

THAT THEY
MAY SET
THEIR HOPE
IN GOD

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Justin Huffman

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“ Justin Huffman sets forth a vision for multi-generational ministry that is grounded in the Word, fueled by the grace of God, focused on the home, and seeks to raise up Christ-centered families to the glory of God. Whether you are preparing for marriage, already married, or are in ministry of any kind, *That They May Set Their Hope In God* will help you to ground your life and thinking in the endless treasure of God’s grace. ”

– **Dave Jenkins**, Executive Director, Servants of Grace Ministries, Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*, Co-Host, Equipping You in Grace Podcast

“ Justin Huffman captures what ought to be the heart of every parent regarding their children, “that they set their hope in God.” Expounding the truths of Psalm 78, he encourages parents to catch the psalmist’s vision for the coming generation(s) while stressing the necessity of being gospel focused in our efforts.

Justin laconically warns of the danger of emphasizing other good things, and offers encouragement to daily keep obeying Christ in our efforts to effect our children for eternity’s sake. ”

– **Anthony Mathenia**, Pastor of Christ Church-Radford

He ... appointed a law in Israel, which
He commanded our fathers,
that they should make them known to
their children;

that the generation to come might
know them, the children who would be
born, that they may arise and declare
them to their children,

that they may set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God, but
keep His commandments

Psalm 78:5-7

Introduction

Each of the majestic cathedrals found across the various landscapes of Europe required multiple generations to build. Raising children is like raising a cathedral. It is a multi-generational goal, and while you are laying each stone, facing each obstacle, it can be difficult to envision the magnificent finished product.

My goal in this booklet is to encourage you, as a Christian parent or disciple-maker, to persevere faithfully in this great work of cathedral-building.

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Raising children is like raising a cathedral

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In this passage from Psalm 78, we find four vital elements to faithful parenting: 1) a multi-generational vision, 2) a Gospel-centered goal, 3) a deliberate awareness, 4) a persistent obedience.

The Psalmist opens with a command to “fathers,” letting us know godly fathers should lead the charge in their own homes. As we will see, this instruction also applies to single mothers, to homes in which the father is not godly, to grandparents, or anyone who has the opportunity to influence the next generation for Christ.

A Multi-Generational Vision

At least *five generations* are specifically spoken of in Psalm 78! Think about that the next time you are disciplining your child, or explaining a decision to them, or choosing between hobby time and parenting time. What do you want to be passed onto your child as he or she grows up, makes decisions, sets priorities, gets married and teaches their children? What about your grandchildren? Beyond?

As a Christian, you must be discipling with a multi-generational vision in mind. You should be seeking to make the Gospel such a clear, potent, and transcendent priority in your life that even your great, great grandchildren will feel the effects of your zealous instruction and passionate affection.

How can you make what really matters in life really stick? How can you make an impression on your children—or on the children in your church—such that the Gospel message is passed down for generations? Only a sacrificial, clearly-above-all dedication can accomplish such a goal.

This kind of plain and lasting impression can be made for something as simple and unimportant as a hobby you unwaveringly dedicated yourself to: “Dad wouldn’t miss Monday night football for anything,” your kids might be telling your grandkids even after you are gone.

Or instead, they could be saying, “My parents wouldn’t let anything keep them from worshipping

at church on Sundays!” I am thankful that this is precisely the testimony left behind by my grandfather, who passed away before I was born. Now I tell my children about his faithful example, so he has already impacted four generations!

Perhaps, though, you didn’t inherit a Christian witness from parents or grandparents? Then begin now! Make your generation the one that is truly Christ-centered. May yours be the branch of the family tree that strikes out heavenward!

We are never condemned to follow in the failing footprints of a past generation. That is the thrust of Psalm 78 and its context. Verse 8 explains that all this admonition is given in the first place so that they “*may 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.*” *You* be meek and obedient, *you* calibrate your heart to God, *you* steadfastly walk with and stand for God—no matter what example you had from your parents or other family members.

Generations from now, your family—and others under your influence—will still be benefiting from your faithfulness today.

Consider:

How can you best communicate to your children—or others under your influence—that the Gospel is the greatest truth they could ever embrace, enjoy, or express? Is consistency an area where you could improve?

A Gospel-Centered Goal

The Psalmist makes the goal explicit in all our parenting: “that they may set their hope in God” (Psalm 78:7). Our goal is not merely to gain their confidence in us, as their parents; nor have we succeeded if our children trust in their religious endeavors to save them.

The force of the Gospel is to put your hope in God, through Jesus Christ, rather than in yourself or others. The gospel says you can’t obey in your own strength; you can’t succeed by your own endeavors, you can’t save yourself—and yet Jesus did succeed where we have failed!

Is that the force and the effect of your parenting, or discipling? Whether sharing a happy day at the park or a difficult day of discipline, our words and actions and decisions ought to point our children consistently to Jesus.

Earlier in this same Psalm the necessity of genuine worship, of publically glorying in our God in our homes, is repeatedly emphasized:

“Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth ... 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” (Psalm 78:1-4).

How much praising takes place in your home during an average weekday? How often do you speak with your children—or people at church—about specific reasons God is worthy of worship?

Do you tell your children, and others, how strong God is? Do you consciously and consistently ground your children in the confidence that God is sovereign in every detail of life, is powerful and able to provide for even our deepest needs, our greatest challenges, our most unexpected trials?

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We must be a model of dependence on God

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Do you draw regularly and joyfully from the wells of salvation to refresh your children's souls with an eternal perspective? Do you seek to instill in your family a deep sense of wonder at all that God has done and is doing, through Jesus Christ?

Consider and take stock, Christian parents and Christian disciple-makers of every kind. Even as well-meaning, dedicated, serious-minded Christians we cannot afford to get off-message, off-balance, nor get distracted by lesser things as we train up the next generation!

Our message is to be, "Praise the Lord! He is strong, and He has done wonderful works, especially

in giving Jesus Christ as our perfect and sufficient Savior." We dare not confuse or dilute this great message with lesser concerns or opinions or labors if we aim to influence young minds on a variety of issues. Even in that, we ought to root all we teach and model for our children in the gospel as our great goal.

Clearly, this does not come naturally for any of us—even for ourselves—which is why it will require diligent, humble focus on our part. We must model for young people the very dependence on God that we hope to encourage them towards themselves.

Our goal in everything we do and say ought to be the same as Paul's, as he spent time with the church at Philippi, "that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again" (1:25-26 ESV).

Think about that, the next time you walk in the door from work or from the grocery store: "My goal as I come to you again is that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus!"

Consider:

How can you lead others around you into greater confidence in, and dependence on, Jesus Christ as Savior? Do you regularly express your own utter need for help and forgiveness from Christ?

A Deliberate Awareness

The reality is that many cathedrals in days past were constructed by slave labor. *This should not be us*, as we seek to guide our homes and churches! What will keep that from being our mindset? We need to keep in mind the glory of God ourselves, hoping in God ourselves. Praising God, marveling at his strength, walking in awe of the wonderful works he has done.

The Cologne Cathedral in Germany ranks as one of the longest-running projects in European history: the cornerstone was laid in the 13th century, yet it was not finished until the 19th century! Although it is large, ornate, and impressive, this is not the reason it took so long to build. The reason lies in the fact that the entire endeavor was undertaken against the will of people, from “the top down,” as we might say. Whenever the people could quit, they did—even taking a 400-year break at one point in the construction!

This should not be us. In order to continue faithfully in the work of cathedral building, of raising the next generation in the nurture and instruction of the Lord, we must own the project. We must internalize the objectives. We must embrace whatever challenges come our way as worth the sacrifice in order to obtain the final goal.

We must engage God’s Word, in our homes and churches, with a deliberate awareness of our own

weakness and of God's worthiness.

It is interesting, and should be instructive, how often the Bible exhorts us to "remember," or to "not forget" (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:9; 8:11; Psalm 103:2; 105:5). It seems we have an amazing capacity to lose focus, to wander from major objectives, to be careless concerning past blessings and lessons from God.

So the Bible says, "Don't forget!" Do not forget the works of God for you, in Jesus, and don't forget the works that Christ in turn now commands of you as his disciple.

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We are building a cathedral, not just laying bricks

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We see this deliberate awareness in verse 4 of Psalm 78: "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." Are you deliberately and openly showing God's praise and strength and wonderful works to your children? Or do you allow the cares of the day, or your ambitions at work, or your discouragements in life to fog your focus and distract your attention?

We must determine not to forget—to deliberately

remember—where our priorities and affection and confidence lie. We are building a cathedral, not just laying bricks. The day-to-day mortar-mixing and stone-placing will become cathedral-building when we keep in mind our overarching goal.

Consider:

What are some ways you have allowed yourself to be distracted from the goal of glorifying God in your home, or church? How can you make sure this first-of-all-priorities is not “forgotten”?

A Persistent Obedience

“That they may set their *hope* in God, and *not forget* the works of God, but *keep* His commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

Christ-centered parenting can only flow out of a heart that is receiving the gospel and not forgetting God’s work. Notice the order of Psalm 78:7; or rather, notice what the order is *not*. The psalmist does *not* say, “Obey, remember, hope.” Instead, the order is the opposite: hope in God, remember his works, and *then* keep his commandments.

Our obedience is the overflow of our hope in God, of our keeping his glory constantly in front of our eyes.

The faithfulness and grace of God genuinely received and considered, fosters a persistent obedience to the precious One who gave himself for us! If we believe Jesus persisted through the humiliation of his life and death for us—and we are deliberately remembering Jesus’ grace to us—it will lead to an obedience that refuses to give up, to be distracted, or to settle down into a life that is merely moral.

It is so easy to become discouraged in the hard work of parenting, of disciple-making, of evangelism in any context. Or, for that matter, in the hard work of personal discipleship. If our obedience is only arising out of a drab sense of duty, rather than a lively hope

in God, then our obedience will likely fizzle out. Or even if we do continue obeying when times get rough, we will become self-righteous and pharisaical in our endeavors, because our labors are not grounded in the gospel.

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Our obedience is the overflow of our hope in God

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On the other hand, the heart that is praising God and has set its hope in God alone—while still susceptible to discouragement at times—will still have reason to go on when every other motivation has long withered away. If God is our hope, then as long as we have God, we have hope! And we have motivation to obey the God who is equipping and encouraging our efforts.

Genuine reception of the gospel leads to a persistent obedience. It leads to a grace-grounded, gospel-proclaiming life for the fame of our great Savior Jesus. May that be your life, and the life of your home, for as long as you are here.

May you be blessed to raise a cathedral, a house of worship, in which new generations will still marvel and from which they will still be benefiting for many years to come.

Consider:

It is hard to obey when we are discouraged. Lift your eyes to God, in Christ, by faith. Set your confidence in him alone. Then commit to obey this worthy God whom you worship!