworthy or around for long periods for young people to find a sense of rootedness in, probably in a sense because we're in such a disjointed world where young people are so separated from their origins, from their histories, that a lot of young people have been going back to very historic faiths. Judaism, Orthodoxy, faiths of that sort are seeing a tremendous spike in increase in percentage in the last few years. I think there's this longing and desire for this historical rootedness that young people have to find themselves as part of a bigger story. And what bigger story do we have than God's story working from the beginning of creation through all of Israel and now in his church?

It's part of the reason why we even took such efforts to celebrate our 175th year anniversary last fall. Because we recognize here at First SF, we have a story that's 175 years old. But here's the great thing about it, not everything in our story is something to be proud of, isn't it? Not everything in our story is all that we're celebrating. There may be periods of our church's history that we would rather cover up and hide. But what does the psalmist say? I will make known the dark sayings of old. I will not hide them from our children. Because when we acknowledge the dark parts of our past, we're able to say that First SF is still here not because of great men and pastors we've had. We've had some hard times in our church's history where pastors have fallen into moral failure, where there's been church conflicts, when there's been

racial tension. There's been moments where our church has seen to almost close its doors for whatever reasons we don't always know. But those were always moments that God showed up and remained faithful to his church. That's not just a sign of God's faithfulness to our church as we talked about last fall, but God's faithfulness here in our city.

God wants to reach a post-Christian culture through the next generation. And it may be hard for those of us who have kids in the city to believe that at times. It's hard to send our kids out into a world that seems so against us in the faith. It's hard for you young people to walk out into your schools and in the world that even saying the name Jesus takes risk.

But I think our church can play a huge role in reaching our city through our next generation and through our young people by supporting our families and helping them thrive in the city. By sending them out and valuing and welcoming in, also that's as Psalms says in verse six, so that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children so they should set their hope on God. God still has people in the city and a work he wants to do in SF. And it may even be through the next generation in 10, 20, 30 years to come. But we can play our part in loving and welcoming and raising them up.