

TELLING YOUR FAITH STORY

By Walt Schoedel

In this article I respond to the question - How to pass on the teachings of discipleship to the next generation? Our actions and lifestyle directly and indirectly show our love and concern for our children and grandchildren. I frequently hear older adults express concern about passing on their faith.

OUR DAILY SONG

I love to tell the story
That Jesus is the Way
It gives me all the reason
To live another day
In every generation
Each age, its story tells
Of how our God is faithful
To people aging well.

OUR DAILY CONFESSION

I have only today, only this moment really, and this moment is all that I need. A moment to pray, a moment to smile, a moment to praise, a moment to serve. A moment to decide that should I be given more moments, more days, more years, I will spend them wisely, concerned not with what I can get, but how I can give.

Passing on Our Spiritual Legacy to the Next Generation

TODAY'S CHALLENGE

How do we transmit our faith to the next generation in today's pluralistic society?

GOD'S VOICE IN HIS WORD

Be very careful never to forget what you have seen the Lord do for you. Do not let these things escape from your mind as long as you live. And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren. Deuteronomy 4:9

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation. Psalm 71:18

Tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might and the wonders He has done. Psalm 78:4

Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children to another generation. Joel 1:3

One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. Psalm 145:4

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. II Timothy 1:5

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. III John 1:4

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works in which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 1:10

THE VOICE OF AN AMERICAN PATRIOT

I have now disposed of all my property to my family. There is one thing more I wish I could give them and that is faith in Jesus Christ. If they have that and I had not given one shilling, they would be rich, and if I had not given them that and had given them all the world they would be poor indeed. From the Will of Patrick Henry

THE VOICE FROM A RECENT STUDY

In their book *Families and Faith*, Vern Bengtson, with Norella Putney and Susan Harres, analyze thirty-five years of data that they collected from over thirty-five hundred family members. Their conclusion – parental piety, religious role modeling, setting a good example (practice what they preached), are the keys for transmitting the faith. However, a positive transmission takes place in an environment of close, warm, and affirming relationship – not that which is perceived as cold, distant, or authoritarianism.

THE VOICE OF WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill, the great Prime Minister of England during and after World War II, was asked in his later years to speak to the students at Harrow School in London, England. As he slowly went to the podium he began his message “never, never, never give up” and then sat down.

This is our message today as we live out the later years of our life – never, never, never give up believing and trusting in Jesus as our Savior and Lord and never, never, never give up telling our faith story.

THE VOICE OF AN AGING PILGRIM

As an aging pilgrim I have the calling to live in such a way that I can exhort the generation following me, “Do it like I did.” That’s what the Apostle Paul said to the church at Corinth, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.” 1 Corinthians 11:1-2 (NASB)

I have the responsibility to live wisely in harmony with my confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

I have the responsibility to set a good example for my children and grandchildren.

I have the responsibility to talk about my faith with the next generation.

-Leroy Biesenthal

SUGGESTIONS FOR SHARING THE FAITH WITH FAMILY

- **LISTEN** to them. Keep the conversation alive, well, and alert.
- **LEARN** from them. They have observations to share and lifestyles that have meaning and purpose.
- **LEAD** them. Teach them by what you say and do. Be a good example.
- **LIFT** them up. Be there always with a helping hand and lift them up in prayer.
- **LEAN** upon them. Don't hesitate to let them support you.
- **LOVE** them as Jesus goes about loving you.

A PRACTICAL LIFE STYLE IN PASSING ON THE FAITH

With our blended family – 11 children (plus their spouses = 20), 41 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren (totaling 75) – we increasingly find ourselves pondering two important questions. “How do we, as octogenarians, go about influencing the faith of our family?” “How do we practice our faith in their presence?”

In our travels across the country, addressing gatherings of older adults, we have found that many seniors share these concerns. Many are looking for ways to pass on a faith legacy to their families.

Studies, research, and our own experiences reveal to us how our lives can serve as a beacon for our family. That's why we have developed the following life style in our later years.

- We pray for each member of our family. We set aside time every day to pray for family members.
- We spend time talking to family members about our faith journey as well as theirs.
- We mark important moments in their lives – sending computer made birthday/anniversary cards, telephone calls, emails, Facebook, and FaceTime.
- We host family gatherings from time to time.
- We pray together, celebrate the Lord's Supper together, play cards and games, and converse.
- We travel to participate in grandchildren's school events, confirmations, graduations, and weddings.
- We send devotional booklets, magazines, and other reading material.
- We come together to celebrate four important Holidays – Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving. Family members make an effort to be with us.
- We wrote our autobiographies as a Christmas gift one year with an emphasis on our faith journey.
- We reach out in service to others to set a good example.
- This year we are sending an e-mail every Sunday morning with a short spiritual message and then asking them to pray for a family member who is celebrating a Baptismal Birthday in the following week.

We share this witness for two reasons. First, we look for ways to help others, especially the younger generations, understand the view points and concerns of older adults. Second, we desire to encourage families to enrich and enhance their faith journey.

Lee and Walt Schoedel are involved with older adult ministry. He is Pastor Emeritus of Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, Missouri and serves as Director of Church Relations for Lutheran Senior Services of Missouri and Illinois. They live at Lutheran Senior Services' Laclede Groves Retirement Community in Webster Groves, Missouri. They spend their summers at Lake James in Northern Indiana in the home built by Lee's grandfather. They edit a quarterly newsletter for congregations, "Engaging the Aging".