



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### The Extended Family Makeover: Raising The Future

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~ Scripture: Psalm 78:2-8 ~

#### INTRODUCTION

I'm thankful for my family. They have provided me much wisdom, counsel, support, guidance.

Yet I see so many families today who seem to have nowhere to turn for advice when times get tough. One of the greatest resources we have as parents is the wisdom and experience of our own parents, extended family, church family, and others who have gone through the ups & downs of family life before us.

Used to be that generations of families grew up in the same neighborhood. A young married couple might set up house-keeping down the road or next door. Grandparents, uncles & aunts, in-laws & outlaws might all be involved in raising the next generation. That was the case with ME!

I was fortunate to have one set of grandparents nearby, and the other only 60 miles away. I had an aunt & uncle who were like a 2<sup>nd</sup> set of parents to me. I remember Saturday afternoons how everybody gathered over at my grandparents' house. I also had a great-aunt here in Michigan who sent me little pictures of Jesus with Scripture verses written on them. Seems old-fashioned, I know, but.....

Today, that sort of thing is more the exception than the rule. Unfortunately, with the distances that separate us plus the schedules we keep, the role of extended family (especially grandparents) has been squeezed down to Christmas & birthday cards, occasional phone conversations, and an annual visit.

That's what makes a church like ours special and important. We are an *inter-generational fellowship*. Individuals from across generations come together here weekly to worship, learn, and fellowship. Of course we have ministries designed for KIDS. . .and likewise for YOUTH and ADULTS. Still it is important for families and different ages to be together—both here and away from here—from time to time. That mix of generations is an important ingredient in a healthy church and in healthy families. It's a value we should all continue to cherish.

Today's Scripture spotlights the interconnectedness of the family. **Psalm 78** is a wisdom or teaching psalm. It is not so much a praise song as it is a history lesson. Most of Psalm 78 reviews the events of the Old Testament and the lessons to be learned—good and bad. As I read the opening verses (**vv. 2-8**), you will see that these lessons make up the “curriculum” that older generations teach the younger. Here we go:

<sup>2</sup> *I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—*

<sup>3</sup> *What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.*

<sup>4</sup> *We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, His power, and the wonders He has done.*

<sup>5</sup> *He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children,*

<sup>6</sup> *So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His*

*commands.*

<sup>8</sup> *They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to Him.*

## TWO QUESTIONS. . .

### FIRST, WHY IS THIS INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF GENERATIONS SO IMPORTANT?

How else will the younger generation learn the things of faith? What this psalm is telling us is that when the elder generation disengages from active involvement and participation in nurturing the faith of today's families, **they** lose...**we** lose...**our children** lose...and **our children's children** will lose. No one wins!

And the result is a “*stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts are not loyal to God*” [v. 8]—whose hearts are turned away from God. Isn't that largely what we have today?

Here's the bottom line (the sermon in a sentence or two):

- **Parents need to seek out the wisdom and direction of their elders.**
- **And elders must not “hide”, but instead take a prominent and active role in the lives of their families.**

Up until now in this series of sermons on bringing faith home, you may have felt left out:

- Because you don't have kids;
- Because your kids are grown and gone (i.e.: empty nesters);
- Because you don't have grandkids. . .maybe you do, but they're a million miles away;
- Because you are single.

You might have thought there's no role for me to play here. But nothing could be further from the truth. There is a definite role for the extended family. Scripture highlights it:

- **II Timothy 1:5** — [Paul says to Timothy, whom he calls his “*true son in the faith*” in I Tim. 1:2] “*I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grand-mother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*”
  - Timothy had a grandmother == Lois
  - Timothy had a mother == Eunice
  - Timothy had an elder / a mentor == Paul

All of them had a part to play in Timothy's spiritual upbringing.

We need the elders and grandparents involved in the lives of our families. I encourage grand-parents to find a grandchild—your own or someone else's—and be a friend, discipler, mentor.

If you're a **YOUNG PERSON** here today and think that the older generation is too out of touch . . .can't relate. . .just don't understand—let me tell you they are an invaluable source of wisdom, counsel, and support. You might not ask an elder in the congregation how to load your iPod or add a memory chip to your computer. ☺ But when it comes to passing on faith to you, we all can learn a lot from our elders. They've been there; they know.

But the young aren't the only ones who need this connection with other generations. **PARENTS** struggling with the challenges of raising kids in a world of conflicted values need support and help from those who've been there and done that. NOT condescending, heavy-handed advice. . . BUT positive, gracious guidance from the veterans around them.

FOOTNOTE: Some extended families are fragmented. Conflicts, personality clashes, unwanted intrusions from family members may have led you to say: “*No way do I want Aunt Suzie influencing my daughter; I don't even want her around Aunt Suzie.*” The differences may be ir-reconcilable, but I would remind you of the Serenity Prayer:

- “*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.*” But there's a 2<sup>nd</sup> petition...
- *The courage to change the things I can!!!* Have you tried? Don't mean to mettle! ☺

Moving on, we **GRAY BEARDS** need the young as well. They remind us what this is all about. If we are not careful, we can easily fall into thinking that church is about us, our wants & wishes, our comfort, our contentment. When it's really about God—His will, worshipping Him, following Him, being *disciplers* and making disciples.

They say Christianity is never more than one generation from extinction. That's why it is important that this be a place where generations meet and learn from one another.

That's why I'm calling for an *extended family makeover!* To get back to the way it was done in Biblical times. Then, families often lived together under one roof. When a young man was going to take a wife, he first built an addition to the family home. Then went to fetch his bride. [Hence all that wonderful Biblical imagery about Christ coming to claim His bride, the Church. And Jesus words, "*In my house are many rooms...*"]

I'm not recommending that we all move in together. But I am suggesting we get a little more multi-generational in our task of passing our faith along to the next generation.

#### SECOND QUESTION: HOW DO WE DO IT?

A. Take advantage of TEACHABLE moments. Let's say you're engaged in a game of *Monopoly*. . .it's gotten pretty cut-throat. . .you've over-extended yourself in buying hotels and don't have much cash left. . .you land on someone else's property and don't have enough to pay the rent. . .and lose the game. Could there be a lesson on greed and materialism in there somewhere?

B. Our kids need to HEAR how God has worked in your life (e.g.: how the Lord has rescued you in the face of temptation. . .how He has answered prayer. . .about how He has guided you in the defining moments of your lives).

C. Our kids need to see their parents and other older adults reading, learning, applying GOD'S WORD. We have lots of great adults in this church whose example inspires and encourages our young. But I must warn you, consistency is imperative. Kids have a build in "*hypocrisy detector*"—an internal sensitivity to actions, attitudes, words that don't line up with our stated values and beliefs. They can spot inconsistency a mile away. Don't let your behavior negate what you've told them or tried to represent to them.

D. They need to see our HONESTY. It doesn't hurt them to know that we struggle. . .that life is not always easy. . .that sometimes we fail. . .and that even in those hard times, God is good, faithful, gracious. They need to learn about the compassion of God and not just His commandments. They need to know that our God is a God of 2<sup>nd</sup> chances, even 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> chances. Our kids need to see us as humble, learning, growing Christ-followers who need GOD'S GRACE as much as they do.

I'm so grateful for the wisdom and direction I received from **my grandfather**. He took me to Sunday School and was actively involved in my life (e.g.: Sunday afternoon rides). He constantly prayed for me; I often would hear him mention my name in his nightly prayers (i.e.: which had a huge impact on me). I wouldn't be here this morning if it were not for him!

**Marcie's father** was a great inspiration to me too. I could see from the stories he would tell (and sometimes re-tell ☺) that he was a man who stuck by his convictions and by what was right. He's gone now and we both miss him and his stories. You never stop needing that.

We have an important responsibility. Older generations must teach and live the faith they want the next generation to carry on after them. That's our job. We need each other to accomplish it. **We are not just raising our kids. We are raising the future.**

I believe it is high time for us to release the incalculable power that is embedded in our extended families AND our church family → and help our kids become all that God intends them to be.