

TREASURING GOD *in Our* TRADITIONS

ALSO BY NOËL PIPER:  
*Most of All, Jesus Loves You*

TREASURING  
GOD *in our*  
TRADITIONS

NOËL PIPER

FOREWORD AND POETRY BY  
JOHN PIPER

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### Dedication

*The bark deep-creased with age; the limbs  
Were laden down with love, and hymns  
Were heard beneath when wind bestirred  
The bowing branches with the Word  
Of heaven. O there were years of shade!*

JOHN PIPER

*With gratitude for my beloved “bowing branches”:*

*Uncle Homer and Aunt Edna  
Uncle James and Aunt Mary  
Uncle Sam and Aunt Alice  
Uncle Buddy and Aunt Lou Ellen  
Uncle Hollis and Aunt Rachel  
Uncle Zach and Aunt Norma  
Uncle Hal and Aunt Ada Sue  
Uncle Roy and Aunt Lou*

*And especially for  
Daddy and Mother,  
George and Pamela Henry*

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## FOREWORD

BY JOHN PIPER

I love to read my wife's writing. It's just like her: velvet steel. Yes, there's a woman's touch. She is one. But there's also an edge because she believes in solid Truth.

Long ago we settled it: Manhood and womanhood are different—deeply, maddeningly, and blissfully different. That's not surprising. But we also agreed on something unexpected. What makes the most admirable women admirable, and the most noble men noble, is the touch that each has of the other's peculiarity. A rugged man with no “female” tenderness is less a man, and a nurturing woman with no “male” ruggedness is less a woman. So it stopped bothering us that I am the emotional, poetic, expressive one in this marriage, and she is the no-nonsense, suck-it-up, thick-skinned doer.

You will hear that, and, I predict, you will like it.

I have called our marriage and our home a matrix of Christian hedonism. Yes, four sons were conceived here and one daughter adopted. But our marriage has also been the birthplace of ideas. Or better: the birthplace of vision—seeing God as all-sovereign and all-satisfying. Woven into our family life is the conviction that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. His glory and our joy are not at odds. In this matrix the vision matured; then it shaped everything.

*Treasuring God in Our Traditions* is exactly the right title for this book. God is the treasure of our lives. We see him in everything. We believe with all our hearts that “from him and through him and to him are all things.” He gets the glory, we get the joy. My job has been to articulate the vision in writing. Noël has shaped a family around it. Now she turns that work into words.

I pray that this glimpse into our lengthening marriage (we were married in 1968) and into our family history—struggles and all—will clarify for you the biblical vision of the God that we love. Long ago we agreed that our family exists to spread a passion for God's supremacy in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ. Now, if you wish, you may see a few more of the “all things” where we long to make God supreme. We have not “arrived.” The banner over our lives is “Desiring God and Longing to Love,” not “Always Full of Joy in God and Living Radically as a Result.”

In this story, as with all stories, test all things and hold fast to what is good. Learn from our mistakes. Adapt some of our imperfect successes. Mainly, look for the Treasure. His grace is everywhere. We could not have made it this far without him. He will not be hard to find. And when you find him, give thanks that he found you first.

heir·loom  
Pronunciation: 'ar-lüm, 'er-lüm  
Something of special value handed on  
from one generation to another.

# ONE HEIRLOOMS



*Dear Mother,  
What kind of fur is the coat you got when you lived in Chicago?*

*Love,  
Noël*

Dear Noël,

What in the world are you writing about, to want to know about my fur coat? There is a story.

When I worked in Chicago in the early 1940s, my cousin Camilla Kellar (Aunt Anne Hughes's daughter, sister of Phyllis) urged me to go to Appleton, Wisconsin, and buy a custom coat from furrier Eddie Myers. I took a train and put up in a small hotel overnight. (All night I could hear music from a bar somewhere across the street. It made me wonder if that was the setting in another Wisconsin town the winter night in 1898 when two Christian traveling salesmen met in a small hotel in Boscobel and shared evening devotions. On the spot they decided to do something to spread the gospel among other traveling men. Thus was born Gideons International, now in 175 countries.)

Oh, well, back to the fur coat. The coat came just in time for my first subzero experience. Snugly inside it, I was cozy and comfy, no matter the sharp winds off Lake Michigan a block or two away.

That's a lot of words to say—mink-dyed muskrat. That is probably all you really wanted to know, but memories go with lots of things.

*I love you,  
Mother*

#### WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS HEIRLOOM?

It's been in our attic for three decades, the shabby orange-and-white corrugated wardrobe box we saved from the movers. For a few years we hung out-of-season clothes in it, but now it's packed with unwanted items left behind one by one when each new season blew in. If you were to wipe the dust from the lid and lift it away, you'd find one piece that's been there for all the thirty years—my mother's mink-dyed muskrat coat.

She didn't really need it anymore, living in warm Georgia. And she was worried about me in Minnesota's deep-freeze winters. The coat was already thirty years old and showing its age when she sent it to me. I tried it on and felt like a bear. And, besides, with all my friends wearing ponchos and pea coats, it seemed just "too too." I don't remember if I ever wore it.

But you can't just toss an icon. I knew its story. This coat was a symbol of Mother's career-girl days, of the Virginia girl's fling in the Windy City, of her independent years sandwiched between life with parents and life as a parent. So I stashed the heirloom in the attic box. I'd decide later what to do with it. Looks like I'll be leaving the decision to my children. As Mother says, "Memories go with lots of things."

#### WHAT WOULD WE DO WITHOUT THIS HEIRLOOM?

On the first morning of my first visit with my future husband's family, I lifted the fork for my initial taste of breakfast cake.

"Wait." Johnny stopped me. "This is the way we eat it." He dunked his chunk of cake into a cup filled with milk. Then he raised it to his mouth and, with white drops rolling down his wrist, bit off a big soggy corner. He rolled his eyes to the ceiling and groaned, "Mmm, mmm! They don't serve us this in the college dining hall, Ma Mohn." His five-foot-tall grandmother, Erma Mohn, just smiled.

She smiled again when I asked her later for the recipe. "Recipe? You can watch and write down what I do." So I watched and wrote: "Four handfuls of flour, a walnut-sized lump of butter . . ." She told me that she learned breakfast cake from her mother, Geneva Stoner, and that she had learned it from her mother, Martha Loos—an heirloom recipe. Years later, when Ma Mohn died, I packed a frozen breakfast cake into my suitcase to take to the other grandchildren gathered for her funeral.

Our children have always expected breakfast cake on birthday and holiday mornings. As young adults, they ask for it when they're home for a visit. After Ma Mohn's death, I thought of myself as the chief guardian of this family keepsake,

## NOW WE'RE COOKIN',

### Ma Mohn's Breakfast Cake

Mix together until the texture of meal:

2 c. flour 1 tsp. salt

1 c. sugar 1 tsp. baking powder

1 stick margarine, cut into 5-6 pieces

Remove "handful" (1/3 to 1/2 cup) of this mix and save for topping.

Mix together in large measuring cup or a bowl:

1 c. milk

1 Tbs. vinegar

1 tsp. baking soda

Add liquid mixture to dry mixture, along with

2 eggs

Mix well and pour into greased 9 x 13 cake pan or 10 x 15 jelly roll pan. Sprinkle with topping.

#### Topping

Mix together:

Reserved dry ingredients

1-2 tsp. cinnamon (optional)

1/2 c. flour 1/2 c. brown sugar

Lump of margarine the size of a large walnut (2-3 Tbs.)

Bake for 25-30 minutes at 325 degrees.



until we visited Benjamin and Melissa, our son and his bride, and she served us breakfast cake. So now this heirloom belongs also to my children, who are at least the sixth generation enjoying it.

Traditions are a lot like heirlooms. Both probably have come to us through our families. Some you love; you can't imagine life without them. Some you're stuck with; you don't know what to do with them.

What are the traditions we're leaving our children, the next generation? Which traditions deserve to be stuck away in the attic? Into which traditions do we love to draw other people?

### GOD—OUR FATHER AND OUR INHERITANCE

Both heirlooms and good traditions strengthen our sense of history and belonging. As Christians, our history is God's story of drawing us into his family. "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me," says the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).

It is as God's children that we find our sense of belonging. "You have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:15-17).

We who are trusting Christ are the heirs of our Father, God. But what is the inheritance that we want from our Father? In this passage, Paul pictures us calling to him, "Abba! Father!" We are like children at the end of a long day. The only thing we want is our abba, our daddy. The yearning of our hearts is for him. And that is the great treasure we inherit from our heavenly Father—himself.

As David wrote in Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." The inheritance we will receive from God is what we delight in most gladly and desire most deeply, the Lord himself.

With any other father, we would not receive our inheritance until he died. But God is eternal; he never dies. He is the Father who never leaves us nor forsakes us (Hebrews 13:5). He gives us himself.

We might wonder what is left to inherit if we have already been adopted into his family and he's already our Father. What more is there to look forward to? The apostle John answers: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. . . . Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2).

He is our Father now, and we are his children now. Yet we are still waiting for something—to see him as he is, to be like him as we long to be, and to have the

passion of God himself to enjoy him. That is our complete inheritance—the full enjoyment of God himself.

Although this book offers ideas that I hope will be helpful as examples of God-centered traditions, this is not a how-to manual. I am praying that it will inspire us to look at God with fresh eyes, to see and love and desire the treasure that he is. And I'm praying that the traditions of our lives will be filled with the treasure that fills our heart on "everyday" days and on "especially" days.

#### WHY DO TRADITIONS MATTER?

My husband and I moved into marriage with traditions we inherited from our parents. Having come of age in the '60s though, breathing the air of anti-authority, no one was going to tell us we had to do everything just like Mom and Dad! But we did love our parents, and we loved God and wanted our family life to reflect that. So to this day, we've kept many "hand-me-downs" from our parents—daily family Bible reading and prayer, for example.

Our first conscious challenge to think seriously about what role traditions would play in our own family came—as it does for many people—with the birth of our first child. The moment we set foot into our apartment with our newborn, panic poured over me. We had walked out this door as two, I realized, and now we were walking in as three—forever there would be one more of us. We were responsible for this life, and I couldn't even keep a philodendron healthy!

By God's grace, our son lived and thrived. My first panic ebbed, replaced by tides of deeper responsibilities. The instant a raindrop falls into the sea, you can't make it separate again. When God entrusted a child to us, in an instant that baby became so intimately a part of us that we couldn't picture life without him—ever. I couldn't imagine what my chubby child would be when he grew up. But what I yearned for had little to do with his adult career. I longed that he be part of us forever—that he be God's forever.

That aspiration blew away any contentment we might have had in assumptions that we'd just keep on doing things the way we'd always done. Now we had to think, not just act out of habit.

#### "WHY?"—THE BIG QUESTION

In early December, for instance, when Karsten was just over a year old, I thought about our meager Christmas traditions. I tried to see them through the eyes of a curious toddler. I imagined the conversations he and I might have during the month:

"Huzz-at?"

"Candles."

Then I mentally supplied the question he wouldn't even know yet to ask: "Why candles?"

"Why?" I realized that was a question I was going to have to answer from now on, not just for Christmas traditions that particular year, but for all years and every day. At that moment I knew that "just because" was no answer. Nor was "because that's the way Grandmother and Granddaddy do it" or "because it's pretty" or "because it's convenient" or "because that's what everybody does."

In the book of Exodus, Moses displays his understanding of the nature of children and the responsibility of parents: "And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt'" (12:26-27).

Moses assumes children will ask why. And he instructs parents to give an answer that speaks of reality. This instruction is all in the context of laying out for children ceremonies that will portray the answer. He is giving them the answer, both spoken and displayed. And the answer is God—God saved us, and we honor him, worship him, thank him. We and our children need this kind of yearly repetition to impress us with the weight of what God has done.

Traditions are important for another reason. We've already seen one huge difference between the inheritance we receive from God and the one we receive from our physical families: God is both our Father and our present and future inheritance, our heirloom.

#### ONLY GOD CAN BEQUEATH GOD

There's another big difference between this inheritance and any other that we might receive: You can't bequeath God to your children. You can leave them the fur coat from your mother, the forested acres from your father, the carved cane from Uncle Claude, and the clock from your grandmother, but they can't inherit God from you. God can only be inherited from God.

#### BARNABAS'S BAPTISM

When Jesus calls a boy to live  
He bids him come and die,  
And promises that he will give  
The Spirit in reply.

He bids him turn from deadly sin  
And trust a dying Christ,  
And find that he will live again  
Beyond the sacrifice.

He bids him bury doubt and dread  
Beneath the water here  
And raises him then from the dead  
And leaves the drowning fear.

He robes the boy with righteousness  
And covers crimson wrong,  
And furnishes with royal dress  
And makes his spirit strong.

So I rejoice to stand with you,  
My son, within the grave  
That you and I are passing through;  
Where God alone can save.

Eleven years I've called you son,  
And that is dearly true,  
And now because of what God's done  
I call you brother too.

JOHN PIPER, JUNE 5, 1994

That's what my mother was saying one night when I was six. As she kissed me good night and tucked me in, she said, "Now that you're trusting Jesus as your Savior, I'm your mother and your sister." She was acknowledging the words of Galatians 3:26: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." We only become God's children through our faith, not through our parents' faith. I had gained a relationship with God in the same way she had. We both had become his daughters by adoption, through faith. I was not God's granddaughter who inherited God through my mother's relationship with him. I was God's daughter who inherited God directly from God.

*To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (JOHN 1:12)*

Now although we cannot bequeath God to our children, we can help them know him and understand him in ways that prepare them to believe in his name. "Everyday" and "especially" traditions in a family are an important part of that teaching, of picturing who God is and what he's done in our home and in the world. Traditions are a vital way of displaying our greatest treasure, of showing what—Who—is most important to us.

We need to remember, too, that when our traditions are displaying the Treasure of our lives, he is there to be seen by everyone who comes within our circle. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). God wants our family and others to give glory to him because they've seen his light through us. Paul says we should be "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life" (Philippians 2:15-16).



#### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ALL OUR TRADITIONS ALL YEAR

- What is my greatest treasure? What is most precious to me?
- How do I reflect and express that treasure in my life?
- How can I pass that treasure on to my children and others within my circle?

## TWO WHAT IS TRADITION?



## HABITS, CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS— WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

If we brush our teeth three times a day, we don't call that a tradition. We call it a habit. But when we pray before each meal every day—giving thanks to God who feeds us—we might call it a habit, and we might also call it a tradition.

Every time I drive home with a trunk full of groceries, I honk “Shave and a haircut, two bits!” to signal my husband or one of my sons to come out and haul the bags into the kitchen. (The dog goes bananas even if the boys don't.) That's one of our family's customs, but we don't call it a tradition.

On Thanksgiving and other special holidays, the rule at our house is: If the women fix it, the men clean it up. (Guess who created that rule! Well, I had good reason. For twenty-two years I was the only woman in our kitchen!) After the males have done their mealtime share of licking the platter clean, they form a relay team clearing the table, scraping dishes, washing, drying, and putting away. Never mind that it takes me a week to find everything again—it's worth it. That's their gift to me so that I can emerge from the kitchen and enjoy the special day with them. It's a tradition I'm passing on to my daughters-in-law and daughter.

People have many habits or customs, such as taking off shoes when entering a house, that we wouldn't call traditions. On the other hand, good traditions become so woven into our lives that they are also habits or customs.

## WHAT MAKES SOMETHING A TRADITION?

Every good gift, including traditions, comes to us “from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). God is the inventor of tradition, just as he is the inventor and giver of every other good gift. We could wish for no better authority to answer our question: What makes something a tradition? So let's think about some of the times when God was creating traditions for his people.

The word *tradition* isn't in the Old Testament, but the reality is there. In the passages where God gives instructions for the ceremonies he designed, he repeatedly makes clear his purposes for these occasions. When we recognize his purposes, we'll have a better idea as to what makes a godly tradition in our own homes. About the Passover celebration, for example, we read:

*It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.* (Exodus 12:42)

Some of the phrases in the verse help us see at least some of what God had intended for his people through their traditions.

- “*A night of watching by the LORD*”—God wants his people to remember what he himself did for them.
- “*A night . . . to the LORD*”—God wants them to honor him for what he's done.
- “*Throughout their generations*”—God wants their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren to hear the story of his salvation so they too will remember and honor him.

If we look at God's instructions for the Festival of Booths commemorating the Jews' forty years of desert wanderings, we see another important piece of his purpose.

- *You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* (Leviticus 23:42-43, emphasis added)

As with the Passover, God wants his people to celebrate in a way that re-enacts the story of his mighty deeds. And again he wants the coming generations to hear the story and celebrate him and what he's done. Then there is an additional piece:

- “*I am the LORD your God*”—God was not just part of their history. Their traditions are to proclaim that he is their God now. He is I AM.

## TRADITIONS—FOR WHOM?

Recently I waited in line at the information desk of a book supermarket. But when my turn came and I asked what they had on traditions, the answer man had no answers, just questions: “You mean like for African-Americans or Native Americans?” Apparently, to him tradition implied ethnic. Then I drove to a nearby Christian bookstore and asked the same question. “You mean like for kids?” But there was nothing in stock anyway.

So who are our traditions for? Let's go back to the Creator of tradition. Yes, God gave the adults instructions for the Passover and other rituals. But was it all just for the sake of the children? Was it mainly to give the adults ways to make sure the kids knew their history? In Deuteronomy 11 Moses had some other words for those same adults.

## TRADITIONS—NOT JUST FOR THE CHILDREN'S SAKE

Yes, this passage does end with children. But first come some strong words to the adults. Moses points directly to them: “You shall therefore love the LORD your God” (v. 1). And in case they didn't get the point, he spells it out in verse 2: “I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it.”

DEUTERONOMY 11:1-3, 7, 18-19

<sup>1</sup>You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. <sup>2</sup>And consider today (since I am not speaking to your children who have not known or seen it), consider the discipline of the LORD your God, his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm, <sup>3</sup>his signs and his deeds that he did. . . . <sup>7</sup>For your eyes have seen all the great work of the LORD that he did. . . . <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (See also Deuteronomy 6.)

Grownups are the ones who have a history with God. We have leaned on his strength, learned his love, and depended on his faithfulness. We have suffered the pain of his discipline and felt the relief of his forgiveness. Our youngest children don't understand much yet about these things. They will learn from their experiences as they grow older and from the Christian adults in their lives.

PEOPLE WITH NO CHILDREN

Which adults are responsible to display the Lord to the children? Moses doesn't separate young parents from the rest. He's speaking to *all* the adults. This means that tradition is important for all of us, even if there are no children in our lives. But most of us do have some children in our circles, even if they're not in our immediate household. We have grandchildren,

nieces, nephews, or Sunday school kids. Once

more, before he talks about the children, Moses stresses the responsibility of all the adults: "Lay up these words of mine in *your* heart and in *your* soul" (verse 18, emphasis mine).

If you are single, traditions may be even more important for you. Your traditions may involve peers who are friends, other adults you want to minister to, and the children in your life—neighbors, students, friends' children. The traditions you develop and practice will draw others into being your family circle. They can play an important role in keeping you from being isolated.

The apostle Paul is a good illustration of a single man who took seriously his responsibility to a younger person in his life. As far as we can tell, Timothy's father was not a spiritual influence in his life. But when Timothy was a young man, Paul became a fatherly friend. He wrote Timothy about the importance of following a godly example, spelling out the very qualities we want to see developed in children through our teaching and tradition.

*You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings. . . . Indeed, all*

*who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. . . . But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.* (2 TIMOTHY 3:10-14)

*"Knowing from whom you learned it."*

If we are loving the Lord and storing his Word in our hearts and souls and keeping our souls diligently, we will be people who, with God helping us, can say, "Continue in what you have learned . . . knowing from whom you learned it." In his relationship with young Timothy, Paul was following the example of Moses—laying up in his own heart and soul the Lord's words and then teaching them.

We can only give what we already have. If God's words are not in our own hearts and souls, we can't teach them to anyone else. If we don't love God ourselves, we can't live out his love for others to see and experience.

*"BUT I'M SO IMPERFECT!"*

Of course, our love for God is never perfect, and we won't know him and his Word completely until we see him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). But isn't Deuteronomy 11:18 encouraging? It doesn't say we need to have all of God's Word down pat before we're ready to teach. It says, "Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul." For the rest of our lives, with God's help, we will keep on making God's Word our own, making it more and more the beat of our heart and the breath of our soul.

LETTER FROM A SINGLE FRIEND

Dear Noël:

Even though they were not Christian traditions (because none of us were Christians when I was growing up), traditions were an important part of my heritage. Grandpa always came for Christmas dinner. Christmas was a time when my father agreed not to drink, although he sometimes failed to live up to his promise. We always had turkey and dressing and both pumpkin and mincemeat pie, as only my mom could make. We never got many gifts, but early on we learned to give as well as to receive. I can remember going to the Ben Franklin store and poring over all the merchandise, trying to come up with a gift for my mom. I finally decided on a package of Wrigley's gum, her favorite.

It was difficult for many years to make myself fit into the traditions of other families, thinking that they were just that—family traditions. But now I love being invited to people's homes on special occasions and being a part of their special traditions.

The only thing I might add to your thoughts regarding singles is the command from Psalm 78 to "tell the next generation the praises of the Lord." I've always taken that as my mandate. Perhaps just as married people need to make their own traditions as well as incorporate those they've learned as children, singles need to make their own traditions after they leave the nest, traditions that will carry on in someone's life after they're gone.

The rest of verse 18 is God's method for laying up his words: "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes." Moses may have had something literal in mind here for the Jews. But even so, there was a practical godly purpose behind these instructions—to help his people live and breathe and move in the air of God's Word. That practical godly goal is ours, too. We should keep God's Word as available and as visible as if it were hanging between our eyes—as if everything we see and do comes through his filter. His Word should be as if it were tied on our hands so that all our acts are directed and shaped by his Word.

And with that as our quest, we move into the next part of God's pattern for teaching and tradition.

#### TRADITIONS ARE ALSO FOR THE CHILDREN

*You shall teach [God's words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (DEUTERONOMY 11:19)*

When I get caught up in the biography of a person I admire, my family hears all about this person for days. Whatever someone says seems to remind me of some event in her life. So mealtime conversations are filled with stories that flow from my own fascination. As we are filling our hearts and souls with God's Word, what will be more natural than the same sort of spillover onto our family?

But are we really talking about tradition here? Isn't this passage about teaching and about God's Word? Yes, and one of the main features of traditions is repetition. Of course, we wouldn't say that sitting or walking or lying down or rising up, no matter how frequently they're repeated, are traditions. But those activities represent the things that we do most often, and they are named as reminders to do the most crucial thing we can do for our children—teach them the words of God. God wants us to remember to see him in the most mundane parts of our lives. And what we see, he wants us to talk about with our children. When that level of significance is added to the ordinary repetitions of life, a tradition is created.

Sitting, walking, lying down, and rising up are so insignificant that we don't even give them a thought. But I pray that my children will look back at "insignificant" times and ask each other, "Remember trying to catch Mom and Dad before they got up in the morning so we could snuggle with them, and how lots of times Daddy prayed out loud before we all got out of bed?" or

"Remember when we asked questions, and somehow the answers always came back to God?"

Things like that don't just happen. They come first from our own hearts that are tuned in to God. Then they happen because we *plan* to include our children in the God-air we breathe. Without planning, we'll practice our Bible memory just once or twice and then no more. We'll do lots of good things, but only a couple of times. One of the great strengths of good traditions in our lives is the *repetition*—not something done once, then something else, then another thing altogether, but good things done regularly, dependably, until they become habits.

There are two kinds of traditions—"everyday" and "especially." Deuteronomy 11:18 is speaking of the everyday kind. A little later we'll think some more about this sort and also about the "especially" traditions, the kind that come only every year, such as holidays or birthdays, or even less frequently.

#### THE ESSENCE OF TRADITION

We've seen in Deuteronomy 11 the essence, the core, of tradition for God's people: "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul" (v. 18). The things we do regularly that help us in our deepest being to know and love and want God, the things that help our lives to be infiltrated with God—those things are tradition. And then if there are children in our lives, to pass these God-focused activities to the next generation—that's what tradition is for a Christian.

Deuteronomy 4:9-10 is a good summary of what we've seen so far—our responsibility as adults to stay close to God, to remember his work in our lives, and to tell the children about it so that we and they will fear and honor the Lord. Moses said to the people:

*Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God . . . the LORD said to me, "Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so."*

From these Deuteronomy passages, we can cull at least three ways of defining tradition:

- Definition 1: A tradition is a planned habit with significance.
- Definition 2: Tradition is the handing down of  
information,  
beliefs,  
worldview  
from one generation to another  
by word of mouth  
and by regular repetition  
of example  
of ceremony  
of celebration.
- Definition 3: For a Christian,  
tradition is laying up God's words  
in our own hearts  
and passing his words  
to the next generation.



Definitions are important as skeletons,  
but we can't live with just bones. In the remaining chapters,  
we'll cover these bones with some flesh:

- What information?
- Which beliefs?
- What sort of worldview?

# THREE WHAT MAKES TRADITION IMPORTANT?



## TRADITIONS LOOK BACKWARD

Through a Milky Way of lightning bugs, my cousins and I darted from pine trunk to persimmon tree, hiding from each other. By now we'd forgotten who was It. Our silent thrills came from bumping into *anyone* in the true dark of a Georgia country summer night. *Silent* thrills because if we didn't remind our parents of our presence, they'd talk till midnight over there on Uncle Buddy and Aunt Lou Ellen's familiar unpainted farmhouse front porch—the house where Granddaddy and Grandmother Henry had raised Daddy and Uncle Buddy and all the rest. The house where Grandmother had taught her children her favorite Scripture passage:

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.*

(JOHN 10:27-30 KJV)

It was a tradition that we children could take turns spending the night with Grandmother. As with all good traditions, we knew what to expect. She would make sure that each of us learned those words of John proclaiming the deity of Jesus and the sweetness and the power of his voice.

By the time I grew up and the farmhouse had long since been crushed into the red dust by a kudzu jungle, my sixteen aunts and uncles and gazillion cousins (I guess Grandmother knew the exact number) were such a fixture in my life that I could almost forget they were there. I took them for granted, like the roots of a tree. If asked, you'd know a tree depends on a wide, deep network of roots, but do you think of that support when you're enjoying the shade of a giant oak?

That oblivion toward the roots of my family tree changed for me in March a few years ago. As azaleas and dogwoods painted Georgia's springtime pine woods, I arrived with my children to watch as Daddy faded and died. Less than an hour after he was gone, Aunt Lou Ellen arrived from her home half an hour away and was washing dishes at Mother's sink. Uncle Buddy wasn't with her now because he had been the first of the brothers and sisters to die. By the next day the uncles and aunts had arrived from Louisiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee, and cousins were pouring in from even farther away.

I stood in the midst of the hubbub with Aunt Lou Ellen, the first widow of that generation in our family. When I talked, she listened, grasping both my hands. When I cried, her eyes flooded over, too. When she hugged me, it seemed as if her feelings flashed through my nerves.

That night at the funeral home, after the town had visited and gone home, my brothers and sisters and I sat in a circle across the room from the casket where our father lay. We had things to talk about—some simply practical and others more difficult. When I heard hymns from another room, I assumed at first it was a custodian's boom box. But soon I realized that we weren't the only late-night group still there. Our uncles and aunts had made their own circle to pray for us and to worship our Lord, the one who gives and who takes away (Job 1:21).

The days surrounding Daddy's funeral reawakened me to my extended family. I still live far away from them. I still don't think of them every day. But when I do, it's with a firm sense of their place in my life and of mine in theirs. They showed me that they're there when I need them. Their example has encouraged me to be like them—many parts, yet one body caring for one another, suffering or rejoicing together as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:20-25).

"My sheep hear my voice. . . ." Those words are a symbol of the traditions that send my mind back to grandparents, parents, uncles, and aunts who are like roots through which God has given me life and strength.

## TRADITIONS LOOK FORWARD

God used my family to lead me to love and trust him. When I moved away from my parents' home, though, I soon realized that not everyone can look back to a family that supported them and pointed them toward God. But the Good Shepherd does not limit his sheep to only those from good families.

IN MEMORY OF  
DR. GEORGE HENRY  
*Reflections on Psalm 1  
and Joshua 24:15*

No tree however deep the roots,  
However high and green the shoots,  
However strong the trunk has stood,  
Or firm the fibers of the wood,  
No tree was ever meant to be  
A never-ending shade for me  
Or you. Save one: where Jesus died  
With bleeding branches spread as wide  
And far as faith for sinful men.

But there was shade, especially when  
The tree was old: the leaves were thick  
With life, and though the root was sick,  
The bark deep-creased with age, the limbs  
Were laden down with love, and hymns  
Were heard beneath when wind bestirred  
The bowing branches with the Word  
Of heav'n. O there were years of shade!

And more: there was the fruit he made,  
Or better, bore, when all the ground  
Seemed dry, we turned again and found  
The branches heavy with some rare  
Well-watered food and sweet called Care.  
There must have been a river there  
Beneath the arid earth somewhere  
Deep-flowing up around the tips  
Of dying roots, and giving sips  
Of everlasting life for him  
To share with us while every limb  
Gave up its own. O, there was fruit!  
Life-giving from the dying root.

And more. Much more. There was  
the wood,  
And it was strong. It had withstood  
A thousand storms, and every one  
More firm. And now for every son,  
Grandchild and every daughter here  
He lies a fallen tree and dear,  
And leaves in you the solid wood  
And bids you stand where he has stood  
Beside the river of the Word,  
And that you keep what you have heard,  
And sing with him in one accord:  
"My fruitful house will serve the Lord."

JOHN PIPER (MARCH 1992)

In 2 Chronicles, for example, Josiah became king of Judah when he was eight, following Manasseh, his grandfather, who “led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray,” (33:9) and Amon, his father, who “did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (33:22). In spite of this wicked heritage and his youthfulness, Josiah “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. . . . For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David” (34:2-3).

Before there ever was a family, there was God. He is not weakened or changed by the failure of a family. When we are God’s, we look back and realize that we were dependent on him for everything even before we knew him. As grateful as I am for my family, they were not the ones who saved me. I am dependent wholly on God. In that most ultimate regard, we believers are all the same, no matter what our background.

In Psalm 71 the psalmist reminds us that our reliance upon God began even before birth, even before our family began to have any influence on us for either good or evil. A public health nurse whose job is to assist people in crisis told me, “I deal with so many people whose lives have been terrible. You wonder what hope there is. This is so helpful, realizing that God knew us and was working for us even before we were born and affected by our family.”

And our relationship with him lasts beyond death. If Psalm 71:9 were a question, we’d call it rhetorical—a question whose answer is so obvious that it becomes a statement. So when the psalmist prays that God not forsake him when he is old, we hear him thinking of the future when God will be as dependable as ever, as worthy as ever of praise, as glorious as ever. He will be the same God at the end of life as he was at the beginning. And no one can pluck his own from his hand, ever.

Even if our background is not good, it is *background*, behind us. What is ahead? How can we make family and life different for the household that God has given us now? The psalmist’s description of his interaction with God is what we want for ourselves and our children: “My mouth is filled with your praise, and with

PSALM 71:6-9

<sup>6</sup>Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;  
you are he who took me from my mother’s womb.  
My praise is continually of you.  
<sup>7</sup>I have been as a portent to many,  
but you are my strong refuge.  
<sup>8</sup>My mouth is filled with your praise,  
and with your glory all the day.  
<sup>9</sup>Do not cast me off in the time of old age;  
forsake me not when my strength is spent.

your glory all the day” (v. 8). That’s what we want to embody in our traditions so that we see and praise God.

When I look toward my children and their children, I am strongly aware of my responsibility to the family that comes after me. From their births, I have always wanted my children to know as much about God as they were

able to grasp at whatever age they were. And I have wanted my life and our family to be a picture of God to others—that we be the body of Christ who presents an image of Christ to the people around us.

WE STAND IN THE MIDDLE

While I am still daughter, niece, cousin, and sister, now I am also aunt, mother, grandmother, and friend. I am a basketball player at the center circle, catching the ball passed from the backcourt and pivoting to advance it down court.

In Psalm 78 the psalmist was also looking both backward and forward. Try to count the generations he names.

1. *Our parents* (“our fathers”—verse 3)

2. *Our own generation* (“their children”—verse 4)

3. *Our children* (“the next generation”—verse 4)

4. *A generation who lived many years before our parents* (“Our fathers,” verse 5, seems to imply the ancestors who received the law during Moses’ time, which was centuries before this psalm was written.)

5. *All the generations between those ancient ancestors and our own parents* (“their children”—verse 5)

6. *Our grandchildren* (“the children yet unborn”—verse 6)

7. *Our great-grandchildren* (“their children”—verse 6)

It’s easy to see, though, that the writer is not giving us a specific generation count. What he’s doing is looking so far backward and so far into the future that we know he means all generations of those who follow the God of Abraham. Of course, we don’t know exactly how many generations have come before us, and we don’t know how many generations will be born in the future. That’s not the point. Here’s the psalmist’s point: Beginning with God’s call of Abraham—the time when there began to be a particular people called “God’s people”—God commanded adults to teach the children. We are part of a millennia-long line, with the same command and responsibility to teach our children that the first generation had.

PSALM 78:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!  
<sup>2</sup>I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
<sup>3</sup>things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.  
<sup>4</sup>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.  
<sup>5</sup>He established a testimony in Jacob  
and appointed a law in Israel,  
which he commanded our fathers  
to teach to their children,  
<sup>6</sup>that the next generation might know them,  
the children yet unborn,  
and arise and tell them to their children,  
<sup>7</sup>so that they should set their hope in God  
and not forget the works of God,  
but keep his commandments.

What are we to teach them?

1. *The glorious deeds of the Lord* (verse 4)—what God has done in our lives.
2. *The might of God* (verse 4)—the nature of God.
3. *The wonders God has done* (verse 4)—what God has done in history.
4. *The testimony and law of God* (verse 5)—how God wants us to live.

These areas of instruction are a confirmation and repetition of the guidelines the people of God received in Deuteronomy 11 where Moses charged the Israelites

I have always wanted my children  
to know as much about God  
as they were able to grasp at whatever age  
they were.

And

I have wanted my life and our family  
to be a picture of God to others—  
that we be the body of Christ  
who presents an image of Christ  
to the people around us.

to teach the children about God's greatness and might, his signs and deeds, and his words and commandments.

We might ask again what the relationship is between tradition and what we teach. It is this: The heart is the same. For a Christian, the heart of our traditions, and the heart of our teaching is God, whom we know through his acts and his words.

Now look at the reasons the psalmist gives us for our traditions (verse 7):

1. *That they* [our children and grandchildren and great- . . . ] *should set their hope in God*—our deepest desire for our children and their children,
2. *and not forget the works of God*—the basis of their trust,
3. *but keep his commandments*—the life they will live because of their trust in God.

Traditions are memories, and they are for memory. Our children and grandchildren don't have to be locked into the small world of their own experience with God. Traditions give them a whole world's worth and a whole history's worth of God.

"That they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. . ."



We will not be here forever for our children, but God will.

# FOUR

## HOW DO TRADITIONS TEACH?



## REPETITION AND REGULARITY

Karsten and Benjamin snuggled under their quilts, turning up their cheeks for good night kisses from their daddy. When he started singing, “*Wer nur den lieben Gott laesst walten*,” a favorite hymn he’d memorized when we lived in Germany, ten-year-old Karsten sat up suddenly. “What was that red light that used to shine when you sang that song?”

Red light? At first we had no idea what he meant. But there was only one possibility, as unlikely as it seemed. Nine years earlier we had worn a path along the long, dark hallway in our German apartment, trying to help baby Karsten sleep. During miles of pacing, Karsten’s daddy had soothed him with, “*Wer nur den lieben Gott laesst walten*.” At one end of the hall was the kitchen door. At the other was the bathroom door with a marble-sized *red light* over it that glowed when the bathroom heater was on. When we left that apartment and Germany, Karsten was still too young to talk.

Do you think we’d been training him all the years since to remember that red light? No. Once we walked out the door the final time, we’d never given it another thought. But Karsten had stared over his daddy’s shoulder at that red glow each lap of the route they’d plodded together—who knows how many hundreds of repetitions? And each time, he’d heard, “*Wer nur den lieben Gott laesst walten*.” Repetition had installed the red light securely in his mind. The sound of the hymn switched on the light in his memory.

We are always teaching our children, whether we mean to or not. Our children come to believe, probably unconsciously, that whatever is repeated regularly has significance.

It was God’s design that learning happen by frequent and regular repetition. That kind of learning was part of what he had in mind when he told his people to teach the children his words, “talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 11:19)—note how frequently and regularly.

One indication of God’s wisdom in this command is that when our activities are filled with God, we have to be thinking about God; so our normal activities are helping us fulfill

God’s command to “lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul” (Deuteronomy 11:18). Another sign of God’s wisdom is that, with enough repetition, the very activities, no matter how mundane they are, will trigger thoughts of God in our minds, just as the hymn triggered the memory of a red light in Karsten’s mind.

## PLANNING

In order to “teach [God’s words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deuteronomy 11:19), you have to be *planning*—planning what to say and where, how, and when to say it. For me, not planning means my children receive a burst of God-talk for a day or two. Then when that particular gush of affection dies down, we’re back to just taking God for granted, rather than talking about him and recognizing him in all the parts of our day. That’s not what I want to teach my children—that God is experienced in a random pattern of a few days of enthusiasm followed by days of silence. One of the things Deuteronomy 11:19 makes clear is that God doesn’t like being taken for granted. Rather, he wants to be talked about a lot.

All of us are training our children both intentionally and unintentionally. We need to make sure we aren’t leaving the important things to happenstance. We know it’s crucial that they become familiar with God, our Heirloom and our only hope for real life. We yearn for them to love and trust and follow Christ. It would be foolish just to wait for them to learn that by chance. We must *plan* to reflect God and teach about Christ in the repeated events of our lives.

## GOD’S GLUE

The repeated God-oriented events in our lives are like God’s glue. I saw that in my own family as I was growing up. It’s amazing my parents stayed together. I know that now. About twenty years into their marriage, their rampaging differences seemed about to rip them apart.

God does not like to be taken for granted. It flies in the face of his eternal purposes—that he be known and loved and praised and enjoyed.

And it makes us superficial people. . . . When the main thing is missing, what’s left is distorted and superficial, whatever it is.

If someone says, “Oh, that’s just religion. You can’t expect everything to be religion,” I answer, “It’s *not* religion. It’s reality. God made the world and everything in it. He owns the earth and everyone on it. He is the main actor in the world. He is guiding the history of every people and nation to their appointed goals. Everything, without exception, has to do with God and gets its main meaning from God. And not to show this, but to take this for granted, is to be superficial. . . .”

It is simply impossible to overstate the importance of God.

And he does not like being taken for granted. The psalm does not say, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be taken for granted.” It says, “Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised” (Psalm 96:4).

JOHN PIPER

“GOD IS A VERY IMPORTANT PERSON”<sup>1</sup>

*Wer nur den lieben Gott laesst walten  
Und hoffet auf ihn allezeit,  
Den wird er wunderbar erhalten  
In aller Not und Traurigkeit.  
Wer Gott, dem Allerhoechsten, traut,  
Der hat auf keinen Sand gebaut.*

GEORG NEUMARK, 1657

If thou but suffer God to guide thee  
And hope in Him through all thy ways,  
He’ll give thee strength, what’e’ betide thee,  
And bear thee through the evil days.  
Who trusts in God’s unchanging love  
Builds on the rock that naught can move.

TRANSLATED BY CATHERINE WINKWORTH, 1863

God used his divine double-ingredient epoxy to hold them together. From one tube came their determination to make it. I never heard the word *divorce* from them, and it never occurred to me as a possibility. Then to create an even stronger bond, God stirred in the contents of the second tube—faithful family devotional habits.

Through even the most difficult months—years really—Daddy and Mother took us all to church every Sunday. There was never any question; it was simply a regular part of each week. And every evening of the week, one of us kids was sent to the front porch to holler down toward the pasture and out toward the woods, “sto-o-ory and pra-a-yers ti-i-imel!” After all nine of us (later we were ten) had tumbled into the living room from the barn and creek and kitchen, Daddy read the next passage in our years-long path through the whole Bible. Then we knelt at our chairs and took turns praying. Or if it was a late night, we said the Lord’s Prayer together.

I realize now how difficult that must have been for my parents. Often they must have felt like hypocrites, going through the motions when they didn’t feel like worshiping or praying together. Of course, it would have been ideal if they had come before God with whole and happy hearts. But it was better to come somehow than not at all. And God held them together until he brought their marriage through the tempest into peace, using his glue of faithfulness—his faithfulness to them and their faithfulness to each other and to those family devotional traditions.

During that time we children were learning on two levels. One was unspoken but obvious: It is good and right for the family to worship together at church and at home. The other level was much deeper and became mortar in the foundation of our lives. We saw in the faithfulness of our parents a reflection, an image, of the faithfulness of God.

Perhaps that is the greatest value of good traditions. Through them we learn about and recognize and experience the faithfulness of our God, who promises, “I will not leave you or forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).

#### CONSISTENCY

“If a bullfrog had wings, he wouldn’t bump his backside so much.” That was always Daddy’s response to my “what if” fantasies. I knew that what he meant was: “God made a bullfrog without wings, so he intended the old leaper to live with the bumps that jar his life. Same with you.” Whenever I went to Mother with my worried imaginations, she said, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34 KJV). Her sources might have been more refined, but her message was the same as Daddy’s: “God is in control. Everything that comes to you is from him. And every

thing that comes from him is good, even if it doesn’t seem like it at the time.”

Why do I remember these answers? Because I heard them consistently for a long time. What are some of the things you remember most clearly from your childhood? I’m guessing that many of them are events or words repeated frequently and regularly through many years.

We don’t know exactly what our children’s strongest, lasting memories will be. But we do want to make sure that our daily, weekly, “regularly random” activities occur in a God-filled context—that we recognize him in all of our life and show him everywhere to our children.

We can see from Psalm 71 that the psalmist thought this recognition of God was an everyday affair. Look at the plans he has in Psalm 71 to hope *continually*, to praise God *more and more* (v. 14), to tell of his righteousness and salvation *all the day* (v. 15), and to *still* proclaim his deeds (v. 17). We can see that his regular and consistent repetition of the praises of God are more than a possible plan; they are what he *intends* to do, what he is, in fact, already doing in the very act of proclaiming his intentions! His purpose is to broadcast the glories and wonders of God, to teach the next generation to know God.

Alongside that intentionality, there is also the unintentional aspect of teaching. When God is part of our everyday conversation and habits and life, we realize that while we are teaching particular things with our words, we are also teaching by our lives things that can’t easily be put into words. The specific “truth jewels” we lay in our children’s hands will, we pray, be stored in their heart’s treasure chests; and the gems will be protectively surrounded by packing material, the wad of impressions, feelings, and assumptions they’ve picked up, both consciously and

#### PSALM 71:6-9, 14-19

<sup>6</sup>Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;  
you are he who took me from my mother’s womb.  
My praise is continually of you.  
<sup>7</sup>I have been as a portent to many,  
but you are my strong refuge.  
<sup>8</sup>My mouth is filled with your praise,  
and with your glory all the day.  
<sup>9</sup>Do not cast me off in the time of old age;  
forsake me not when my strength is spent. ...  
<sup>14</sup>I will hope continually  
and will praise you yet more and more.  
<sup>15</sup>My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,  
of your deeds of salvation all the day,  
for their number is past my knowledge.  
<sup>16</sup>With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will  
come;  
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.  
<sup>17</sup>O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.  
<sup>18</sup>So even to old age and gray hairs,  
O God, do not forsake me,  
until I proclaim your might to another generation,  
your power to all those to come.  
<sup>19</sup>Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens.  
You who have done great things,  
O God, who is like you?

unconsciously, of who God is and what it means to be a family.

The factory for that packing material is our everyday lives. Our “everyday” traditions are the purposeful, significant activities that we do most frequently and regularly, the things that give shape to a day and a week. What are we teaching our children, both intentionally and unintentionally, during our “everyday” times? When Daddy says, “Let’s pray,” at every mealtime and, “Time for devotions” before every bedtime, he’s not presenting a formal lesson. But he’s packing his children’s hearts with unspoken understandings about life—about how a husband leads, for example, and about the presence of God with us to hear our prayers and to speak to us through his Word.

That takes us back to the questions at the end of chapter 1, and we realize that it’s not sufficient just to ask them about our traditions. We must ask them about the way we are living our lives.

- What is my greatest treasure? What is most precious to me?
- How do I reflect and express that treasure in my life?
- How can I pass that treasure on to my children and others within my circle?

#### THE GREATEST TREASURE

What is my greatest treasure? What is most precious to me?

Remember, Deuteronomy 11:1 charges the adults: “You shall therefore love the LORD your God.” And verse 18 shows what that means and how it happens: “You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.” As this relationship with God is developing and this preparation has begun, then the adults are ready to teach the children about God. How do we work on this relationship and this preparation?

Once again Psalm 71 can give us some direction. How does the psalmist prepare himself to proclaim the glory of his great treasure, God?

- He leans on God, depends on him for everything, even his very life (v. 6).
- He turns to God and calls to him for help when he is in danger and needs protection (v. 7).
- He learns from God’s teaching (v. 17).
- His mouth is filled with praise at the glory he sees and experiences (vv. 8, 14, 15).
- His hope, his confidence in God, is a way of life (v. 14).

#### REFLECTING OUR TREASURE

How do I express the greatest treasure in my life?

When we look at Psalm 71 to see what the psalmist is praising, we note some words that express what a valuable treasure God is.

- God gives us our existence and life (v. 6).
- God is our protection (v. 7).
- God’s glory fills our mouths (v. 8).
- God’s righteous and saving actions are immeasurable (vv. 15, 19).
- God shows us his righteousness through his mighty deeds (v. 16).
- God teaches us, our whole life long, through his wondrous deeds (v. 17).
- God’s mighty power is worthy to be proclaimed to all generations (v. 18).
- God is utterly unique, unmatched—there is none like him (v. 19).

#### PASSING ON THE TREASURE

How can I pass that treasure on to my children and others within my circle?

Deuteronomy 11:19 tells us, “You shall teach [God’s words] to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” Here in Psalm 71 the psalmist is an example of a person who loves to display his treasure to anyone within range. Let’s see how he does it.

- He writes poems and psalms so others can read and be drawn into his praise and love and reverence for God.
- He praises God continually, all day long (vv. 6, 8).
- He acknowledges God’s protection (v. 7).
- He prays for God’s strength and care in the unknown future, basing his request on the kind of things God has done before (vv. 9-15).
- He hopes continually in God, which causes his praise to keep increasing (v. 14).
- He talks about what God has done and expresses his own awe (vv. 15, 19).
- He reminds others of God’s righteousness, helping them remember what God has done in their lives (vv. 16, 19).
- He trusts that God will be the same through his whole life (v. 17).
- He prays for God’s presence and power in his old age so that he can keep on showing God to the next generation (v. 18).



May God give us eyes to see him, hearts to love him,  
and a passion to show him to our children.