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Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Our theme today is "Are Your Grandchildren Going To Be In Heaven Some Day?" Be assured that this sermon is not just for the grandparents. The fact is, the greatest influence of grandparents has already taken place long before their grandchildren are born, in the way they have brought up their children in God's word, that their children then might bring up their grandchildren in God's word. This word of God also applies to those who do not have children of their own, for the children belong to all of us in our precious family here at church, and our instruction, our encouragement, and our example are very important to them. The greatest influence you have on your children and grandchildren, whether now or in the future, is the way you hear and learn God's word yourself, and where you place God's grace among your priorities. That has eternal implications not only for you, but also for those who follow you.

How it tears at the heart of many a Christian grandparent, and rightly so, if one of their grandchildren is not in church, not in the Savior's arms repenting and receiving his forgiveness. How it tears at the heart of many a Christian pastor and congregation member alike, as it should, if one child in the congregation is not in church, not in the Savior's arms repenting and receiving his forgiveness. Such spiritual dying of a child should certainly hurt us worse than losing a child or grandchild to physical death. Let us read our verses:

Psalm 78:1-7

"O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old -- what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands."

Lord our God, help us to teach our children your holy Scriptures in such a way that they in turn will teach it to their children. Cause your word to be the most important thing in our lives and in our families, so that our children and grandchildren and theirs after them might have the peace and joy of everlasting life in heaven. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, crucified and raised from the dead for our eternal life in heaven, and not only for us, but for our children and grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren;

Let's count the generations in our verses. There are at least four generations. "Our fathers have told us." "We will not hide them from our children; we will tell the next generation." "Even the children yet to be born." "And they in turn would tell their children." That assumes even more generations in the future as they continue to proclaim God's great grace. Obviously, if one generation should fail to teach God's redemption to the next, his saving word and heaven itself is then lost to all succeeding generations, until a missionary from the outside reintroduces it. God prevent us and our grandchildren from losing his salvation!

Tragically, even among God's chosen people Israel, rarely did God's word endure as central and top priority in a family for even four generations. Too often we read, "The next generation forgot the Lord and turned away from his ways. So there were often severe problems and defeat throughout Israel's history. But the Lord demonstrated his greater mercy by again and again rescuing his people from the destruction into which they had gotten themselves, and through his forgiveness enabling them to start out anew as his holy people.

Think for a moment of your own family, how many generations have clung firmly to God's word? I remember my grandfather, who was a morally upstanding, outwardly good and kind individual. But he didn't demonstrate a love for God's word, nor did he clearly confess faith in God's salvation. I was in eighth grade when he died. I remember wondering, and I still do, whether or not Grandpa is in heaven. That's a difficult thing to wonder. My father spent time talking with him during his last hours. That is of comfort. However, the masonic funeral was not of any comfort. We need to finally leave such things in the Lord's hands. But that was one of the major events in my life that led me to become a pastor. I knew that I couldn't make an eternal difference for my grandfather anymore. But maybe I could for other people's grandfathers and grandmothers and grandchildren.

The desperate question that missionaries are often asked is haunting: Why didn't you come sooner, before my parents or grandparents died in their ignorance and unbelief of God's forgiveness? Just as difficult and tragic it is to not know if our children or grandchildren are going to heaven when they die. It is very sad when a child dies, but if the child has faith, is repenting of his or her sins and receiving Christ's forgiveness, we have the sure and certain comfort that that child is in the Savior's arms forever. More than sad it is if a child loses his or her faith and dies spiritually, or leaves Christ's church when he or she grows up. Here we all strive with all our might to make a difference as long as our children and grandchildren are alive and as long as we are alive.

If we have children or grandchildren who have left the church, we should surely pray for them each day that the Holy Spirit would reach out to them with God's word and lead them to return. We should show them by our example that God's word and salvation are most important for us, and so also for them. Sometimes our own example says more than anything else. And we should at opportune times try to talk with them, share God's word with them in a most loving way, and encourage them. If it would help, your pastor is more than willing to accompany you. Indeed, all of us parents are painfully aware of our many faults, failings and shortcomings in bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Take comfort, God has forgiven all those wrongs!

Our children grow up quickly, and before we know it we are grandparents, and then great-grandparents. Our time of influence with them is short! Rather than starting tomorrow, we should have started yesterday. In God's total and free forgiveness for yesterday's failures and shortcomings we start anew today, apologizing also to our children and grandchildren for our failures and asking for their forgiveness. That goes a

long way in demonstrating that God's forgiveness is the most important thing in life each day.

In 2 Corinthians 8:5 we read that God's believers "gave themselves first to the Lord." It is essential that our children know that we have given ourselves first to the Lord, that we have given them first to the Lord, that we have given our families first to the Lord in all that we do, in our family priorities, in the way our family's time is spent, in the way our family's finances are spent, in the way we treasure and use God's word, hearing it, learning it, teaching it to others, supporting mission work through our prayers and generous offerings.

Just what is this most important thing that we must make known to our children and not hide from them in such a way that they will make it known to their children? "The praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done." That he is the wonderful creator of all things, the giver of all things, the sustainer of all. How with his mighty hand the Lord has accomplished all events throughout history to send his Son to live for us, to die for us, to rise from the dead, to open heaven to us unworthy sinners. This most important thing of all history must be the most important thing for the short few years of our life, and for our children's lives, and their children's, and so on throughout history, until we are all gathered together safely in heaven's bliss and glory which has no end.

I remember the long-term project of teaching my 7 children to drive a car. Some of it was just plain frightening! Before that, I recall teaching them to ride a bike. That wasn't quite as frightening and difficult. With the bike we have to teach them to balance, and to watch where they're going. I saw it happen more than once; the little child does just fine balancing, riding that bike merrily down the sidewalk, humming some tune and staring at the ground, or looking to one side or another, any direction except ahead, and then runs right into a garbage can or a mailbox. We tell them, "Watch where you're going!" When they learn to drive a car, we tell them, "Aim high in steering! Watch far in front of you, way down the road. Look at where you're going to."

Look at where you're going to -- to heaven. Don't get distracted or sidetracked from that all-important destination. Aim higher -- heaven not only for our children, but our grandchildren. Then our grandchildren will tell their children, and their children will tell their children. Where will WE be then, four generations from now? If God allows the world to endure so long, we'll be six feet under -- our souls in heaven, and long forgotten here. What will have mattered in our life? Our career? Our money? Our home? Our job? Our popularity? Our recreation, sports and hobbies? All of those things will clearly be meaningless then. There is only one thing that we can take with us to heaven -- our children and grandchildren, and theirs after them. Show them the way. Teach them how to drive spiritually by the way you drive your life. Focus alone on God's word of grace and salvation. Aim high in steering!

Why would we spend our time with our family here at church on Sunday morning, time that we could be spending on some other family outing? Why would we spend our energy carrying out Christ's work, energy that we could be spending doing other things with our families? Why would we spend our money on the preaching and proclamation of our Lord's gospel, money that we could be spending on our children? Only when we consider the question: Will my grandchildren be in heaven one day; does it make sense. For they will only learn that which is first in life if we show them.

How important it is that our weekend worship come first, before everything and anything else. How important are our daily devotions with our family. How important it is for our children to be in Sunday school regularly, to learn the holy Scriptures; and to be

instructed, strengthened and encouraged in catechism class. When people neglect and thus despise God's word, we want to shake them up and ask them, "Are your grandchildren going to be in heaven one day?" They're riding their bike, looking down and in every direction except ahead, and coasting their family toward something worse than a garbage can.

When our children consider a career or consider moving to a location that will prevent them from being actively involved in God's church, they tell us, "I have my faith and I'll keep it." Then we need to urge them to look a little further: "Will your grand-children be in heaven some day?" As our children begin dating and finally choose a husband or wife, how vital it is that they consider that all-important question, "Are your grandchildren going to be in heaven some day?" "The praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done" must be the chief thing in our lives. They are our life, and the life of our children and grandchildren.

We have a beautiful congregation. God has made us a wonderful family, so that the children and grandchildren here belong to all of us; so that the parents and grandparents here belong to all of us. When we as a congregation ask that question, "Will our grandchildren be in heaven one day?" and also "Will our grandparents be in heaven one day?" That sets our priorities in order as we keep in mind that which is infinitely and eternally most important.

Indeed, we pray God: Forgive us for our many faults, failings and shortcomings in bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. God has forgiven all. We pray for our children and grandchildren, and those yet to be born. We pray that God would continue his praiseworthy deeds and wonders in their lives. God grant that we may live our life as a testimony to our descendants of what is truly important -- not just as a testimony to them, but because God's word is most important for us. Are your grand-children going to be in heaven one day? In all that we do in life, let us aim high in steering! Our God has given us heaven. He has given it to our grandchildren too!

Amen.

May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us or forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways. Amen.