

Passing the Baton

"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed"
(Acts 13:36, *NIV*).

A relay race is run by a team of four runners. The first runner carries a baton. After running a specified distance, called a "leg" the runner hands the baton to the next team member. The exchange must occur within a zone a few meters long. Timing is crucial. If the runners do not exchange the baton within this zone, the team is disqualified. The length of the race varies from four hundred to six thousand meters. In some relays each team member runs an equal distance, but in others run different distances.

The relay race is not necessarily won by the team that runs the fastest, but by successfully passing the baton in the exchange zone. That's right; races are won or lost in the passing of the baton. Teams can be disqualified by a bad pass. Passing the baton is essential to win the race.

Tony Wang in an article entitled "Passing the Baton" states the following is needed to qualify for a good pass:

1. Both runners must be running so that they do not lose time.
2. There must be trust and confidence that the team member will hand it over properly.
3. A runner receiving the baton cannot look back or swerve out of his lane.
4. It requires knowledge of each other's ability.
5. The runner passing the baton has to tell the other runner when to go. If he says, "Go!" too early, he won't have time to catch him and give him the baton.
6. It also requires strict obedience to the rules.

A lesson to be learned throughout the Bible is the importance of passing the baton from one generation to another. This is clearly seen (to give a few examples) in Moses passing the baton to Joshua, David to Solomon, Elijah to Elisha, Jesus to His disciples, and Paul to Timothy.

It is not enough to run the race. We also pass our mission to the next generation. We must hand off the baton, at the right time, and must do it well.

Jesus handed the baton to His disciples. They ran a good race and passed the baton to the next generation. Timothy received the baton from Paul, and was instructed to pass it on to others (2 Timothy 2:2).

George Bernard Shaw said, "Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I've got ahold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

Dale Burke in *Less is More Leadership* said, “Nothing feels better than seeing a vision that you helped birth be passed on into the capable hands of others.” As a leader you must be willing to let go.

As leaders we should always be on the lookout for the next prospective relay runner. We need three men in our lives:

1. Paul—someone to whom we can be accountable. Every one needs a pastor.
2. Barnabas—someone to encourage us.
3. Timothy—someone that we can mentor; to whom we can pass the baton.

The challenge for every Christian father is to successfully pass on His faith to their children.

Rowland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller in the *Leadership Baton* wrote, “Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction...Jesus’ mission has always depended on one generation of leaders handing the mission to the next. Where they have done so effectively, their churches and ministries have continued to thrive. Now the mission is in your grasp.”

Let us look closely at a man that successfully passed a baton to the next generation. This is the Old Testament story of King David and Solomon.

Dream:

David had a dream to build a house for the Lord. Despite his good intentions, ample preparations, it remained an unfulfilled dream.

“King David rose to his feet and said: “Listen to me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it” (1 Chronicles 28:2, *NIV*).

Destiny:

David passed the baton to Solomon. David’s dream became Solomon’s destiny.

“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work” (1 Chronicles 28:9-10, *NIV*).

All that David had without Solomon was a dream.

Design:

God provides the design for our vision. David without Solomon was a dream. Solomon without David was a destiny unfulfilled.

“Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things. "All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan" (1 Chronicles 28:11-12, *NIV*).

David had the dream. Solomon had the destiny. Both were committed to God's design.

Daniel Deck provided the seed thoughts for this lesson. In his sermon “Generation to Generation” he said, “When the younger full of strength and energy joins forces with the elder full of experience and wisdom the results can be powerful and long-term.”

No generation stands independent of its predecessors or those that follow. Generations overlap. Each generation is equipped with men and women created for that generation.

Every generation stands on the shoulders of those that went on before. We build, not destroy, the foundation that is laid for us. The church's success is determined by its ability to survive and excel from generation to generation.

This takes us away from our relay race comparison but have you ever noticed farmers in the field? Daniel Deck explains that the success of their harvest is vital to survival. When it is time to plant or harvest everyone is involved. Sometimes school is even dismissed and the field becomes the focus of everyone. It is not uncommon to see three generations working in the field together, side-by-side, because success, survival, and the season demands it. Generations should learn how to run together; work together; know when to receive the baton, and how to continue the race.

Many times the mission, vision, purpose, or plan of God outlives a person. To see it fulfilled it must be successfully passed to the next generation. We often think of generations in terms of age but it could mean much more than this. Instead of experiencing generational friction and misunderstanding we need to strive for unity and continuity.

Generations could also include, and still not be limited to: differences in culture (the way we do things around here); differences in languages; relationships between missionaries and nationals or pastors and members; methods in accomplishing the task; variation of ministries; tension of which Bible school one attended; differences between males and females; types of thinking; loyalties to certain leaders; educational backgrounds. Often tensions develop between these groups or generations. It need not be like that. We have strength in our diversity. We run the race together, as a team, and pass the baton from one to another.

David's lifelong dream and heart's desire became Solomon's intense passion.

"My father David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel" (1 Kings 8:17, *NIV*).

"I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the LORD my God, as the LORD told my father David, when he said, 'Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name'" (1 Kings 5:5, *NIV*).

The temple took seven years to build, was a wonder of the world, and was built according to David's dream and God's design. God has planted a piece of eternity in the hearts of men. We do our part and then successfully pass the baton to the next generation. Thus, we keep the mission alive, and the church marches on.

Study Questions

1. What spiritual significance can we find in the passing of the baton in the relay race?

2. What three types of men do we need in our lives? _____

3. It is not enough to merely run the Christian race. What else should be done? _____

4. What is this generation equipped with? _____

5. Explain what is meant by "Christianity is always just one generation away from extinction." _____

6. What is one of the major factors that determines success? _____

7. What valuable lesson or principle does Daniel Deck give us in this lesson? _____

8. What is the specific application or meaning attached to “generation” in this lesson? _____

9. Explain what is meant by dream, destiny, and design in this lesson. _____

Additional Notes
