

They ask me how they should answer when their tests demand that they explain how evolution created the world. What should they put? They tell me how they have to deal with the pressure of sexuality already in middle school. They are being taught religion—the religion of life without God.

Here's what life looks like without God: *"As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more."* Imagine this: You weren't made by God. You are the product of random chance. God isn't in control of your life. In fact, God doesn't exist at all. You are at the center of your life. Can you picture this? Where do people end up? There's no value to human life. There's no purpose for your life. Life without God is empty! It's like putting your faith in grass. When we forget how we are formed, we lose the wonderful truth that we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God's own hands. When we forget that we are dust, we arrogantly think we control our own destinies. When we forget that we are like the flowers of the field, what a shock when death comes.

But God offers you and your family something better: *"From everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts."* Compare this: People who blossom and then dry up like a flower versus God and his everlasting love. Do you see the difference? What's the right kind of legacy? Do you see the importance of Christian education?

There are people who ask, "Why do you have a school?" We want to pass on to our children the most important thing. It's true that we can't protect kids from everything. We can't expect our world to teach our kids our beliefs. The greatest responsibility to teach children about Jesus will always rest on parents at home. Yet, you have chosen to have a Christian school and preschool to pass on God's Word as legacy to your children and grandchildren and other children. Here is what sets our school apart. Children at our school learn everyday about the love of God, which is greater than the heavens are above the earth. They hear every day how God has taken away their sins as far as the east is from the west. They appreciate every day the love of our heavenly Father which is from everlasting to everlasting. That's the best kind of legacy!

I just have to end by telling you about my wife's grandma, Helen. By the time I got to meet her, she was well into her 80s. She stood about this tall. She lived in a little house in Hokah, MN. Her husband had been in the army, and then they ran a little store in Hokah. She never drove a car, yet somehow her refrigerator was always packed with enough food to feed an army. She and her husband were simple people who believed in God. But what amazed me was when I went to her funeral. Just among her descendants were six pastors, nine teachers, and a whole bunch of grandchildren and great-grandchildren who believe in Jesus. Of course, I knew all the people, I had just never realized the impact that this little lady had on her family. What a legacy! You matter. Christian education matters. What are you passing on? Jesus is the right kind of legacy!

Psalm 103:8-18
Pastor Nathan Nass

Lent 4—Christian Education Sunday
March 6, 2016

⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴ for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. ¹⁵ As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. ¹⁷ But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—¹⁸ with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Best Kind of Legacy

Parents matter. In 1874, a man named Richard Dugdale visited some jails in upstate New York. Something caught his attention. In one jail, he noticed six inmates with the same last name. Don't worry, it's not the last name of anyone in our church! He investigated and discovered they were all relatives. In fact, he traced a huge number of inmates back to one man named Max Juke, who was born in the early 1700s. According to Dugdale, Max was an uneducated drunkard. A wild man. Of his 1,200 descendants, Dugdale found that 140 were convicted criminals, over half the women were prostitutes, and 7 were convicted murderers. Some legacy, huh?

After that study came out, some researchers wanted to see if the opposite was true. Could one person also have that much of a *positive* impact on his family? They decided to study the family of Jonathan Edwards—a famous preacher from the 1700s. By the year 1900, he had 729 descendants. When the researchers studied them, they found hardly any lawbreakers. Instead, there were 100 lawyers, 30 judges, over 100 college professors, over 100 pastors, 75 army officers, 3 U.S. congressmen, and 1 U.S. vice president. That's quite a legacy! Parents matter.

You can't deny the tremendous influence parents have on their children and future generations. Every person here spends time around children, whether kids or grandkids or nephews or nieces or neighbors. Whether we realize it or not, we all pass on values and habits to children—both good and bad. How you act around children today not only shapes who they are, it affects generations to come. Just think about your own life: What values did your parents pass on to you? What negative traits did you inherit? Now, what are my children learning from me? What do you want to leave behind for your kids? You are passing something on. What's your legacy?

So how are you feeling right now? Is the guilt starting to set in? We parents can carry around a lot of guilt. We hear the stats about our impact on our kids, and we think, “Man, I’ve messed up. I haven’t done that. I haven’t emphasized the right things. I haven’t set the right example.” Have I done everything for the kids in my life—my kids, my grandkids, my nieces or nephews, the neighbor kids....? What legacy have I left behind? As parents, nothing makes us feel guiltier than the thought of all the things we haven’t done for our kids. How much guilt do you carry?

Then listen to this: *“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”* That’s God’s legacy. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. Just let that soak in. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. Instead, when it comes to anger, God is “slow.” Not like you and me! When it comes to love, God abounds. Not like you and me! What a cool way to say it! This is how God wants to be known—God’s legacy—compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Our heavenly Father.

But what’s all that really like? How much love does God have? It’s a little like when your friend comes home from a fishing trip and tells you he caught a big fish. What is he dying for you to ask? “How big was it?” God wants you to ask. “How big, God? How big is your love?” God loves to tell you! *“As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him.”* There is nothing in the world bigger than the universe. That’s how big God’s love for us is. It reminds me of one of my favorite children’s books. A little bunny tells his dad that he loves him up to the moon. And do you know what the dad says? “I love you to the moon and back!” That’s a lot of love!

But what about when I mess up? What about all the things I haven’t done? What about this guilt I carry around? *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* So how far is the east from the west? To me, “out west” is California. So when you get to California, how far away is the west? It never ends, right? The distance from east to west is immeasurable. Could God say it any clearer? When Jesus died to remove our sin, he removes it completely. The Lord is not like people who forgive but don’t forget. When God forgives sin, he does not bring it up again. When God forgives you, your sins are gone. Gone for good!

Because here’s how God feels about you: *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.”* Remember how the Lord’s Prayer begins? “Our Father in heaven...” God wants us to look at him as dear children look at their dear father. He wants us to trust him like a little boy trusts his dad. He wants to let us know that he loves us more than we love our kids. God never gets tired of forgiving your sins. God never gets tired of loving you. Isn’t that great? We have an awesome God!

Now I don’t know about you, but that’s what I want to pass on to my kids! We pass on all sorts of things to the next generation—our favorite sports team. Our love of hunting

or fishing. Our favorite recipes. But here’s the thing I want to pass on most of all: I want my kids to know this wonderful God we have. I want them to know his love, to know his forgiveness, to know his compassion, to realize they have the best Father possible. Your relationship with your kids begins with your relationship with God. Isn’t this the kind of legacy we want to leave behind?

So the question is, “How can I transfer this great God to my family?” It would be nice if you could put God in a box and hand him on to the next generation like a cedar chest or old dresser. “He’s yours now, take it!” It doesn’t work that way, does it? How can I get my family to grasp the love of God, which is greater than the heavens are above the earth? How can I help them appreciate the forgiveness of God, which takes our sins away farther than the east is from the west? Well, that’s what we’re talking about today. Christian education starts in your home, with your family’s daily time in God’s Word. Christian education continues here at church, as you come to worship God. But there’s something else that you as a congregation do to pass on God’s Word to children—our Lutheran school.

It’s good to have a week like Christian Education Week, because it’s easy for us to overlook the blessing of our school and preschool. On the one hand, we’re blessed in Saint Peter to have excellent public schools and public school teachers. Sometimes we hesitate to talk about our school, because we have so much respect for the other educators in our town. But there is a reason we have a Lutheran school. We don’t just want to pass on math and reading to our kids. We want to pass on Jesus. There’s one thing a public school teacher can’t do—tell your child the truth about God.

I think we underestimate the daily challenges to children’s faith. For example, our psalm reminded us, God *“knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”* What’s that talking about? God is the one who created us. That’s why he has compassion on us like a Father has compassion on his children! But is that what a child hears in a public school—that their loving heavenly Father created them? No! Every public school will teach your child that God had no part to play in their creation. In fact, every public school has to explain the world to your child without God at all. How do you feel about that?

I saw a cartoon recently that has had me thinking. It shows a boy sitting in his desk at school and says: “Monday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong! Tuesday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong! Wednesday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong! Thursday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong! Friday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong! Saturday—Evolution is true! The Bible is wrong!” Then it shows the boy yawning in church on Sunday and says: “Sunday—Not another Bible story! This is so boring! Church is so irrelevant!” I see that happening.

But it’s all harmless, right? There’s no religion in public schools, right? There is no place in the world where there is no religion. Every time someone attempts to explain our lives, there is religion involved. It’s just that our society is teaching kids to live and understand life without God. Is that harmless? I see our confirmation kids struggling with this.