

Poor planning has led Greece, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, and Germany to the brink 边缘 of bankruptcy. Many other nations are just a step behind. They don't have a vision for the future. They aren't thinking longterm. They aren't thinking about the future generations. They are wasting their time, energy and resources on themselves.

That's true of economies. It's also true of families and churches. Where there is no planning, the people go bankrupt; they fall away from God. Families and churches become unfaithful because they aren't planning for the future. To put it another way, they are not living by faith. They're short-sighted, living for the here and now, living for *this world*.

There's one sense in which our culture is obsessed with family planning – reducing the number of children. But that's often more like *anti-family* planning. What's even worse is that true, *biblical* family planning – *raising children who are confident in God for generations to come* – is all but gone from our culture! Even in the church this is true. Approximately 75% of the next generation in North American churches are leaving. The main reason is that they are not being raised to hope in God.

We live in the kind of age Psalm 78 is addressing – a godless generation whose hearts are not loyal to God. From Psalm 78:1-8 let us hear what God says to us about *a Biblical vision for family planning*.

Take Extra Oil: A Biblical Vision for Family Planning

1. an educational vision
2. a God-centered vision
3. a multi-generational vision

Asaph is speaking to the rising generation in Israel about a renewed vision of planning for the future of Israel, the covenant people. Israel has been through a time of rebellion and unfaithfulness. Psalm 78 tells us this long, sad story of Israel's unfaithful response to their faithful God. In spite of all He did for them, they did not believe in Him, and they did not talk about Him to their children. That was the key problem. That is the reason given for Israel's forgetting the LORD and falling away from Him: the fathers did not tell the children about the Lord. The parents did not educate the next generation in the LORD's ways.

Psalm 78 is written to fight that problem. The main theme is this: *If we tell our children about the LORD, then they will put their trust in God*; and **not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.** (verse 8) This psalm is a recipe for spiritual renewal and reformation in the church.

It not promise that each and every child will respond favourably to our Christian instruction, but it does mean that with this biblical vision for raising children in the covenant community, families and churches will be strong in the LORD. Of course, each generation must commit in faith to this vision for family planning!

The key is education. By that, I mean the key is that we practice what the psalmist speaks of at the beginning of the psalm: **Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark (hidden) sayings of old.** The parables, the dark and hidden sayings are the mysterious, wonderful things God has done which are beyond our understanding! After introducing his desire to teach us in verses 1-8, Asaph goes on to tell us about God and His covenant in verses 9-72. Asaph is a model of what each generation must do: we must open our mouths to declare the wonders of God to our children.

He continues in. verses 3-4: **I will utter dark sayings...which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength, and His wonderful works that he has done.** Here the LORD tells us our educational task in two ways, in a negative way and in a positive way.

- Here's the negative: **We will not hide them from their children.** He is calling believers to make a commitment not to hide the teachings about God and His works of salvation from the children of the covenant. To hide means to cover over. *We will not cover over our faith. We will not be silent about God. We will not keep quiet about the Word.* Sometimes as parents we are too afraid or too busy to educate our children to know the LORD. But Asaph, a wise and godly teacher in Israel, is putting words in our mouths and calling us to make them our own words: *We will not hide them...!*
- Here's the positive: **We will tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD**, that is, the great things He has done for which He is so worthy of praise. Again, Asaph is putting words of commitment in our mouths and calling us to make them our own. We will tell them of God and His works. That means spending time and energy on talking about God and His ways to our children. Our temptation is to be busy with so many things that the instruction time gets cut short, and sometimes doesn't even exist! That's why Moses added the word *diligently* when he commanded:

- **And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.** (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)
- **Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.** (Deuteronomy 4:9)

This educational task must be our undying commitment to and priority with our children – with our own children as parents, but as parents and singles with *all the members of the next generation*. Asaph speaks of a commitment to the whole rising generation in the church! As a man of God Asaph had in his heart all the children of the congregation of Israel, not just his own children. For this reason the education of our children is not just a family matter, it is also a church matter. *Our care must be for posterity in general, and not only for our own posterity; and for the generation to come hereafter, the children that shall be born, as well as for the generation that is next rising up.* (Matthew Henry)

As Christ's church, therefore, this is our commitment to God's covenant children: to instruct them and discipline them – education involves both – in the true God, and in the true teaching of salvation, and in faithfully living for Him. a) Through the preaching and teaching ministry of the leaders of the Church, b) through parental instruction, and c) with the assistance of other godly brothers and sisters in Christ who can also be their teachers, let us never, ever lose sight of that commitment to educate our children so that their lives are shaped in truth. [I grew up in a church environment which did not take this task seriously. The church wanted to follow the trends instead of being faithful. It wanted to be cool, not Christ-centred. They did this hoping to keep their children, but, instead, they lost most of their children! Only the true knowledge of God's works through Jesus Christ will keep the next generation!]

This is true, biblical family planning. In many families this kind of planning is often completely forgotten, even in families that call themselves Christian. One of the saddest things is to witness a family that calls itself Christian but spends no time talking about, teaching, or telling the things of God. This is not Christian, and it will not raise children who are confident in God.

2. a God-centred vision

That wise and godly teacher, Asaph, also understand the God-centred purpose of true education. What *is* the purpose of this education? Is it to give parents bragging rights so that we can proudly say (or think): *My child knows much more than yours!*? Is it to give churches a sense of pride that they have an excellent education program that is far better than almost every other church for miles around!? God forbid that we should ever use education to become a proud and smug people – we have the true doctrine and we are the best! In Romans 2, Paul rebukes the Jews for being proud that they know the law of God, but then don't use their knowledge to bring glory to God. What happens then, says Paul, is that our knowledge blasphemes God.

What does Psalm 78 says about the purpose of education? (5) **For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children;** (6) **that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born...** (7) **that they might set their hope in God and would not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.**

There are 2 purpose statements here. Why should the fathers make the truths of God's Law (Word) known to their children?

- so **that the generation to come might know them...** Knowledge is the first purpose. But there is a further purpose:
- so **that they might set their hope (trust) in God.** The family planning vision runs like this: from education to knowledge and from knowledge to trust.

The real purpose of education is not to raise children with self-esteem, but to raise children who hope in God and put all their confidence in Him, not in themselves. The biblical vision for family planning is a God-centred vision, not a child-centred one. The focus is on God, not on the us or our children. God is the Great One to be esteemed, not our children. Only this vision can pass along true meaning to our children, when they see that God is the meaning of life in this universe. He is at the centre of everything.

This God-centred vision of teaching our children involves two things, says God's prophet, Asaph:

- It means that the content of our teaching must be God. **We must tell the generation to come the praises of the LORD, His strength, and the wonderful works that He has done** (verse 4). And verse 7 adds: **that they might not forget the works of God.** Education not about teaching morals and manners to our children. That produces empty religion which is all about man's works. No, education is about coming to know God. Not just any god, but the God of salvation who sent Jesus, His Son, into the world to save sinners.

Did you know that in this Psalm Asaph is really commanding us to tell the story of Jesus Christ? Let me explain how Asaph is a prophet who is talking about Jesus. The New Testament says so. Jesus came to fulfill Psalm 78 by what He taught and what He did. When Jesus told parables about the kingdom of God, the Bible says in Matthew 13:34-35: **All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, He said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the**

prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

(Matthew 13:34-35) Jesus came to reveal the "dark sayings" or hidden mysteries of God. He came to show the wonderful work of God's salvation. What is this work? It is how God would save sinners through a Saviour who would come and die for sinners on the cross. This is the ancient mystery which was hidden in the Old Testament and then revealed in the New Testament in Jesus Christ. The Israelites saw God's salvation only dimly, in sacrifices and prophecies.

Jesus came to show us God's salvation plainly in His death and in His resurrection. There the hidden works of God are exposed in full beauty: how He put our sin and punishment on Jesus, so that we might have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life. This is the story of God Asaph told in Old Testament language, which Jesus now tells us in New Testament language. This is the story we must tell from all of Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. Tell them the story of Jesus, which starts already in Genesis 1. As Paul says in Colossians 3 – **May the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!**

b) And it means that the aim of our teaching is faith in God: that they might set their hope in God. The word here for hope literally means **kidney**, something that lives very deep inside you. The idea is this: that they might develop a very deep, genuine and abiding confidence in God and in His saving work. This hope is a *deeply felt confidence in and expectation from God*. We are called to raise children in the desire that they come to a firm conviction and deep-rooted assurance in the God of the Bible, and that this God is My Saviour and will work all things for my good and be with me to the end. I commit my life to following Him alone and keeping His commandments because there is no other God besides Him, and I have no other refuge.

We know that God-centred education is the tool for this, but it is not the power that does this work of creating faith and hope in God in our children. The power belongs to the Holy Spirit of God. We must teach and discipline always in reliance on the Holy Spirit who alone can create and develop faith. As the apostle once said: **Our Gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance.** (I Thessalonians 1:5) It requires the work of the Holy Spirit for our telling of God to translate into our children's trusting in God. We must pray for that! He uses our work, but it is His work. He must regenerate and open the heart to the Lord.

3. A Biblical vision for family planning is also a multi-generational vision

Remember that the LORD through Asaph is calling us to a 4-generation perspective – *a multi-generational outlook*. Here, verses 5-6, the LORD calls the 1) fathers to teach 2) their children so that 3) the generation to come would know the teachings, even the children yet to be born, that they in turn may arise and 4) declare them to their children. It reminds us of the prophet Joel who says to Israel about the works of God (in judging His people for their sin): **Tell your children about it; let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.** (Joel 1:3)

Now, obviously, the LORD is not calling us to limit ourselves to only 4 generations. The point is this: as you teach your children, look far, far ahead into the future, much farther than you can see or imagine now. *As you teach your children, plan ahead for your great, great grandchildren who will be born in 22nd century, Lord willing!*

And that brings us to the issue of the oil in the parable of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins. The Church has often failed in her vision for family planning. We are like the 5 foolish virgins who took no extra oil with them as they waited for the Bridegroom to return. They were thinking short-term. The Bridegroom is coming any moment! And they are not ready for the long wait; they are not ready for a delay. Short-term thinking is really very selfish: *I'm just in it for me. As long as I get to heaven I'm not concerned about anything else.* This has led to very careless, short-term thinking when it comes to training our children. The rapture's just around the corner so why bother thinking about great-great-great grandchildren?!

But if we really want to prepare for the Lord's coming, we will take extra oil with us, so that, in case the Bridegroom is delayed and takes longer than we think, we will have passed along the knowledge of God with enough clarity and soundness and diligence and seriousness to carry the next generation forward, and they the next, and the next, and the next, so that in the year 2130 and 2576 our descendants will be raising children who are confident in God! No, we can't guarantee the outcome, but we must be faithful in our task to desire and pursue this outcome that only God can bring!

Take extra oil with you. What does this mean in the context of raising the next generation?

- This means many things, of course, but it begins with throwing away all half-hearted, lukewarm Christianity. If we are half-hearted in our faith, we are setting the generation to come on a pathway that leads away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Half-hearted Christianity has no holding or staying power. As Paul says, the *form* of godliness may be there, but there is no power in it. Jesus will spit it out of His mouth. (see Revelation 3:16) We must repent of being lukewarm (which attacks us all) and become, with God's help, fully devoted to the Lord and His kingdom. The Lord says that the fear of the Lord holds great blessing for Israel's future: **Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!... May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!** (Psalm 128:1,6)
- Taking extra oil with you also means having that positive perspective on the future that is willing to look ahead several generations. Many Christians simply assume that everything is going to ruin with the coming generations. But we must

stop thinking that the future of the world belongs to the godless, and that there's no hope for the future generations either of our own children and grandchildren. This is an extremely short-term and hopeless outlook. We must believe what God promised Abraham: that he (and those who have his faith) **will inherit the world!** (see Romans 4:13) A Psalm 78 perspective believes that there is hope for the coming generations, and for the Church in this world.

- For this reason, taking extra oil also means that we believe that we are not stuck in the sins of our forefathers, but that reformation and renewal are truly possible with God. By faith Asaph was looking to reverse the tide of an evil, rebellious generation. He was saying to them: *You don't have to do this just because your fathers did it that way!* God is the God of reversals. He can make children of Abraham out of stones. He can use little you and little me to turn the world upside down by the power of the Gospel, and turn the tide of a wicked and depraved generation! The Gospel is powerful – far more powerful than the godless, pagan culture that invades our land, our movie theatres, our government, and our news media. Taking extra oil means shining the powerful light of our lamps in this dark world until the Lord returns, and letting the Lord work powerfully through us. The Gospel is powerful light because it is nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ which destroys sin, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ that brings new life. That is the life-changing power that can turn the tide in your life, in your child's life, in your whole family history, and even in your nation!

Because of the Power of the Gospel of God's Christ, we not only must, but we can look far ahead in our family planning! This is the Word of God that saves households for generations to come. We must never put faith in our family planning vision, or in our parenting techniques, or in our church education program, for in the end, though God will be pleased to use these faithful works, it is His faithful work alone through Jesus Christ that will build the rising generations.