



Our DNA

We Mobilize Our Next Generation

Psalm 78:1-8

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Last summer, my family and I took a camping trip to Yellowstone National Park. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit. Here's a selfie we took, and right as we took it, a geyser we had been waiting to see went off in the background. Only Ezra saw it. But all of us got to see Old Faithful, Lake Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, plenty of bison, one bear, and elk standing outside our tent in the morning. But there is one memory that stands out in particular. On the first night we were there, we were awoken in the middle of the night to the sound of our, then, 7-year-old daughter, Evelyn, vomiting. The camp food, and campfire s'mores had not settled well with her, and she vomited it up, all over her sleeping bag.

So, Rachel took Evelyn to the bathroom to clean her up, and I proceeded to use the one packet of disinfectant wipes we had to try and rid the tent of vomit, using the light of a headlamp. It was miserable. And it had gone all over her sleeping bag. The only thing I could do was put it in a trash bag and throw it in the roof box of the car. Poor Evelyn was fine by the next morning, but it is a memory I will never forget. That and I will never forget to bring a spare sleeping bag when I go camping, so I don't have to go around to every store in Yellowstone National Park trying to find a new one!

We all make sacrifices for our children. And as hard as those sacrifices can be, we believe that our kids are worth it. Even if it means cleaning up vomit with disinfectant wipes from a tent in the middle of the night with a headlamp. We are more than willing to sacrifice ourselves for our kids because they are worth that sacrifice.

My name is Ellis, and I'm one of the pastors at Chapel Hill, and I want to welcome you to this Youth Sunday. Every year we take the opportunity to celebrate the next generation and invite them to lead us in worship. And what a privilege it is to be led by you all today. We are continuing in our DNA series, talking about the core values that make Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill. We believe there are 9 pieces of Chapel Hill DNA, split into three groups: head, heart, and

hands. What we believe, how we behave, and what we do. Last week, Pastor Mark kicked off our hands group as he explained that at Chapel Hill, we honor our legacy. In two weeks, we will hear that we serve our neighbors. But today, I am going to talk about what it means when we say we mobilize the next generation.

40 years ago tomorrow, a man in his mid-twenties stood in front of the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Bakersfield, CA, and took vows of ordination to be ordained and installed as their Youth Pastor. And through 40 years of ministry, stretching from youth to adults, from what started as a small church but turned into a large church, this man has been used by God to faithfully lead many to Jesus, to minister God's love to those who need it, and to help people grow in their faith. But, I believe, the biggest impact this man has had for the kingdom has been in mobilizing the next generation. In not only teaching them God's ways, not only helping them to walk out God's ways, but in mobilizing them to teach God's ways to others. If you hadn't guessed, that man, who is tomorrow celebrating the 40th anniversary of his ordination, is our Senior Pastor, Mark Toone.

Pastor Mark has lived out this piece of the Chapel Hill DNA in his every breath. And he has created a culture at Chapel Hill that seeks to do the same. He has mobilized the next generation through men and women like Jeremy Vaccaro, now the pastor of First Pres Fresno, Megan and Larry Hackman, pastors of our church plant, Kitsap House in Port Orchard, through those who are on staff in this church, and through countless others. And he has created a culture whereby we are always looking to mobilize others to ministry. "Head on a swivel," is what he calls it. We are always looking for someone who has the potential to step up and lead others, and then we give them those opportunities. We mobilize the next generation.

This week, as I studied for this message, and the many places the Bible talks about passing on our faith to the next generation, I felt drawn to a few verses from Psalm 78. The Psalms are the song book of the Bible. For centuries the church has sung the Psalms in worship, and even Jesus would have sung these songs. And Psalm 78 is a Psalm that recounts how God had been at work among his people. But it begins with an introduction, explaining why it is important for us to recount God's works in the past. So, let me read to you Psalm 78:1-8:

"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us.

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.

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

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

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

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 78:1-8 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

When my first child, Evelyn, was born, I recall a moment in the hospital where she was lying on my lap and I was reading the Bible, and I began to ask the question: what do I really want for Evelyn? Do I want her to be happy? Sure. Do I want her to have every opportunity I can afford her? Sure. Do I want her to know Jesus’ love for her? Absolutely. But what do I really want for Evelyn? And in that moment, I felt the Lord lay a conviction upon me, that what I really want for Evelyn is that she would not only know Jesus, but she would tell others about Jesus. I didn’t want her to only be a disciple of Jesus, but to be a disciple-maker for Jesus.

What does it mean to mobilize the next generation? Well, Psalm 78 tells us. In particular, verse 6 shows us two things that characterize a mobilized next generation. A mobilized next generation knows God’s ways, AND they tell God’s ways. Let me read to you from the verse before—verse 5—again, and see if you can spot these two things: know, and tell.

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

that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children,” (Psalm 78:5-6 ESV)

Know, and tell. And here’s what I think is important about this passage as it pertains to this part of our Chapel Hill DNA: We need both of these things to mobilize the next generation. It would be easy to just focus on making sure the

next generation knows God's ways—for us to teach them. But mobilization is more than that. Mobilization requires that the next generation not only knows God's ways, but they also tell God's ways. Just like my desire for my daughter Evelyn—she would not only be a disciple of Jesus, but that she would be a disciple-maker for Jesus.

When we say we mobilize the next generation, we use the word mobilize intentionally; we don't just want a next generation that only knows God's ways, we want one that tells God's ways. We want to see them actively telling others about Jesus, so that our faith might be passed on from generation to generation to generation. Without them telling others, our faith will die out with them. So, when we say we mobilize the next generation, we mean that we help them to know God's ways, *and* tell God's ways.

That's what I experienced in my life. One of the most significant experiences of my life was a trip I took with my high school youth group to Kenya. Every day we would be split up into groups of 5-6 students with one adult and we would go and minister to those who had been affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We would pray for them, share scripture with them, or share a song with them. Some days it would be visiting the sick in their home, some days it would be visiting widows' groups, other days it would be visiting schools.

But here was the thing that sticks out to me most...the students were the ones who were doing all the ministering. Our leaders were not there to pray for, share scripture with, or share encouragement with the people we were ministering to. Our leaders were there to push us, the students, to minister to those we were visiting. Our leaders mobilized us. And of course, they could have done it better themselves, but they chose not to. Why? Because they wanted to see the next generation mobilized.

At Chapel Hill, we mobilize the next generation. But here's what is hard about mobilizing the next generation... it requires the current generation to sacrifice some things. Jesus once told a story about old wine and new wine. In the first century they stored wine in wineskins, which were animal leathers that were cleaned, tanned and turned inside out. Over time the wineskin would begin to lose its suppleness and flexibility. And this was fine, as long as you kept using it to store old wine. But if you put new wine in an old wineskin, you would have a problem. New wine would continue to ferment, releasing gases that would create pressure on the wineskin. If the wineskin was new and supple, it would be fine, but if the wineskin was old and brittle, it would break, and both the wineskin and the wine would be lost.

In the same way, our next generation is still fermenting, so to speak. They are still maturing, and often, when we mobilize them, they will be some by-products that get released, which can create some tension with the status quo. That young youth pastor who I spoke of earlier, the one that was ordained 40 years ago tomorrow. Well, he once enlisted a friend of his who had access to a helicopter to come and buzz his students as they were playing capture the flag to give them a little scare. Let's just say the elder board of that church wasn't best pleased with their youth pastor. This new wine was releasing some by-products that was causing stress and tension on the old wineskins of that traditional Presbyterian Church. And this is the reality of mobilizing the next generation... there will be some side effects to letting these young people do the ministry.

So, what is required of us, those who are trying to mobilize the next generation? Well, we need to give them new wineskins, rather than the old ones. We need to realize that the systems and structures and traditions that work for us, may not work for the next generation. And we may need to give up our old wineskins in order that they not be destroyed by the new wine. We may need to let go of some of our systems and structures in order that we might see the next generation mobilized and the generation after them released.

My son Ezra loves to play Minecraft. For those who aren't aware, Minecraft is a video game whereby players seek to mine the world around them, in order to craft materials necessary for survival. Mine-craft, get it? Several months ago, one of Ezra's adopted grandfathers took him out for ice cream. He asked Ezra what he liked doing with his dad, and Ezra said, "Playing Minecraft." So, he asked Ezra whether his dad likes Minecraft. Ezra said, "No. He hates Minecraft. But he loves me."

And it's true, I hate Minecraft, but I love my son. And it's the same when it comes to mobilizing the next generation. We might love our traditions, but we must choose to love our kids more. And, this isn't something God himself was unwilling to do. Jesus himself, sacrificed his status in heaven to come to earth and take on human flesh. He chose to walk among us, and experience what we experience so that we might know that he loves us. And, ultimately, he sacrificed his very life for us on the cross. He died the death that we alone deserved to die, so that we might live the life that he alone deserved to live. Jesus gave up everything for us. And if Jesus can give up everything for us, what might we be willing to give up that the next generation might know his love for them, and might be mobilized to tell others about Jesus' love for them.

And that's what many of you have done here this morning. I know not everyone here likes the music we've been singing this morning, but you have given up your preference for music so that the next generation might be mobilized.

And as a church we do this over and over again. I'm not sure I will ever fully comprehend the sacrifices Pastor Mark made so that he could hire a very young pastoral team, but I certainly know I'm responsible for many of Pastor Mark's gray hairs! And I hope the same will be said of all of us—that we were willing to sacrifice, like Jesus did, that the next generation might be mobilized.

Earlier this year, I attended the Alpha Conference, and one of the speakers, who works for a national institute studying best practices in student ministry, shared about a church they had gone in to survey. They interviewed a number of students to try and understand more about what was going well in their youth ministry. And these students kept telling them about a guy named "Bill." Repeatedly, they heard, Bill is awesome. I love Bill. Bill comes to my games. Bill's the man.

So, as they sat down with the youth pastor of this church, whose name was not Bill, they asked him, who is Bill? All your students love him and can't stop talking about him. Well, Bill, it turns out, is a member of their church who vowed that every young person in his church would have someone who was cheering them on. So, he found out when the kids of his church were playing their sports games and just started showing up. He cheered them on. He championed them. He sacrificed his time for their sake. But here is what is most amazing about Bill. He's over 70-years-old! Here's a picture of him. And Bill isn't cool because he is up with all the latest trends. When he was asked to participate in this survey that was being done, he faxed his responses to their questions from the local public library! Bill is loved by the kids because they see that he is willing to sacrifice himself for them.

So, this morning, I want to challenge you all: be like Bill. Everyone say that with me: be like Bill. Be willing to sacrifice for the next generation. Be willing to give of your time, talents and treasures that the next generation might be mobilized. Be willing to let go of some of the things you love, that the next generation might know your love. Be like Bill.

And what might that look like? Well, if you have children, or grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, it starts at home. Parents are the primary disciple-makers in their kids' lives. And grandparents have an enormous potential for influence on their grandkids' lives. Read the Bible with your kids, pray with your kids, share stories of God's works with your kids, and bring your kids to church. And if you have elementary kids in this church, I'd encourage you to download the

Parent Cue app. It follows along with what the kids are learning in Kids Worship and gives you prompts and cues to begin conversations with your kids as you go about your week. You can find a link to it in the weekly guide, or just search Parent Cue on the app store.

And whether you have children at home or not, we have a church full of kids. Our Elementary ministry has more kids in it now than before the pandemic. Our middle school ministry had 99 kids last week. I'm praying for that 100th kid. We have a church full of kids and there are so many different ways you can be like Bill. And many of you are already doing it.

Our seniors' ministry, we call it Cornerstones, has committed to praying for and writing to our high schoolers every month. There is one LifeGroup who wants to adopt a student for whom they will pray and attend games and events, so they can be like Bill—maybe there are other LifeGroups who want to join them. And we have countless men and women who give of their time to volunteer in our children's and students' ministries; from cooking, greeting, and leading small groups, to a whole bunch of other ways, you can get involved. And next month we will be hosting more than 150 kids for our Vacation Bible School, and there are still many spots open to serve—perhaps you could sign up for that using the link in the guide.

So, we mobilize the next generation. We want to see a generation who not only know God's ways, but also tell God's ways. And this is going to require us to sacrifice. So be like Bill. Say, "Be like Bill." Be like Bill. Be willing to give up some of what you love, that the next generation might know your love and Christ's love for them. Start with your kids and grandkids if you have them. But also serve the next generation of this church. That our legacy might not stop when we die, but would go from one generation to the next.