

Passing the Baton of Leadership

by Paul and Nate Bramsen (originally given at EBC's 2011 Iron Sharpens Iron Conference).

Part 3

Paul: 4) When must the baton be passed?

In a relay race, you get there as quickly as possible and pass it. If you pass it too early or too late, it's a foul. Timing is critical. And you must pass it while running at full speed. So it is with passing with the baton of leadership in the local assembly.

In Numbers 8, we learn that it was at age 25 that the Levites entered fulltime service in the tabernacle. At age 50 they were to withdraw from this duty and serve no more. They could assist their brothers to perform their duties, but they themselves were not to do the work. Of course this Old Testament law isn't a command for the New Testament local church. But it puts before us two principles:

One: you *must* pass the baton of leadership to the next generation. Sooner rather than later. Secondly, you must step back. Don't miss this. You must step back. That's a principle we see here. Once you pass the baton, your job is not over. Continue to pray, encourage, teach, counsel, and set an example. Your new role is to work alongside, but not lead. This is crucial. As long as the older generation is leading, how will the next generation ever learn to lead? Imagine a relay runner who hangs on to the baton. You must let go. You must pass the baton.

How are we doing? As has been said, the Lord Jesus had a three-year plan to prepare His disciples to carry on His work. What is our plan? Is it a 3-year plan? 10-year? 50? No plan? Dead men pass no batons. They drop them.

There are many wonderful elders in our assemblies. Many in their 70's and 80's are still faithfully leading. Sometimes they're in that position due to no fault of their own. But the question that must be answered by baton passers and baton receivers is: Why are 80-year old faithful men still carrying the baton when there are 40-year old faithful men who either are able to carry the baton or who could be prepared to carry it?

Note: Perhaps we have a **fear of failure**. Perhaps we're afraid the next generation will fail. But let's redefine failure. True failure is disobedience to Christ. True failure is not fulfilling His commands. In Matthew 28 Jesus says, "Make disciples and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you." That's the baton we must carry and pass.

A true leader will begin with the end in mind. He will not just see what is. He will see the raw potential in those around him. If we don't see the potential in the human souls created in the image of God, perhaps we don't have the eyesight of Jesus Christ. Jesus saw a lot of raw potential in twelve men, not to mention many others. And they were raw.

Let me give you one illustration of raw potential. There was this 7-year old boy who had ADD, ADHD, every letter in the alphabet associated with hyperactivity. One day his teacher said of him, "That boy is never going to amount to anything." A couple of years later the boy was at the public swimming pool in Baltimore. A man named Bob was at that pool. Bob saw this kid swimming and went up to the kid's parents

and said, “I think your son has potential. Do you mind if I work with him and see if we can pull some of that potential out of him?” They said, “You can, but he’s a tough kid to work with.” Bob took up the challenge. This boy’s name is Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history. We know his name today because of a man named Bob Bowman recognized his raw potential.

Do you see the raw potential within your local church? When Paul said, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ Jesus”, he was not seeking to duplicate himself. He was saying, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” That is what we are to do with the next generation. Maybe it’s taking a girl with a passion for young people out to Colorado Springs to visit Compassion International and feel the heartbeat of their ministry. Maybe it’s telling that young man who is interested in missions, “We’re going to pay your way to CMML’s Missionary Orientation Program and we’ll drive you there so you can attend.” Maybe it’s telling that young man who shows some potential in speaking, “Let’s go down to the rescue mission and minister together on Friday nights.”

Maybe it’s time we get uncomfortable and get serious about pushing people towards Christ and unleashing their raw potential.

***Paul:* 5) How is the baton to be passed?**

In a relay race, the receiver’s hand goes back and gives the target, and then as soon as he receives the baton, he switches it to the other hand so he’s ready to pass it to the next runner.

Likewise, in the race of life, we’re to take this baton-passing thing seriously. Deuteronomy 6 reminds us that it all starts with our relationship with God. “You shall love the Lord *your* God with all *your* heart, with all *your* mind, with all *your* strength, with all *your* soul.” Then there must be a combination of formal instruction and informal instruction. Every moment of every day. Over time, those who are close to you will know how you are investing your life. Your life is a sermon. We need to think about what are we teaching, and what people are catching from our lives. Our everyday choices are impacting eternity.

I thank God for my father and mother who passed the baton to me as a boy growing up in Santa Barbara, California. I am the 4th of 6 children. My dad had a heart for foreign missions and boldly shared the gospel, anywhere, anytime, to anyone. Dad ran a garden nursery and landscaping business. In beautiful Santa Barbara Sunday is a favorite gardening day. But Dad chose to close his nursery on Sunday. The signs on the chains that blocked the parking lot entrances, declared, “Sunday is the Lord’s Day, a holy day, not a holiday. Sorry, we’re closed.” Dad chose to be with his family and with the Lord’s people on Sunday. My dad and mom used Sundays to exercise hospitality and disciple young believers. That was a priority. Eventually, due to competition, dad’s garden nursery went out of business, but all six kids grew up to know and love the Lord.

What is left to say? Pass that baton! Get out of the rut. Get on the track. Run the race God has set before you. Give the next generation the privilege to lead, even as we have the privilege to lead. If we don’t put the baton in the hand of the next generation, how can they run the relay race that is set before them?

Note: Why don’t we pass the baton?

The fear of risk. When Barnabas first interacted with Paul, he took a big risk. “When he came to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him. But Barnabas took him and brought him

to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord who had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:26-27). Think of it. The apostle Paul was nearly rejected by the local church. Would he be accepted into ours? Would we have given him the baton?

From as early as I can remember, Dad included me in the ministry in Senegal. Whether helping with the kids’ ministry programs, giving out a cup of cold water or going to remote villages to show a gospel film, I was part of it. I probably wore him out sometimes, but he let me come along. I always felt like I had a part, and more than that, I got to watch his life and the way he interacted with people and the way he loved people. I don’t know if I was of any help, but it brought Dad and me a lot closer in our relationship. Similarly, Christ allows us to be a part of His work, not because He needs us but because He wants us. He wants a deeper relationship with us. That we may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

I close with these lines by Steve Green.

After all our hopes and dreams have come and gone,
And our children sift through all we’ve left behind.
May the truth that they discover
And the memories they uncover
Remind them, become the light that leads them
To the road we each must find
Oh may ALL who come behind us find us faithful.