

# ***Leaving a Godly Legacy***

## **The Six Components of a Godly Legacy \* Psalm 78**

Today we're pausing our study in the book of Romans in order to do a short series where we're going to explore how to leave a godly legacy. Since we're going to be in Romans all the way up until next Easter, we've decided to take a few breaks along the way to allow the deep truths of the book to marinate in our souls and to give us the opportunity to talk about some other important things. And one of those important things is the legacy we're all in the process of leaving behind.

Now, last week I said that I love it when life provides me with sermon illustrations, and lo, and behold, that happened again this week. Early Monday morning I was at University hospital for an MRI. And I guess I should say that it was simply preventative, and everything checked out ok, so there's no reason to worry. But a funny thing happened as the nurse was prepping me; I have some claustrophobia issues and so I had taken medication that made me somewhat woozy. And when the nurse asked how I was feeling, I said "fine, just a little dizzy," and in response she immediately reached down and put a wristband on me that read "Fall Risk". I've kept it on all week just to show you. Now, this is a great illustration for today, for two reasons. One, it's a reminder that I'm getting old and therefore need to seriously consider my legacy. And two, if I don't pay close attention to how I'm living, I'm at a severe risk of falling short of the kind of legacy I want to leave, and more importantly of the kind of legacy God wants me to leave. In other words, if I don't carefully consider the direction of my life, then I'm in danger of failing to leave a godly legacy.

You see, a godly legacy requires intentionality. A godly legacy doesn't happen by default, but rather by design<sup>1</sup> and so over the next four weeks, we're going to go to God's Word to discover what a godly legacy looks like and how we can pursue one. So, in order to set the stage for this series, I want to make a few introductory comments. First, I want to be clear that leaving a legacy means more than simply being remembered. It's more than what a financial planner or insurance adviser or funeral director will counsel you to do – to leave behind money, material things, and/or memories. In fact, it's possible to leave an immense legacy without being remembered at all. Consider two of the most influential men of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century: Gavrilo Princip and Norman Borlaug. You've undoubtedly heard of these men, although I'm guessing few if any of you remember their names, and yet, each and every one of our lives have been impacted by them. Gavrilo Princip was the man who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand and his wife on June 28, 1914, and in doing so ignited World War I, in which 20 million people were killed.<sup>2</sup> World War I eventually led to World War II in which 75 million people were killed.<sup>3</sup> So, while you may not know Gavrilo Princip by name, it's not a stretch to say that he may have been the most consequential individual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://briandoddonleadership.com/2015/04/25/12-steps-to-leaving-a-godly-legacy-to-the-next-generation/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.centre-robert-schuman.org/userfiles/files/REPERES%20-%20module%201-1-1%20-%20explanatory%20notes%20-%20World%20War%20I%20casualties%20-%20EN.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_II\\_casualties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II_casualties)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.seacoast.org/seacoast-go/stories/leaving-a-legacy-that-matters/>

Then there's Norman Borlaug, who has a different kind of legacy. Borlaug was an American agronomist known as the father of the Green Revolution, a series of initiatives that led to extensive increases in agricultural production in some of the neediest parts of the world. Borlaug has been credited with saving over a billion people from starvation<sup>5</sup> and is said to have saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived.<sup>6</sup> But even given the fact that Borlaug was a native Iowan, I'm guessing few of us remember his name. And yet, he has a massive legacy.

Now, none of us are likely to leave the kind of legacy that Gavrilo Princip and Norman Borlaug have. We're unlikely to be responsible for either that great degree of suffering or great amount of salvation.<sup>7</sup> And yet, we're all in the process of leaving a legacy, either for evil or for good. I realize that's a stark way to put it, but that's the way the Bible puts it. In Proverbs 10:7, Solomon writes that:

*The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot. Proverbs 10:7 (ESV)*

We, of course, always want some middle ground, but the Bible doesn't allow for this. It tells us our legacy will either be a blessing or a curse. It will be one or the other, and therefore the question before all of us is which will it be for us? Will we leave a godly legacy or an ungodly one?

And I want you to hear this at the beginning; you can leave a godly legacy. You can have a memory that blesses people long after you're gone, even if most or even all of them don't remember your name. Your life matters more than you can imagine, and if you will do the hard, intentional work of pursuing a godly legacy, when you're in heaven one day you'll have the joy of seeing how God used your life in ways you can't even begin to fathom. And today I want to begin to show you how this can happen. How you can leave a godly legacy. So, let's dive into God's Word now, turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 78. If you don't have a Bible, you can find it on p. 379 in our chair Bibles.

Psalm 78 is a historical psalm written by a man named Asaph. 1 Chronicles<sup>8</sup> tells us Asaph was a chief music leader during the reign of King David. And Psalm 78 is a song Asaph wrote where he relates the history of the Israelites from the Exodus to David's reign in order to impart lessons about who God is, what he has done, how the people responded erroneously in the past, and how they should learn from those past failures in the present and the future.<sup>9</sup>

We might think of it this way; in this psalm Asaph is attempting to help the Israelites re-write their legacy. To this point their legacy wasn't a good one. Despite God's incredible grace and mercy, they had repeatedly rebelled against him, with all kinds of devastating consequences. And so, in hopes of changing this legacy, Asaph records all that God had done for Israel in the past and how the prior generations had failed

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman\\_Borlaug](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Borlaug)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.worldfoodprize.org/en/dr\\_norman\\_e\\_borlaug/about\\_norman\\_borlaug/](https://www.worldfoodprize.org/en/dr_norman_e_borlaug/about_norman_borlaug/)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.seacoast.org/seacoast-go/stories/leaving-a-legacy-that-matters/>

<sup>8</sup> 1 Chronicles 15-16

<sup>9</sup> Boice, J. M. (2005). *Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary* (p. 645). Baker Books.

to respond in obedience to him, in order to inspire the current and future generations to choose a different path and in so doing leave a godly legacy.

So, seeing as how it reviews hundreds of years of Israelite history, the psalm is really long. Seventy-two verses, in fact. And since this is the case, we're going to zero-in on the first eight verses, where Asaph gives us six components of a godly legacy. So, let's look at these verses, follow along as I read:

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! <sup>2</sup>I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, <sup>3</sup>things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. <sup>4</sup>We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. <sup>5</sup>He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, <sup>6</sup>that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, <sup>7</sup>so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; <sup>8</sup>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. Psalm 78 (ESV)*

I want to start with verse 8, as it reveals what Asaph is after in this psalm; he's trying to prevent those in the present and the future from being like those in the past. He wants the present and future generations to be steadfast and faithful instead of stubborn and rebellious. In other words, he wants them to leave a godly legacy.

And we need to realize that Asaph isn't just speaking to his day, he's speaking to our day. He's speaking to us. Romans 15:4 says that *whatever was written in former days* – meaning the Old Testament – *was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

This means Psalm 78 is not only about the Israelites being steadfast and faithful, but also about us being steadfast and faithful; it's about us leaving a godly legacy too.

So, how do we do that? How do we leave a godly legacy? Well, in v. 3-7, Asaph tells us we do it by telling, teaching, knowing, hoping, remembering, and keeping. These are the six components of a godly legacy and let's talk about each of them.

### **1. Telling (v. 3, 4, 6)**

First, telling. This is a repeated theme in the text, as is evident from the use of the words *told* and *tell* in verses 3, 4, and 6.

And I want you to look at v. 4 again:

*We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders he has done.*

What Asaph specifically has in mind here are the great redemptive miracles God had performed for Israel from the Exodus all the way until the reign of David. Beginning in v. 9, Asaph repeatedly recounts these miracles; the 10 plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians, culminating in the Passover, which led Pharaoh to finally let the people go. The parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. And then the provision of food and water in the wilderness. And of course, the repeated protection from and defeat of their enemies. Time and again, God had miraculously saved the Israelites and Asaph's saying that the current and future generations must give themselves to the telling and retelling of these mighty works if they're going to avoid the error of past generations. In v. 42 & 43 Asaph highlights that because the Israelites quit telling about God's mighty works, they forgot about his power – his ability to save them – and so in their forgetfulness they turned from him. They quit telling and so instead of being steadfast and faithful, they became stubborn and rebellious.

And so, here's what this means for us. If we're going to avoid doing the same thing, we must tell and retell the story of the great redemptive miracle God has done for us. The great redemptive miracle in which he freed us from slavery to sin through Jesus' death on the cross. We must tell and retell the old, old story, of Jesus and his love.<sup>10</sup>

We must first tell it to ourselves, and then in turn tell it to others. We must tell it to our children and grandchildren. We must tell it to our friends. To our co-workers. Even to our fellow church members. There can be no godly legacy unless we're regularly engaged in telling the mighty work God's done in our lives. If we don't keep this continually before us and before others – then we'll end up, like the Israelites, being stubborn and rebellious instead of steadfast and faithful.

Asaph knew this and that's why he's so passionate about telling. Can you see his passion, by the way? In v. 1 he's basically begging us to listen to him. And in v. 4, he says, "We will not hide them..."

So, we need to move on, but friends, a godly legacy begins with a commitment not to hide the mighty works of God. Not to hide it from ourselves and not to hide it from others.

## **2. Teaching (v. 5)**

The second component of a godly legacy is teaching. Look at v. 5:

*He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their children.*

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<sup>10</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/tell\\_me\\_the\\_old\\_old\\_story\\_of\\_unseen\\_things](https://hymnary.org/text/tell_me_the_old_old_story_of_unseen_things)

*Testimony* and *law* refer to the same thing – it's the Mosaic law found in the first five books of the Old Testament – what we might call the Bible of the Israelites.

So, in v. 4 we have the *telling* of the works of God, and here in v. 5 we have the *teaching* of the will of God, giving instruction regarding how God desires us to live.

I want to point out a couple of super-important things about a godly legacy here.

One, leaving a godly legacy begins with being taught the Bible. It begins with being a student, not a teacher, with being a spiritual child rather than a spiritual father or mother.

But then two, leaving a godly legacy requires that as we're being taught, we begin to teach others. We've got to get this – leaving a godly legacy means being both student and teacher, both a spiritual child and a spiritual father or mother.

So, I really want you to see that what Asaph is telling us in v. 4 and 5 is the essentially the same thing Jesus tells us in the Great Commission. We're to tell people about the gospel and then when they believe, we're to teach them everything he's commanded us. That's how we leave a godly legacy, and we must, must, must recognize there's no other way to do so.

### **3. Knowing (v. 6)**

And that leads to the third component of a godly legacy: knowing. Look at v. 6:

*that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children.*

I want to point out two things here.

One, telling and teaching are to happen in perpetuity. Note there are three generations mentioned in the verse: this generation, the next generation, and the generation after that. So, we should tell and teach in a way that these two things carry on long after we're gone. In other words, we should make disciples in a way that our disciples can make disciples.

And then two, note the purpose of telling and teaching. This should be obvious, but the purpose of telling and teaching is so succeeding generations may know *them* – them being the works of God and the will of God.

I think it bears highlighting here that one of the greatest factors in the collapse of morality in our culture is the failure of the church to faithfully tell the works of God and teach the will of God. Simply put, over the last 50 years the number of churches and Christians who have

been faithfully preaching and teaching God's Word has dropped precipitously, and when people don't know what God has done and how he wants them to live, then they are, by default, going to rebel against him.

Proverbs 29:18 says this:

*Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law. Proverbs 29:18 (ESV)*

This verse is often misapplied as it doesn't refer to having a vision, but rather to the preaching and teaching of God's Word. Where that doesn't happen, people cast off restraint, or as another translation puts it, they run wild.<sup>11</sup> And of course, that's what's happening in our culture in increasing measure. We're running wild. And so, what's the solution? It's telling and teaching so people will know the works of God and the will of God – and experience the blessings that come along with it.

#### **4, 5, 6. Hoping, remembering, keeping (v. 7)**

Now, we're going to do components 4, 5, and 6 together, because as we'll see, they really can't be separated. So, look at v. 7:

*so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.*

Note the words *so that*...telling and teaching lead to knowing which leads to hoping, remembering, and keeping. These three things go together, and the one that holds them together is remembering.

Remembering, is, we might say, the crux of the matter,<sup>12</sup> because remembering the works of God is what enables us to hope in God and it's what empowers us to keep the will of God.

Let me explain; the word *hope* means *to put confidence in*.<sup>13</sup> And so to hope in God means to trust that he's going to come through for you, no matter what the world might say, no matter what your own wisdom might say, no matter what your circumstances might say.

And what enables us to trust God like this is remembering how he's shown himself to be trustworthy in the past. It's looking back, again, to his miraculous redemptive works – specifically through the cross – and reminding ourselves that, if God didn't spare in his own son, but willingly gave him up for us all, how will he not along with Jesus, give us all things?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> HCSB

<sup>12</sup> Kidner, D. (1975). [\*Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#) (Vol. 16, p. 314). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>13</sup> Strong, J. (1995). In [\*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon\*](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:32

Friends, if we're going to have a godly legacy, we have to hope in God. We have to trust he's going to come through, no matter what we face in life. This is a characteristic that all of our Biblical heroes shared in common – Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Job, Esther – they all hoped in God in the face of overwhelming circumstances – and above all, that's why we know their names today. That's why they have such a godly legacy. And here's what we have to realize: we have greater reason to hope in God than these heroes did, because while they could only look forward and see the cross dimly, we can look back and see it and what God did there for us with crystal clarity.

But not only does remembering enable us to hope in God, it also empowers us to keep the will of God. It does so by reinforcing that God loves us and wants what's best for us. Let me give an example to help us apply this. The thing that helps me to fight temptation and submit to God's will for my sexuality is continually remembering that if God loved me enough to send his son to die for me, then I can trust that his will is best for me. You with me on this? Brothers and sisters, you can trust God's will because of God's works. God's works are for you – and therefore you can know that God's will is for you too.

So, when the world, the flesh, and the devil tell you that God's way will kill you, remember what he has done for you, and you will find the strength to say no to sin and yes to him, and in doing so leave a godly legacy.

## **Application**

I want to close with three brief points of application. We'll take more time to explore each of these in the weeks ahead, but in order to get you started, today I want to encourage you to assess, act, and access.

### **1. Assess**

Take some time this week to assess the current state of your legacy. Review the six components we've talked about today and honestly evaluate where you might need to change.

### **2. Act**

Then, begin to act to implement change. I realize change is hard. It's been said that the only person who likes change is a baby with a dirty diaper, and even he cries about it. So, changing might require some blood, sweat and tears, but I promise it will be worth it. It will be worth to you, and it will be worth it to others. One of the things I'm going to repeatedly encourage you to do in this series is to fight for your legacy. To be courageous and to do the hard things required to change the future for yourself, for your family, for your church, and for your world.

### 3. Access

Finally, as you assess and act, access the gospel. I realize I've already talked about this numerous times today, but I don't believe I can say it enough, especially to those who think that it's too late to leave a godly legacy.

Friends, because of Jesus, it's never too late to leave a godly legacy. Because of what he did on the cross, there's no legacy that can't be redeemed.

Just consider the Apostle Paul. At one point in his life, he had the most ungodly legacy imaginable. He was torturing, imprisoning, even murdering Christians, doing everything he could to rid the world of Christianity. But then one day God miraculously saved him and then empowered him to rewrite his legacy, one that's considered the godliest ever.

And in closing I want you to hear that what God did for Paul he can do for you. No, you aren't going to be remembered like Paul. None of us are. And yet, you can have a legacy that will impact lives for years and years to come – if you will assess, act, and most of all access the gospel – so I urge you to begin to do so today. Let's pray.

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