

From Generation to Generation

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

Last week, we started a new series in the book of Judges, and you'll remember that the book of Judges is about many things. Some of the things the book is about is the need for constant renewal and revival among God's people.

It's also about the need for a faithful and true king, a king who can do what no human king can do, which is to change the hearts of men. And it's also about the power of leadership that's enabled by the Holy Spirit.

This week, as we come to the second section, we have before us what is a painful and tender topic for many of us as we look at the challenges that the nation of Israel faced as one generation remained faithful to the Lord and the next generation fell away.

[1 : 29] And I know for us in this congregation, that's a topic that is all too personal. And for many of us, very, very painful. Of course, many of you are afraid not just of your children, but the future of your grandchildren.

And so this morning, we're going to try to hold kind of two truths in tension together. And the first truth is this, that you cannot save your children. That your children are 100% responsible before God about the decisions that they make and the ways that they choose to serve Him or not serve Him.

The saying is true that God has no grandchildren. So that's truth one. Truth two is this, how we raise the next generation really matters.

It really matters and it has real consequences for their faith. And so as we come to this passage, there's a variety of mistakes that we could make. One mistake we could make is assuming that just because someone was raised in the church and walked away from the faith, well, of course, it's their parents' fault, right?

That would be an incredible mistake to assume that. Because God has no grandchildren. The other mistake we could make is to wallow in shame. As we think about this and maybe you look back and you think about mistakes that you've made as a parent, places where you've failed, it's important for us to recognize that God's forgiveness is real.

[2 : 52] And it's also important to recognize that the story isn't over. If you are alive and your child is still alive, you still have a role to play.

There is still great hope. God is still, in fact, a powerful God. And He's still able to change hearts and minds. And so with that, remember that we're going to say, as I often say, we're going to say something, not everything.

This is the beginning, not the end. But with all of that in mind, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to God's holy word. We are going to be in Judges 2, starting at verse 6.

You can read with me in your worship guide. You can open up your phone. You can open up your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that His word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold.

And it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. Which is why we read now Judges 2, starting at verse 6. Verse 9.

[4 : 22] And they buried Him within the boundaries of His inheritance in Temnath-Herez, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers.

And there arose another generation after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel. Verse 11. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals.

And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them.

And they provoked the Lord to anger. They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

And He gave them over to plunderers who plundered them. And He sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them.

[5 : 31] And they were in terrible distress. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we thank You once again that You haven't abandoned us, You haven't forsaken us, You haven't left us to try to piece things together on our own.

But instead, You've given us Your Word, and You speak clearly to us through it. You speak to us every Sunday morning, and You speak to us as we open it throughout the week.

And we ask that You would continue to do that this morning, that You would help us, that we would see our great need for Your grace, and we'd see how You meet us at that very same point of need, and that You would convict us of our sin, and You would encourage us with the hope that we have in Christ.

And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. When I was in high school, I took a class or two on U.S. government, and one of the things that we learned about was this concept of political socialization.

And political socialization is just a fancy word for how people come to the political beliefs that they hold, and especially how they come to those beliefs based on the people around them.

[6 : 52] So that's why we use the word socialization. And what they found, if they do studies around these things, is that there's an incredible impact that your family of origin has on your political beliefs.

You are not, as some say, as much of a free thinker as you might fancy yourself to be. When you have two parents who are both of the same political party, there is about an 80% chance that their kids are also going to hold to that party.

So if mom and dad are both Democrats, 80% chance the kids are likely going to be Democrats. Mom and dad are both Republicans. About an 80% chance kids are going to end up being Republicans.

Mom and dad have no affiliation. This is where it gets even more interesting. It's pretty evenly split. About the same percentage Republicans, same percentage Democrats, and then you have your independents in the center.

And this highlights just a basic principle that you probably know in life. God has designed the family with incredible influence. God has created families as the place where people are shaped and formed.

[8 : 04] You don't need to look at a study about politics to figure this out. You talk to any counselor who's worth their money, and they'll tell you there is no influence more powerful than someone's family of origin.

And within that, there's no influence more powerful than their parents. And so that clarifies for us what is actually incredibly shocking about this passage in Judges 2.

And what's shocking is that there's not just a lack of transmission to a few people. It's not like we have a few Israelite children in the next generation who walk away. No, we actually have an entire generation that just abandons things.

You know, we would expect from those numbers I just told you, on average, one out of five kids are going to choose a different political affiliation than their parents. It's okay, that's to be expected. But here it looks like five out of five of the Israelites decide they are not going to hold to what their parents believe.

And so that's where we pick up in verse 6 with the death of Joshua. We're actually having a second introduction to the book here in Judges. This is not saying that the death of Joshua happened after everything from chapter 1 and verses 1 through 5 of chapter 2.

[9:16] No, we're having a second introduction to the book. And so it's actually recapping what happened at the end of the book of Joshua, the book that came right before the book of Judges. In fact, the wording here is almost exactly the same as some wording we see in Judges chapter 24.

So he's recapping the end of the book of Joshua, saying, look, this is, remember what happened. Joshua came into the land. The people settled it. Everything was great.

They went to their inheritance. And then we see that there is a faithful generation and an unfaithful generation. Joshua comes in.

Joshua is the leader of the faithful generation. And that's what we see in verse 7. The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel.

So great. Got a generation. They've seen God's work. They remain faithful. They serve the Lord. They do what they're supposed to do. Then the turn happens here, verse 10.

[10:21] And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. Faithful generation dies, followed by an unfaithful generation. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.

In fact, we're told it's worse than that. It's not just that they don't know the Lord. It's, in fact, that they turn to do not what's good but what's evil. Verse 11, the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Verse 12, they abandoned the God of their fathers. And so we get a clear picture of what's been happening here. The older generation has been restraining the younger generation.

The older generation has been providing leadership. And so they've been holding at bay the influence of the younger generation. They have been keeping the nation faithful.

When they walk away, there is nothing holding them back. And so this next generation goes after other gods.

[11:28] And we're told the exact problem here in verse 10. They did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel. Now, this is where people try to get creative with this passage and say, oh, well, we understand what the problem clearly was.

The first generation, they had seen what God had done. That's what we saw in verse 7. The second generation, verse 10, had not seen what God had done. And so there's no connection between these two.

It's just a function of timeline. First timeline, they just happened to live at the right time. And so because they lived at the right time, they were faithful. Oh, it's just kind of a coincidence. This next generation didn't live at the right time.

So because they didn't live at the right time, they weren't faithful. That, however, gives us too easy of an explanation. Because if we look at the rest of Scripture, what we are told over and over again is that the works of the Lord are to be remembered as they're told by one generation to the next.

The older generation is meant to be telling their children over and over about God's power and his faithfulness. Remember, we talked last week, what is it that they forgot when they went into the promised land?

[12:40] They forgot God's power that he had demonstrated in the past. They refused to believe God's promises in the present. Of course, we could look at many places. One is Psalm 145, which says this, one generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.

Psalm 78 says the same thing, that these things are passed down generation after generation. And of course, the most famous instruction comes in Deuteronomy 6, where it says this, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. And, verse 7, 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.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. And so what's the problem in Judges 2?

Something was dropped between the generations. The older generation failed to sufficiently tell the next about the mighty works of the Lord.

[14:01] The older generation served faithfully, but they did not pass that on to the next.

This generation should know the Lord, but they don't. Now, at the very beginning, I said, one of the mistakes we can make is to assume that it's the fault of the parents when a child walks away from the faith, right?

The children are 100% responsible for what they choose to do before the Lord. And so did I just contradict myself? No, and here's why.

What we see here is a shocking percentage. This is not 20% walking away. This is not a handful here and there.

This is an entire generation. When we see an entire generation, we're able to say, okay, something went wrong.

[15:07] Something happened between the first and the second. And so what do we do? What is Judges 2 meant to teach us this morning?

First, it is a reminder of our responsibility to train the next generation to know and love the Lord.

That responsibility falls to all of us. It especially falls upon parents. You'll notice on pages seven and eight of your worship guide, there's a quote from research that was done very recently on how children's faith is formed.

And it basically says this, there is no influence that is more powerful than the influence of a parent. There is nothing more effective in forming the faith of a child than for that child's mother and father to love the Lord and to talk about the Lord with that child.

In fact, it doesn't say this in the quote, but it comes from this entire book. And the book talks about what is effective in passing on the faith to the next generation. And it turns out, surprise, surprise, what's incredibly effective is to do what Deuteronomy 6 talks about.

[16:29] The most effective way for parents to pass the faith on is to have conversations with their children about what they believe. To do what Deuteronomy 6 says, to teach them diligently to your children and to talk of them in the house when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise.

Parents that talked about God's faithfulness in the day-to-day of their lives were the ones most likely to see their children grow up to continue to love and follow the Lord.

By the way, the book notes, and other folks have noted this as well, when we talk about conversations with your children, we are not talking about monologues. We are talking about dialogues.

The author of this book says, the most effective conversations were the ones that centered around the questions that the children themselves had that they raised in the family. That heavy-handed lectures actually have a tendency to backfire.

The other thing that has a tendency to backfire is if we present ourselves to our children as if we are always right and we never make mistakes, which actually communicates the opposite of the gospel to them, right?

[17:40] Because the gospel is the news that I must change and I cannot change myself. And so it's clear also to be careful in what we're saying and what we're not saying.

I am not saying you are able to save your children. I am not saying you are necessarily or wholly to blame if your children walk away from the faith.

Again, part of why this passage is so clear is because an entire generation dropped away. What I am saying is this. God uses the family in a powerful way as his instrument in the lives of the next generation.

God uses the family in a powerful way as his instrument in the lives of the next generation. I am also saying this.

Do not be surprised if you take your faith casually that your children take it casually as well or not at all.

[18:52] Don't be surprised if you believe that it's the church's job to raise your children in the faith if it doesn't stick.

Now, you might look back as we talk about these things and realize places you didn't live up to Deuteronomy chapter six. And I'll tell you the same thing that I told you at the beginning. As long as you are alive and as long as your child is alive, there is still tremendous hope. God is still able to change hearts and minds.

God does not stop working in someone's life when they turn 18. You still have the opportunity now to talk about the mighty works of the Lord.

You still have a chance to share what God has done in your life. And of course, those mighty works include your failures and your mistakes and the way God's met you and shown you grace in the midst of that.

[20 : 04] So I asked, what do we do with this? The responsibility is first and primarily to parents. However, it's not simply to parents.

This study that's referenced in your worship guide also goes on to talk about the incredible power of grandparents. He says, grandparents can play, and I quote, a surrogate role in instilling religion.

In fact, grandparents can have a powerful impact in the lives of their grandchildren even when the parents don't have faith. And I say this for many of you in this room.

You are walking a road as a grandparent, but actually, many of you are functioning as parents. God is using you in a powerful way in the lives of your grandchildren.

Never underestimate your ability to influence the next generation. Never underestimate the power of a grandmother or a grandfather.

[21 : 16] In fact, that's why our New Testament reading came from Timothy. Remember, Timothy, this is on page three of your worship guide, 2 Timothy chapter one. Timothy's dad was not a Christian.

Timothy's mom was, you know who else was? Timothy's grandmother. So what does Paul tell Timothy? I'm reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

Many of you still have the opportunity to be a Lois or a Eunice. God doesn't just use parents. He uses grandparents.

Now, to say that parents are the most powerful and to say that grandparents are the second most powerful is not to say that the rest of us don't matter in any way. It means those are the most influential.

It does not mean that the rest of us lack influence. In fact, if I said before when we baptize children, it takes a church to raise a child. You do not have to be married and you do not have to have children to tell the next generation about the mighty works of the Lord.

[22 : 38] That's our hope for this community that parents would not be the only ones telling their children but that they would be hearing it from older and younger members. They would be hearing it in Sunday school and in youth group that they would know over and over from a variety of people from an entire community about God's grace and His power.

And so all of us, this entire church, we have a role to play in this. Everyone has a part to play in raising up the next generation.

Now, who cares if our children grow up to follow the Lord? In fact, if you're a non-Christian, you might be thinking, man, these people are like really uptight about their children becoming Christians and don't you know that not everyone, you know, religion's not for everyone and maybe your child just makes the choice that religion's not for them and why should you worry about that?

I mean, why don't you just set your child free to make their own choices about the world and not try to influence them? First of all, no one actually lives that out consistently. Anyone who says that has things that they hope are not true for their child.

I remember hearing a story about someone who went off on that and the person sitting with them said, well, would you want your kids to join the Taliban? Is that an open choice for them? And that person realized in that moment, no, there are actually things I want for my children no matter what.

[24 : 09] The second answer is this, everyone is religious. you will worship something. Your children will worship something.

In fact, that's what we see here in verse 12. It's not simply that Israel stopped serving the Lord and then went on with their lives. No, what did they do? They had to fill that void.

They found something else to worship. Verse 12, they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers who brought them out of the land of Egypt. they went after other gods and bowed down to them.

The next generation will worship something. The next generation will love something. The next generation will be religious in some sense.

The question is whether Deuteronomy 6 will be true that they will love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their might. Israel went on to worship the gods of the nations around them.

[25 : 22] Christian, our nation has many gods as well. We have the God of sexual anarchy. We have the God of radical individualism.

we have the God of consumerism. And then there are the gods of every age, the gods of sex and money and power.

And we're reminded in this passage, all false gods do is enslave. All false gods put us in bondage. Verse 14, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel and he gave them over to plunderers who plundered them. Any God that you worship besides the true and living God will be a plunderer who plunders you.

If you worship sexual anarchy, you will be plundered. If you worship radical individualism, you will be plundered.

[26 : 39] If you worship consumerism and experiences, you will be plundered. If you worship sex and money and power, they will plunder you as well.

And so, where does this leave us? It leaves us with a reminder. It leaves us with a reminder of what matters most in this life. It leaves us with a reminder of what matters most for the next generation. It is still true that the next generation is our greatest legacy. It is still true that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

and it is true that we are not here at church to be good moral people. Notice that nothing in this passage says they forgot the Ten Commandments.

No, what is it that they happened? They did not know the Lord or His work. Why is it that we are here gathered together?

[27 : 59] It is not primarily because we want to be good moral people. It is not primarily because we want our kids to live in a certain way. The hope of the next generation is not to live by the Ten Commandments.

Although, I hope they do. the hope of the next generation is that they would know the mighty works of the Lord. The hope of the next generation is that they would know God's mighty work, that He holds the world together.

That they don't live in a universe governed by chance or fate, but in fact, there is a personal God who sees and holds together everything.

The hope of the next generation is that they would know the mighty works of the Lord in reigning and ruling over this earth that we do not give our ultimate allegiance or fear to politicians or influences or businessmen.

The hope of the next generation is that they would know the mighty work of the Lord that He changes hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

[29 : 16] The mighty work of the Lord in the Old Testament was delivering God's people from Egypt. The mighty work of the Lord in the New Testament is not deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

It's deliverance from slavery and bondage to sin. mighty work of the Lord is no longer the parting of the Red Sea. It is Jesus in His life and His death and His resurrection.

The mighty work of the Lord is not the fighting of the Egyptians or the taking of the promised land.

The mighty work of the Lord is that Jesus has come and won the victory once and for all.

Our hope is not that church would be a place for our children to learn good and right behavior. Our hope is that they would learn and know the Lord and His mighty works.

John Newton was a man who lived mostly in the 1700s and a little bit in the 1800s and he's famous for writing the hymn Amazing Grace. He became a pastor but before he was a pastor he was actually a slave trader.

[30 : 34] After his conversion to Christianity he switched teams completely. Not only did he leave the slave trade he actually became an abolitionist. He made it his goal to eradicate it and he worked with William Wilberforce to be able to do that.

By the way Newton's mother taught him about the faith growing up. So his conversion did not completely come out of left field. He abandoned it for a time and then he returned.

And as Newton came to the end of his life and he was shortly to die he said this Although my memory is fading I remember two things very clearly.

I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior. Brothers and sisters that is our testimony of the Lord's great work.

it's our testimony of his great work to us and it's the testimony that we give to the next generation. I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.

[31 : 46] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven we praise you and thank you that you work powerfully in families and you've also worked powerfully in our lives.

we ask that as we examine our hearts that you would not just challenge us but encourage us you'd remind us of your grace and your power and that would give us courage and strength to tell the next generation about your mighty works.

We ask that you would use this church in a powerful way to raise up men and women who till the very end of their lives are committed to you and are committed to your church.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.