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How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?

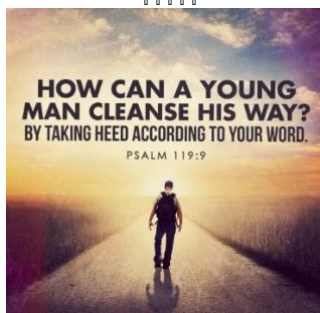
*How shall the young secure their hearts,
And guard their hearts from sin?
Thy Word the choicest rules impart
To keep the conscience clean,
To keep the conscience clean.*

*'Tis, like the sun, a heav'nly light,
That guides us all the day;
And, thru the dangers of the night,
A lamp to lead our way,
A lamp to lead our way.*

*Thy Word is everlasting truth;
How pure is ev'ry page!
That holy book shall guide our youth,
And well support our age,
And well support our age.*

WORDS: Isaac Watts (w 1719)

MUSIC: attr. Ludwig van Beethoven



*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth,
before the evil days come and the years draw near of
which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."*

Ecclesiastes 12:1



Pass It On

February 24, 2022 – an historic day, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, our time's "day that will live in infamy." Ever since that date, I have followed the news, read the posts, looked at the pictures, grieved, and prayed. I've learned about the people fleeing for their lives in the freezing cold, the young wives kissing their husbands goodbye at the border, the desperate straits of the elderly who are too frail to flee, the terror of a small congregation trapped for weeks in a basement with barely any food or water. I've read the words of a young Christian sister that her life now consisted of her suitcase, and her only home was the path at her feet.

But there have also been reports of bravery, self-sacrifice, and outreach for the sake of the gospel. I've seen the pictures of church members in Poland preparing their building to receive a flood of refugees. I've perused the reports of the Romanian church whose members have repeatedly driven into war torn Ukraine to deliver food and medicine and encouragement. I've watched a Ukrainian brother, with Bible in hand, record a video imploring Russian soldiers to put their weapons down. There have been many videos of baptisms, of meals joyfully shared by Christians who cannot speak the same language and of Ukrainian, Romanian, American Christians working together to pack and deliver supplies.

Of all these posts and pictures, though, there was one set of pictures that more than any others caught my attention and my heart. The pictures could have been taken anywhere – in Missouri, Texas, Tennessee, South America – in any children's classroom in any church building. Children seated at their classroom tables, bulletin boards decorated with the Bible story, teachers leaning over the children to help them with their craft. These pictures, though, were taken in a city in western

Ukraine at a congregation providing housing and food for refugees from eastern Ukraine.

Why, when there were so many urgent matters to take care of, would people bother to set up a children's Bible class? There were meals to serve, bedrooms to set up, laundry to do, medicines to be acquired. People were traumatized; they had lost their homes, lost loved ones. Lives had been turned upside down and inside out. How does Sunday School class, of all things, rank anywhere on the list of priorities? I think I know the answer.

Those Ukrainian Christians understand that always – always – we have the obligation to Pass It On. In this case, they understand the duty and necessity to pass it on to their children. Prior to 2014, when Russia first annexed Crimea and moved into eastern Ukraine, the greatest concentration of churches of Christ in Europe was in eastern Ukraine. Those Christians had to flee, and where they fled, they took the gospel to others and continued to teach their children. Now it has happened again. They understand that as essential as it is to get those children away from missiles, it is equally essential that those children continue to learn about God, about His love, His power, His Son Jesus.

Yes, those refugee children need an escape from bombs, a safe place to sleep, nutritious meals, a place to play. And they need Bible class. They need to hear the stories, sing the songs, learn the verses, plant the Word of God deep in their little minds and hearts.

Well, at least there aren't any missiles whistling over our heads here in the U.S. Or, are there? Perhaps it's just that it's the kind we can't see or hear. If we pay any attention at all, we know that we engage in spiritual warfare all the time. It may be subtle; or it may be obvious, but in any case, it is real. Moreover, just as children are not exempt from attack in physical warfare, they are not exempt in spiritual warfare.

We give our children the weapons to fight this spiritual warfare only when we care enough to pass it on. We teach them about God the Father, His Son, His Spirit, about the spiritual armor God can clothe them with. When we realize that seemingly little things have great power – little things like those children's Bible classrooms, family devotionals, memory work, spiritual discussions about daily life, grasping every opportunity to model and to teach the love of God. One father I know makes sure his children know as they watch family movies together, "Every good guy and every bad guy in every movie needs Jesus."

Each of us is the beneficiary of someone who loved us enough to pass it on, and we must make sure the news of the gospel in our lives does not end with us. Never assume that children and young people know. Each generation is new to the table and must be taught. Take to heart the words of the Lord from long ago:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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. 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.
Deuteronomy 6: 4-9

Ina McKune, Rolla, Missouri



What Can I Do?

Churches across the nation are facing a real crisis when it comes to keeping young people faithful after college or when entering the work force. A Google search results in many articles on the subject. Many cite youth groups as the culprit, claiming they are focused on entertainment and pizza rather than feeding youth the gospel. That may be true in many cases, but there are good bible-focused groups as well. Others lay the blame for losing our kids on parents. Parents truly are the first line of defense and should be reading and teaching their children from the cradle up, but we cannot discount all the outside influences that bombard our youth.

Recently I heard a sermon in which the preacher spoke of a survey among young people who had remained faithful. They were asked several questions, but one common denominator kept showing up. Eighty percent of those faithful young folks had experienced a significant relationship in the church with an older adult who was not a family member. Does that jolt you as much as it did me? It isn't just ineffective youth groups or negligent parents. It is also a disconnect from one generation to the next, so how do we fix that? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Invite a young person on a "date" to have lunch or dinner. "Entertainment," you shout. Yes, but as you eat remember to pray for your meal and add in other heavier issues, then talk about those issues. Ask if there is something special the child would like to

pray about. If that happens to be her pink 'My Little Pony' that is lost, take it seriously, and apply that to other issues in your discussion. Make this a regular date, starting at a rather young age and continuing into adulthood. Trust me, you will gain far more than the child involved.

2. Set up a class to teach life skills. A lady in our congregation organized a class twice a month to teach young girls how to budget and write a check, how to change a tire and the oil in a car, how to read a recipe, etc. Different ladies teach those classes, based on their own life skills. Great bonding and lots of giggles go on. The same lady set up weekly basic sewing classes for the girls to be taught by a couple of senior women. Some men hold classes for the young men with emphasis on how to lead singing, present a devotional, lead a prayer, etc. Those young boys are then scheduled to serve during our regular services.
3. An adult male can spend 10-15 minutes before the evening services at the front of the auditorium drilling basic bible facts with the children from infancy through high school. If that is done in the presence of the whole congregation, new members can listen and learn and older members can be refreshed. Women can encourage men to do this.
4. Who is up for a cookie baking session to distribute to local nursing homes or to nursing stations at the local hospital? A monthly gathering to make small tray favors for that same nursing home would be fun, and delivery would be even more fun for the kids, both boys and girls.
5. The gap between seniors and youth seems big, but it can be surmounted. Pride can prevent seniors asking for help when needed, but sometimes a request gives a young person the opportunity to serve and develop a relationship. As an example, I recently broke my wrist and needed an end table assembled to hold my computer. I asked a young dad if he could do that for me since I was unable at the time. He readily agreed, and I offered to pay him since we live a good distance away. He refused the pay and even brought his preteen boys and asked if there were other tasks we needed done. In casual conversation my husband had already mentioned the gutters needed to be cleaned, so this brother dispatched the boys to get our ladder and get to work. The boys had a ball pelting one another with twigs and leaves from the gutters. Again, we offered to pay the boys, but their dad quickly refused. While the boys waited for their dad to finish his job, we had a great time just

talking about things the boys had been doing and planned to do in the next few days. We decided to get together again soon to play dominoes. So, what chore do you need done that a young person could do in a flash? What activity could you do that would involve them? Card games, attending little league ball games, yard games? What skill can you teach? Seniors may be old, but they certainly are not useless.

The exodus of our young people is a concern for us all. We can encourage and advise parents, if asked. We can promote more meaningful youth group meetings, but we individually need to become involved. Be a mentor to one degree or another. Be an example, be a teacher, and be an encourager. That preacher I mentioned earlier said an elderly lady told him every time she saw him, "You're going to be a great preacher one day." When the time came, he said he felt he had no other choice, nor did he want one. Not all young men will be preachers (or girls be preacher's wives), but some boys can become outstanding deacons, elders, and servants.

By Wilburta Arrowood, Napoleonville, Louisiana



Pass It On

Two-word phrases are interesting. Some evolve and have a different meaning today than the original meaning. Here are a few that have lasted and are popular today.

1. Hand's down – In horse racing, a jockey who is way out front doesn't even have to lift his hand to guide his horse. It has come to mean to score a victory without much effort.
2. Double take – This came from movie making in which the director wants to take another look at the scene to make sure it's like he wrote it. Today it is anything that deserves to be looked at a second time.
3. Chicken feed – To the farmer, chicken feed is the poor quality of wheat or corn that is given to chickens. The phrase soon became popular meaning a small amount of money.
4. Senior moment – This phrase first appeared around 1997 to mean a lapse of memory in elderly people. Today it is applied to anyone who temporarily forgets a name or where she laid her car keys.
5. Let's Roll – Todd Beamer a passenger on hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 on 9/11/2001, spoke his last audible words as the plane turned in a southeast direction: "Are you ready? Let's roll." It became a

catch phrase of national sentiment after 9/11. It means to get going, get busy, move along, and a time of action.

These phrases have stuck with us over the years. We continue to use them and pass them on.

A two-word phrase was chosen by a couple to be their family motto to communicate what they felt was most important to pass on to their children and grandchildren. The two words they chose were “be there.” They wanted all who were in the family, and came into the family through marriage, birth, or adoption to be in heaven. As they discussed it, they found two tangible ways of communicating these two words.

First, when audible words could not be spoken, the thumbs up sign meant “be there.” The thumb pointed to heaven, and that is what was communicated. If family members saw each other in a public setting or across the room from one another, they quietly and simply gave the thumbs up sign, a positive reminder of their goal.

Second, the wife cross-stitched the words “be there” on linen, then framed and hung the inscription in their family room. She continued to cross-stitch “be there” for each of their children. This was given as a gift when they married. Through the years the grandchildren married and they too each received a “be there” cross stitch as they began their own home. Four generations of the family have “be there” hanging on the walls in their family rooms.

This two-word phrase endures in this family. It has been passed on for generations. All know the story of when it started, where it started, and what it means. It’s a strong reminder of their commitment to God and what is most important.

We read of this Biblical concept in Deuteronomy as Moses tells Israel to always impress God’s love on their children. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). We might not choose a two-word phrase, but we do need to find a way of communicating our faith and God’s love in our families, and then make sure this is passed on from one generation to the next.

Sally Shank, Edmond, Oklahoma

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PASS IT ON

Do you remember one of the songs in “Fiddler on the Roof”? The community has just learned that the oldest daughter has refused to marry the butcher and pleaded

with her father to let her marry the tailor. The butcher was a wealthy man; the tailor was poor. The first to learn the news passes it to a neighbor who promptly passes it to another. Each time the news is spread from one person to another, the story changes a bit until it is totally fabricated by the time it reaches the last person.

There are good things to pass along to others, such as the soul-saving gospel of Christ, encouragement to the discouraged and downtrodden, a smile to a stranger, or a kind word to a teenager struggling with poor self-esteem.

It has been our privilege to share the gospel with many over the years. Some refuse to obey the gospel for reasons they decline to reveal. Some respond quickly, only to fall away just as quickly. Others may hesitate as they count the cost but later become strong Christians.

God commanded the children of Israel to pass down the scriptures to their children by committing God’s word to their memory. They were to teach the holy word to their children, and the children were then to repeat the process throughout all generations. Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

Consider Deuteronomy 11:18, *“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”*

We pass along lots of things to our children from physical characteristics to possessions. We also pass down family traditions, heirlooms, and wisdom learned the hard way. Let us never neglect teaching our children God’s word and His expectations for all of us.

Evelyn Waite, Rolla, Missouri

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