

How God's Truth Passes Down Through Generations

The Big Idea

Psalm 78 shows us a problem: God's people kept forgetting what He did and falling into the same sins over and over. The New Testament shows us the solution: Jesus Christ, remembered and proclaimed across generations. This creates a blueprint for both evangelism (reaching new people) and revival (renewing God's people).

The Pattern: When we remember what God has done in Christ, tell it to others, let it change what we love, genuinely repent, learn from mature believers, and follow credible leaders—real transformation happens.

Six Principles That Connect Old Testament Warnings to New Testament Solutions

Principle 1: Training Memory, Not Just Behavior

The Psalm 78 Problem: Israel's parents taught their kids to obey rules but didn't teach them to remember God's mighty acts. When hard times came, the kids forgot who God was and rebelled.

The New Testament Solution: The gospel isn't primarily about new rules—it's about remembering what Jesus already did.

- "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead" (2 Timothy 2:8)
- The Lord's Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)

For Evangelism: We don't just tell people what to do. We tell them what Jesus has *already done*—He died for sinners and rose from the dead. Faith starts when people hear this historical fact, not when they're pressured to be better.

For Revival: Revival isn't new truth—it's old truth remembered clearly again. When churches drift, it's usually because they've forgotten the simple gospel and replaced it with complicated programs or rules.

Example: Imagine a family where grandparents constantly tell stories about how they survived hard times. The grandkids grow up knowing their family's strength. But if those stories stop getting told, the next generation forgets who they are. That's what happened to Israel—and what happens to churches that stop rehearsing the gospel.

Principle 2: Silence Produces Forgetting

The Psalm 78 Problem: When one generation stopped telling the story, the next generation forgot God entirely.

The New Testament Solution: Faith shrinks when the Word of God isn't actively proclaimed.

- "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14-17)

For Evangelism: Evangelism isn't optional extra credit. God has chosen to work *through* people proclaiming the gospel out loud. Your silence means someone doesn't hear about Jesus.

For Revival: Every major revival in history happened when biblical preaching and teaching dramatically increased. The 1904 Welsh Revival saw church services go from once a week to 3-4 times *per day*. When God's Word isn't being spoken, spiritual life dies.

Example: Think about learning to ride a bike. Your dad can *believe* you'll learn, but if he never teaches you, you won't. God works through means—and that means is proclamation. Faith comes by *hearing*.

Principle 3: Interpreting Desire, Not Just Restraining It

The Psalm 78 Problem: Israel's complaining in the wilderness revealed what they really loved—comfort and food more than God. Their cravings exposed their hearts.

The New Testament Solution: The gospel doesn't just add more rules to control bad desires. It gives us new desires by giving us a new heart.

- "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16-17)
- "Set your minds on things above" (Colossians 3:1-3)

For Evangelism: The real battle isn't what people *believe* intellectually—it's what they *love*. Someone might understand the gospel but reject it because they love their sin, their reputation, or their control more than Jesus.

For Revival: Fake revival just adds more rules: "Stop doing this, start doing that." Real revival changes what people love. When Christians start loving Jesus more than their comfort, status, or entertainment—that's when you know God is at work.

Example: You can tell a teenager, "Stop looking at your phone so much!" But until they find something they love more than social media, the phone will keep winning. The gospel gives us Someone worth loving more than anything else.

Principle 4: Crisis Faith Is Not the Goal

The Psalm 78 Problem: Israel kept crying out to God when they were in trouble, but as soon as things got better, they forgot Him again. Their repentance was shallow—driven by pain, not love.

The New Testament Solution: True repentance isn't just feeling bad or wanting relief. It's turning toward God because you finally see who He really is.

- "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10)

For Evangelism: A prayer at an altar call under emotional pressure isn't the same as genuine conversion. Real faith produces ongoing fruit—changed life, sustained obedience, growing love for Jesus and His people.

For Revival: Emotional hype meetings aren't revival. Real revival shows up in:

- Broken relationships getting healed
- Stolen things getting returned
- Lifestyle patterns changing long-term
- Churches growing in love, unity, and holiness

Example: Your little brother says, "I'm sorry!" when Mom catches him—but five minutes later he's doing the same thing. That's worldly sorrow (I got caught). Godly sorrow is when he genuinely realizes he hurt someone he loves and *wants* to be different.

Principle 5: Grandparents as Stabilizers of Long Memory

The Psalm 78 Problem: When the older generation died without passing on their stories, the nation collapsed spiritually. They lost their memory.

The New Testament Solution: Faith is designed to pass from spiritual parents to spiritual children across multiple generations.

- "What you have heard from me... entrust to faithful people who will also be able to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2)

For Evangelism: Evangelism isn't just about getting strangers saved. It's also about mature Christians investing in younger believers, creating spiritual family trees. Your faith should produce "spiritual grandchildren."

For Revival: Movements without older, wiser believers to guide them fall apart fast. The "grandparents" in a church:

- Remember what worked and what didn't in the past
- Interpret what's happening (Is this really God, or just emotion?)
- Keep truth anchored when feelings run wild

Example: The Azusa Street Revival (1906) started powerful but fragmented within 20 years because it lacked older leaders to give guidance. Compare that to the Moravian missionary movement, which lasted over a century because they had strong mentorship structures.

Principle 6: Leadership That Makes Trust Reasonable

The Psalm 78 Problem: Israel's leaders often failed—they were hypocrites or incompetent. Psalm 78 ends by pointing to David, a leader with integrity and skill, as the solution.

The New Testament Solution: Christian leaders must be credible—their lives must match their message.

- "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1)
- Leaders must be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

For Evangelism: Non-Christians judge Christianity not just by what we say, but by how we live. A hypocritical leader doesn't prove the gospel is false—but it sure makes people think it might be.

For Revival: Revival accelerates when leaders:

- Confess their own sins honestly
- Lead with humility, not pride
- Practice what they preach

Example: If your youth pastor talks about purity but everyone knows he's cheating on his wife, his words mean nothing. But if he lives with transparent integrity—admitting struggles, seeking accountability—his teaching carries weight.

How These Six Principles Work Together

Think of it like building a house:

1. **Memory** is the foundation—what we build on
2. **Proclamation** is the construction crew—how the house gets built
3. **Desire** is the wiring and plumbing—what makes the house actually work
4. **Repentance** is moving in and living there—not just visiting on weekends
5. **Generational Memory** is the deed to the property—making sure your kids inherit it
6. **Leadership** is the contractor—making sure it's done right

Without all six, the house either doesn't get built or falls apart.

Real-World Examples: Revivals That Worked vs. Revivals That Fizzled

Revival That Lasted: First Great Awakening (1730s-1740s)

- ✓ **Memory Training:** Jonathan Edwards preached long sermons rehearsing what Jesus did
- ✓ **Proclamation:** Churches held services 4-5 times per week
- ✓ **Desire Changed:** People didn't just feel bad—they started loving Jesus more than their sins
- ✓ **Deep Repentance:** People made restitution (paid back debts, reconciled feuds)
- ✓ **Generational:** Lasted 40+ years, founded Princeton Seminary to preserve truth
- ✓ **Credible Leaders:** Edwards was brilliant theologically and lived with integrity

Result: Churches grew, society changed, and the impact lasted for generations.

Revival That Fizzled: Some Second Great Awakening Methods (1820s-1840s)

- ✗ **Memory Training:** Charles Finney focused more on emotional techniques than gospel content
- ✗ **Proclamation:** Used high-pressure tactics (the "anxious bench") instead of clear teaching
- ⚠ **Desire Changed:** Some real conversions, but many just felt guilty temporarily
- ✗ **Deep Repentance:** Finney himself admitted most "converts" didn't stick
- ✗ **Generational:** Collapsed within one generation
- ⚠ **Credible Leaders:** Finney was talented but theologically shallow

Result: Big emotional meetings, then most people drifted away. Many churches founded during this period abandoned biblical faith by 1900.

Revival That Started Strong but Lost Direction: 1904 Welsh Revival

- ✔ **Memory Training:** Evan Roberts emphasized repentance based on Christ's work
- ✔ **Proclamation:** Churches met 3-4 times daily with Scripture-saturated worship
- ✔ **Desire Changed:** Widespread restitution—people returned stolen goods, paid debts
- ✔ **Deep Repentance:** Crime dropped, bars closed, society transformed
- ⚠ **Generational:** Powerful for 2 years, but effects didn't sustain long-term
- ✘ **Credible Leaders:** Roberts lacked theological training; movement became experience-focused

Result: Amazing short-term impact, but within 20 years many churches drifted into theological error because they lacked mature leaders to guide them.

One-Sentence Comprehensive Summary

Revival and discipleship succeed, through the power of the Spirit and the finished work of Christ, as memory is preserved (preventing forgetting), silence is broken (faithful proclamation continues), desire is re-formed (cravings are interpreted theologically), crisis faith is matured (into enduring repentance), elders function as stabilizers (carrying irreplaceable long memory), and leadership demonstrates credibility (making trust in God reasonable across generations).