

**Rev. Rob Looper**  
**Psalms**  
**“A Hand-Me-Down Faith”**  
**Psalm 78**

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 78. And as we turn here, some of you may have noticed this is the second longest Psalm in the Psalter -- Psalm 78. We're not going to read the whole Psalm now. But as we continue our foray, our summer foray into the Psalm, we're going to look at something that's so important for us to understand. It is a wisdom psalm, but it is a psalm that teaches it's didactic as well. And it's a hymn of faith, ultimately, and of trust, even as we learn hard things about who we are as God's people. We learn great things about who our God is. We're going to look as we read here the first 7 or 8 verses as we prepare for this preaching of God's Word. I ask you to stand again, it is God's word. Please pay careful attention. It is holy and inerrant.

***Give me your 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 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 and 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.***

Let's go to the Lord again in prayer.

Lord God, we thank you that you have given us this word. We need Your Holy Spirit or we will not understand more than that. We will. We will not be encouraged to put our hope in you and in you alone. We thank you. We praise you. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Please be seated.

You know, there's a difference between an heirloom and a hand-me-down. An important difference. And an heirloom is an item that's precious because of its long history in a family. It might be a piece of jewelry. It could be a wedding dress. It could be, family Bibles. Something precious that it has long standing in the family. And it has a place of special honor. Some years

ago, I did a wedding in Montgomery, and the reception was held outside of the city, out in the country, in an old family plantation. And I was surrounded by history, towering oaks just dripping with Spanish moss. Ancient, enormous boxwood hedges. You could smell them everywhere. And as we gathered inside the house, which had no central air in July, it was time to cut the cake. And someone came in to the bride with a black box, and they came in and everything hushed. And as they opened it up and they pulled out, it was this long sterling knife, and the bride took it, and she cut the cake with that knife, as had her mother and her mother and her mother, all the way back to the 1860s. And as soon as she had cut that first piece, someone came up and grabbed it, snatched it out of her hands, wiped it clean, put it back in that box, and they whisked it away. And it was gone. Because that's the way it is with heirlooms. They only come out for special occasions. They're stored in a safe place away from curious hands, safe from everyday use.

But that's not how it is with hand-me-downs. If they're clothes, hand-me-downs can come to you in a plastic garbage bag from your aunt's garage. Or they might just migrate from your older brother's drawer into your drawer. grass stains, other kinds of stains. Not even the dignity of a wash. They just show up now. Hand-Me-Down toys. They look dirty. But you're told they've been cleaned. Eyes worn off of dolls are just missing it. Jammed wheels and buttons and things that don't work. Yeah, there's a big difference between an heirloom and a hand-me-down. Heirlooms we consider precious hand-me-downs. Well, they're just hand-me-downs. That's just what they are. But you have to admit, there is something about some hand-me-downs. Yes, they're used, but they're comfortable. They're worn. But they're proven broken in the reliable.

In Psalm 78, I think God shows us what I like to see as an example of how those two come together. Something precious to be honored like an heirloom, but also something tested, something usable, comfortable, reliable, like a hand-me-down. That something is our faith. Now, by saying our faith, I'm not talking about the personal belief that is necessary for all who would know God.

It's impossible for anyone to pass down their personal faith to another. What I mean is the body of truth, the faith, the body of truth about who God is, how he has revealed himself to us, and how we come to know him. So it is the faith that I'm talking about again, that body of truth that he has personally given to us in the New Testament.

We see this concept, this, concept specifically mentioned with Jude, talks about the faith that is once for all entrusted to the saints. And so you could say this the faith is simply what it is that we believe. And the psalmist, I think, is saying something similar here and here. The faith is not just information. Information about God.

For believers, the faith is personal in that God covenanted himself to them. The faith in is a covenantal possession as the people who received God's promise, they could. And we may also say that the faith once delivered is our faith. It isn't just information. Look at look at verse two. The things we have heard and known, even if we were not eyewitnesses, those things are from of old and given to us, and they belong to us as God's people.

Now note also what the psalmist is urging here. Really, it's a plea give ear, O my people, listen to the words of my mouth. Now the plea is really God's plea to his people to hear his words. God is not making a desperate plea, rather one of urgency for sober attentiveness. The word translated dark sayings in verse two is translated as riddles in the account of Samson in Judges 14.

In first Kings ten, it's used to refer to the hard questions that the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon. And so the emphasis here is on deep things, profound truths. So the psalmist God is essentially saying, see, to it that you listen attentively and think deeply about what I am saying. All of Israel's history, as it were, is a parable.

But it's true. Consider carefully and ponder, and don't walk away. But take heed for yourself. The spirit of this directive is the same as what we hear in Psalm 95 today. If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. Or when Jesus in Luke 9:44 says, let these words sink deep into your ears. He calls his people to sober attention so they may hear his call, ultimately to steward the words that follow to ensure that what God says is intentionally handed down.

Verse four. 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 God, and revealing Himself in His Word and in giving us faith to trust him, has given us a clear task. Hand down what you have come to know, and with that task comes the clear promise that God will use the handing down of our faith to bring generations of people to himself, to fulfill his covenant and advance his kingdom.

These perfect and strong truths of God's grace and his covenant promise are both like an heirloom, precious, and like a hand-me-down. Comforting. And so we must be faithful to hand down our faith. Let's look to the words of the psalmist together, and see how God has promised to secure more than a future for his people, but to secure his people for himself.

In this text, we may, in fact, I think two tasks that we are to take up we must remember and we must rehearse. Very easy to remember. We must remember and rehearse. If we were to hand our faith down, we have to remember what is foundational. We must remember God's Word. Look at verse five. He established the testimony and Jacob and appointed a law in Israel which he commanded our fathers to teach their children.

Now the terms statute and law are the same words that are used throughout Psalm 119, which is the longest psalm in the Psalter. And I'm not going to read the whole psalm again, a psalm that is specifically about the perfect word of God, and only there and there in particular, we see the perfection of God's Word held forth.

What's in view here in Psalm 78 is certainly the law given to Moses at Sinai, but also it includes the entire prophetic revelation up to the psalmist time and ultimately beyond. In the New Testament, the scriptures that reveal God's promises in fulfillment to his people, especially regarding Messiah Jesus, God's people, saints of both old and new. Covenants are a people formed by and kept by God's Word.

He spoke his word of promise, deliverance to Adam and Eve after their rebellion, he revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the promise of his word. To them he filled Moses, the prophets, the apostles with his spirit to commit his words. The written form, so that, as Calvin says regarding this passage in the Word of God in the word, God sealed up his grace, that the knowledge of it might never be obliterated.

That's grace, and we must remember it. So the psalmist here calls the people of God to ponder deeply and to meditate upon the truth that God has established His Word among his people as the source of their wisdom and the revelation, ultimately of their hope. Certainly that's true for us today. It's no different. Without the word, we would not know of God's personal character.

We would not know who he was. We'd be forever guessing and never knowing. We would not know about his awesome holiness or his righteous wrath against sin, and we would never know of his abundant grace to his people, of his mercy and tenderness for us in Christ. It's the word that contains the history of God's faithfulness to his covenant promise of taking sinners and making them, but especially keeping them his own people.

And of course, it's the word that it contains instruction and training in righteousness. For that reason, we must remember God's Word is everything to the faith, our faith. Without it, we would have no faith to live, much less to hand down. Now, as I said last week, when we looked at God's love in First John, there are some things we sometimes think are obvious that everyone knows, and those are usually the things we have to be careful.

We don't rush by too fast. And talking to members of Briarwood, especially the Sunday night crowd, about the importance of God's Word, feels like one of them. If that's not preaching to the choir, I don't know what is. But Psalm 78 urges us not to ever take this for granted. Ultimately. So what follows are some things we must take care to do.

There will be coming up on the screen here. Some of you already do these things, but it's good to be reminded. We should read and meditate on the word. That's the most obvious and simple

way to remember God's Word. Read it. Meditate. Think about what it's saying carefully. Deeply. Pondering what it tells us about God and about ourselves.

Memorize the word. It's getting harder for me these days. if you're not already, do it. I want you to think about partnering with someone to do that. Even tonight, perhaps in your small group or in some setting. How about Ephesians one, maybe verses three through 14? As doctor Reed said, it's quite dense, but think of it like baklava.

That's dense and it's sweet, layer upon layer of good things. The richness of God's Word. Be accountable to one another and seek the Holy Spirit's help. This is one of those things that I think is so obvious and we don't often do it. He inspired the word. He gives us understanding in the word. If you ask the Holy Spirit to help you memorize and know God's Word, I am sure he will not say no.

Now encourage one another in and discuss the word together. What you're learning. Don't strive for perfection. I know some of the more OCD and kind of among you will probably just say, I've got to get it perfect, but strive to embrace what the text is calling you to see, to remember, and to enter into it and embrace it for yourself and ultimately, don't give up.

You may think you're failing sometimes, but you'll be amazed at how much of God's Word gets hidden in your heart, because it will rise up at those times when you most need it's perspective, when you need it's encouragement, when you need it's hope. Now it's clear that by remembering God's Word, we learn of and are reminded of who God is.

But when we remember the word, we are also reminded of who we are. And this is critical. And if we are to hand down our precious faith in particular, we must remember our weakness. I want to slow down here, just for a bit before this next point, because it's important, I think, to understand what the psalmist is not urging here.

He isn't saying, look at how badly your forefathers did. What a mess they were, see what they did and how wrong it was. Now you do better. It's not that. It's never that. In a moment we're going to look at this, this key idea that equips us not to think that our response is just to have an amped up moralism and then to try to make ourselves better and do better and strive out of everything within us.

Maybe not for perfection, but maybe close to it.

The key idea will slip past us if we don't truly listen to the words of the psalmist mouth and realize that we are, in essence, a part from God's grace, just like our fathers. Look at verse eight. The psalmist says, the reason we must be careful both to listen ourselves and to teach the next generation the Word of God is so that they and those yet to be born 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. Now we know the entire history of Israel sometimes is nothing but a continual cycle of sin and rebellion. Psalm 78 is a reference of that history up to the point of its composition, which is sometime after David's reign, after the division of the kingdom, perhaps during Hezekiah's or Josiah's reign, could be after the exile, but it makes several references to the tribe of Ephraim, whose particular rebellion is here represented of the northern tribes rebellion and apostasy, and turning from God and His temple in Jerusalem.

But it really typifies the hearts of God's people through the centuries. The psalm mentions the ultimate example in the Old Testament of God's deliverance, the Exodus in verses 12 through 16, but verses 17 through 20. Civil rights. Israel's subject behavior. Yet they stand still more against him. Verse 17, rebelling against the Most High in the desert, they tested God in their heart. My demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God, saying, Can God spread a table in the wilderness? I don't know, he can split the Red sea. So it stands as it says, like a wall, like a heap, I don't know, can he spread a table in the wilderness? He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat to his people? And all of this, while the scenes of God's power, his deliverance in the plagues of Egypt, ought to have been playing and replaying in their minds as verses 14 through 42 through 51 to recount how soon they would forget it. Even after God delivered Israel into the Promised Land, after that aforementioned generation died in the wilderness, after God lavished them with the goodness of the land, the scenario repeated itself.

Look at verse 56. Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God, and did not keep his testimonies, but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers. They twisted like a deceitful bow. They provoked him to anger with their high places. They moved him to jealousy with their idols. Now I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like to have witnessed the plagues in Egypt, the miracles in the Exodus. The Red sea parted again, two walls of water and crossing across and dry land. I can imagine, but I can tell you that I have often thought if God would but only reveal himself to me in some powerful way like that. I'd never doubt again. Well, the Israel saw these things and more. Verse 17. Yet they sinned still more against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.

Verse 22. They did not believe in God. They did not trust in his saving power. This is a universal common reality, and it belongs to our hearts as well. Prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love all too easily. This Old Testament account of Israel's sin is what Paul draws upon in his plea for the church in Corinth.

And in chapter ten, I'd like you to turn there first Corinthians ten. Such a powerful statement as he is urging that church to recognize the power of idolatry and of the temptation of their own

hearts to be drawn away by it. Verse 11. Now these things happened, all these things recounted there at the beginning of the chapter that we've looked at in Psalm 78.

These things happened to them as an example of them, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. I'm stopping there for a reason. It is common to all of us that we would be so tempted.

Ultimately, we have to understand that we are no better than our fathers, apart from the grace of God. Now, God doesn't put these hard realities before us or remind us of our common share in weakness to discourage us. He does it to cause us to despair.

And by despair, I specifically mean that we would despair of our having any hope within ourselves, any delusion that we have any natural capability within ourselves to be obedient to God's call, and that instead we would turn in total dependance upon him. That, as I said earlier, we would never conclude that the message here is look at how badly your forefathers did.

Now you do better. There is no grace in that right here. I want to pause for a moment and say something to those of you who have children, whether in their teens, young adults, maybe even into their 50s and 60s, who just seem ambivalent or have walked away from the faith altogether that you saw it to hand down.

I know that you're very aware of your weakness. You feel it to the point that perhaps you think you failed as a parent. You haven't handed down your faith and you know it isn't automatic. And stains could very well be that in your desire to see your children walk with the Lord, you realize you've made mistakes and what you've done, and you've said things you shouldn't have said.

You may feel as if hope is lost. You regret it. Maybe you even looked at the title of the message and expected to feel failure and condemnation as a parent. Oh, hand-me-down faith, that doesn't work. I've tried. Some may have even done that this morning and decided to stay home tonight. That hurts. Doesn't hurt me. It hurts. The Lord for you especially, but certainly for all of us.

I want you to be encouraged to remember God's Word and remember what it tells us about our weakness and inability. So we will truly see what is most important for us to see God's greatness and God's grace. Look at verse five. 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 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. Now the key difference the psalmist is urging here is that we in the next generation would be different from those faithless fathers and do what apparently they did not do. And that is set our hope in God. And this is why we don't remain in despair of our weakness.

It's directly in the midst of this faithless display that God displays what is foundational and shows us what we must rehearse his greatness and his grace. Verse four. 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. Psalm 78 retrospective is, of course, not just of the father's faithlessness.

It is also of the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might, over and over and over again, God showed up in delivering his people in ways that demonstrate his awesome greatness. Verse 12. In the side of their fathers, he performed wonders in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan he divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap.

In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly. As from the deep he made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers. That's awesome. Greatness. We rightly equate God's greatness with his power, his omnipotence.

There is nothing too great for the for the Lord. You know, even in the previous Psalm, if you turn over to Psalm 77, we get this in verse 13, your way, O God, is holy. What God is great, like our God, you are the God who works wonders. You have made known your might among the peoples. You with your arm redeemed your people.

The children of Jacob and Joseph. God's greatness, all earthly and physical deliverances of God are ultimately symbols of the greatest deliverance of all. That shows the greatest example of God's greatness spiritually, the deliverance of sinners through the death and resurrection of Christ from the eternal death and punishment that we deserve. Martin Luther comments on verse nine here. I think the quote will be on the screen, and he says that this is referring to the greatest and most wonderful battle of all.

That was the battle of Christ against the devil in the day of his suffering. For this battle was spiritual and so great, and have such a nature that all the battles of the world were hardly a figure, a shadow, a weak sign of this one.

The depths to which we grasp the greatness of God, I believe, is determined by how deeply we understand our weakness and our defenseless ness against our greatest enemy, the one who came to steal, to destroy, to kill. But as first John three eight tells us, the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

And what makes God's greatness all the more magnificent is that the ones he delivers from sin and death and the devil's power are the ones who in no way ever deserve that deliverance. Doctor read referred to that this morning. It is incomprehensible. It's even inappropriate, he said, to consider why. Why the most powerful way to hand down the faith is for those of us who astoundingly see and embrace that deliverance is to rehearse God's grace of all that we were able to see in Psalm 78, and to ponder deeply upon nothing is more profound, nothing more astonishingly non-human than God's display of grace.

Over and over again. They sin. He saves. They forget. He forgives. They rebel. He redeems. Look at verse 37. Their heart was not steadfast toward him. They were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them. He restrained his anger often and did not stir up his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

Pastor Alexander showed us last week in Psalm 103. God's grace to his people boggles the mind. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the West so far does he remove our transgressions from us again.

How can he do such a thing? How can he show such grace? It's because he himself is our hope and because he has provided us a deliverer, the one truly, faithful, truly righteous one to shepherd us, to be our hope and our stay. Look at verse 67. He rejected the tent of Joseph. He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.

He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth which he has founded forever. He chose David, his servant, and took him from the sheepfold. From following the nursing ewes, he brought him to shepherd Jacob, his people Israel, his inheritance with upright heart. He shepherded them and guided them with his skillful hand. I love that this psalm closes with an almost an eruption of mercy, an avalanche of grace, a blast of light that turns from Israel's revenge, rebellion and failure to shine on the faithfulness of God and his sure covenant promise.

It was from the tribe of Judah that Jacob prophesied the scepter of the royal kingdom would come. It would be Zion, Jerusalem, where God would make his presence dwell and draw near to his people. And specifically as he covenant with David, it would be from his line that the King who would reign forever, Jesus Christ, would descend. The true David, the true Shepherd.

Listen to what Old Testament scholar Christopher Asch says about this passage. The words he chose sum up the conclusion of the song we choose to sin repeatedly. Culpably Incorrigibly God chooses to save only the sovereign grace of God, sending Christ to fulfill all the promises to David and effectually calling men and women into Christ can bring any hope.

This is the new covenant, so badly needed, so certainly prophesied, so wonderfully brought to us in the death of Christ. That is the grace that we must rehearse over and over again, preaching the gospel to ourselves in one another's presence, to our children, telling and marveling in our own testimonies of conversion, of growth, and of God's amazing grace in our lives to the coming generation, doing the same in our covenant community here at Brier Wood, explaining how God has been gracious to us, we must rehearse the glorious salvation of Christ and His might.

The account is not definitely recorded, but it is widely accepted as true that among the last words of that profound pastor in hymn writer John Newton are these I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior. Echoing the same testimony of the Apostle Paul, first Timothy chapter one, verse 15. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Again, reference this morning. Isn't it amazing how God dovetails for us, those things that he wants us as a body to hear so that we're reminded and we hear repeatedly those things that are so necessary for us as we're being built up because we have a faith to handle. I want to end with two final encouragements. One individual.

One corporate that is, to the body. Some of you know my testimony how I was raised in a believing household but rebelled and that rebellion was hard. It was intentional. It was specific. However it came about. I hated my parents faith. I hated what it stood for. I despise the claims it made on my life and for years I pushed hard against it with real anger the more desperate my mother in particular, was for me to repent and turn to her Christ, the harder and louder I became.

But there was a turning point. About two years before the Lord changed my heart. I was in my early 20s. Around that time, something happened to my mother. Her demeanor enlightened and our conversations changed. She almost seemed unburdened and she was so different. I wondered if she still cared that I was lost.

It was during this time that she nonchalantly handed me a copy of C.S. Lewis His Screwtape Letters, suggesting that I might find it interesting. I did, and she said, well, if you like that, you'll love this. And she handed me mere Christianity. And that was the beginning of the end of my rebellion. Years later, after I'd come to know the Lord, we were talking about that.

I asked her about that change, and she said that it finally one day settled into her heart that I was in the hands of a gracious and sovereign God, that in trusting him with me, no matter the outcome, she would not have a vain faith. What she didn't realize is that the peace that came over her in that realization.

There was evidence of God. I saw it even if she didn't realize it. And God used it. All the content I had heard all my life that was in here. Now what my mother modeled. No, what she passed

down was a modeled faith in her gracious God. And the Lord use that parents, husbands, wives, whoever you may be with unbelieving loved ones, do not give up.

Rest in the good grace and hope of our mighty Christ. He is a great Savior, and you can trust him. Now, a word of corporate encouragement. We are so excited and grateful that you pastor, read or with us and with your family. Where I would. Presbyterian church, as you know, is a congregation that has grown across multiple generations witnessing amazing displays of God's greatness and grace through the faithful teaching of His Word, equipping people, sending them around the world in missions, and having an impact.

Over the last few years, there have probably been among us those who have inevitably, during this time of initial uncertainty and transition, a little bit of worry, perhaps something that might have led some to think this way we're Briarwood, we've got a lot of eyes on us, and there's a lot on the line. We better not mess this up.

I'll admit, there are times that I have been tempted to think that way. The pressure of the world, our own expectations. It's great. But I believe that the vast majority. Of folks in this church realize that we can't think that way. And I know, though, the devil wants us to, we will never put our hope and our reputation.

We will not put our hope in our history. We won't put our hope in Dr Redd's success.

God loves Briarwood more than we love Briarwood. And we want to love Briarwood like he loves Briarwood. And he has given us Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us so that we might be shepherded and guided with his skillful hand to set our hope in God. He has given us a pastor who not only believes that is theologically accurate, but it is his hope and stay and his God. Through Pastor Redd and our elders, leads us to remember His Word and our weakness. We will rehearse his greatness and his grace. And so by living in the power of God, we will hand down the most precious and the most proven thing we can ever give the promise of our faithful covenant God.

Let's pray.

O Lord God, let these words sink deeply into our ears. Not that we would be afraid, but that we would be amazed that you are so gracious. We praise you and we thank you. Fill our hearts with anticipation, excitement, and total dependance upon you so that we set our hope in the Lord. We pray these things in Jesus name.

Amen.