



Leadership Principles

Passing the Baton of Leadership –part 3

This series was originally given at Emmaus Bible College's 2011 Iron Sharpens Iron Conference. Their message is here condensed into 3 short articles, the third of which follows.

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 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 OT law isn't a command for the NT 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?

Nate: 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 was Michael Phelps, the most decorated Olympian in history. We know his name today because of a man named Bob Bowman who 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.

(Continued on page 4)

Elders should hold in high esteem the practical skills of hospitality and visitation. Hospitality is “they in our homes.” Visitation is “we in their homes.” These are twins impacting assembly life and providing a barometer of its health. In a past issue, we looked at hospitality (Mar. 2011); in this article we’ll think about visitation.

First a word about the title. “Reviving a weak . . .” is gratuitous, for in many cases visitation is not weak but dead; a resurrection is needed! Some may object to the word “program” as too structured. But it makes the point that we are not talking about occasional, random visits by elders which almost all elders do anyway (especially when there is a crisis), but a planned, systematic approach that skips no one in fellowship.

Facing the Problem

In assemblies where visitation has fallen on hard times, it is not that the elders have ceased to love the sheep, but only that a disciplined approach has been given up, often due to the demands of administrative functions like decision making. It is fine to substitute a different word for “program,” but there must be greater consistency and dependability than “as led,” or “where needed.” It is a fallacy to think that the Holy Spirit is grieved by accountability structures; we insist on breaking bread *every* Sunday, or beginning *each* day with time in the Word.

Think of the middle-eastern shepherd who makes his sheep “pass under the rod,” i.e., admits them into the fold one by one, accounting for each and checking each for problems or needs. The idea is to give personal attention to every individual, making certain that nothing is taken for granted. The idea that “they didn’t complain so they must be OK” is unacceptable, simply because it’s not true.

Setting Good Goals

Elders may need to commit to a fresh start. Trying to patch up procedures that have already proven ineffective will not work. Four steps can sim-

plify the process: 1) clear the air, 2) set realistic goals, 3) decide on actions, and 4) embrace accountability.

First, elders must be convinced, based upon Scripture that visiting the flock is not a “make work” project, but at the very heart of Biblical shepherding. Most would already be convinced of this, but a restudy of relevant passages such as Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34, John 10, Matthew 25:36 and James 1:27 might be in order. In addition, the elders may need to admit (confess?) among themselves and possibly to the saints that things have been neglected, and affirm that with the Lord’s help a new direction is being undertaken,

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requesting prayer and *cooperation*.

Second, given the size of the congregation and its available leadership, a realistic goal should be set. It would seem prudent to visit each individual or family unit a minimum of once per year *in their own residence*. This latter point is important, because part of the information gained during visitation comes from seeing believers in their own home setting, thus becoming aware of special needs for prayer and any extenuating circumstances which might otherwise remain unknown. An opportunity is thus afforded to pick up on early danger signs that rarely are discovered through contacts made in public such as in the church or at a restaurant.

Third, visits should begin with two elders, or with one elder taking along a younger man. Make it clear to all that the first round of visits are not to deal with problems, but only to see where the people live, and open the way for healthy communications in future visits.

Setting the people at ease is very important at this point, for if visitation has been neglected for a long time, they may understandably be nervous.

Thus it is wise to work alphabetically after making it known to “expect a call in the weeks ahead.” Insist on brevity; an hour should be sufficient. In order to avoid time consuming preparations, be sure to mention “no food please.”

Arrive on time! Plan a simple agenda of greeting, explaining what will take place, and then get started. Keep it simple. Include a brief prayer at the outset, perhaps the reading of a short Scripture to show the Lord’s love for His people or the desire of the elders to care for the sheep, and then follow with a few questions. For the first visit, plan to use a few standard questions to draw interaction. Some have found it helpful to

make these known in advance, which helps people prepare and reassures them that the tone will be positive. Remember, this is not a teaching time, or a time to deal with needs and problems that may arise. To this end, it will be helpful if those visited see at least one elder taking notes, implying prayer, follow-up

help, answers, etc.

Questions should be simple and disarming. “How are things in your walk with the Lord?” “How are you getting along in the assembly?” “How can we pray for you?” “Is there anything you would like to mention that would help us be better servants?”

Don’t rush things but try to steer conversation away from doctrinal discussions. Make note of prayer requests and any doctrinal or moral concerns raised. Close in prayer.

If time constraints are followed carefully, it is not unreasonable to make two visits in one evening. With (for example) three teams each doing two visitations in an evening yielding six individuals or families seen, it will not be long before the goal of everyone being visited will come into view, which is rewarding.

Fourth, be disciplined about accountability. This involves good record keeping (who, when, where, needs for prayer, etc.), and letting the believers know of progress. Some part of the elders meeting can be devoted to brief reports of each team’s findings. Incidentally, some elders have found it

Encouraging Young Couples

by Ruth Spender

In the course of our ministry over the years, my husband and I have had the opportunity to spend time with young people who are seeking God's will for their life. One of the most commonly asked questions deals with finding a life partner. We have had the privilege of taking many young couples through premarital counseling classes. How rewarding it is to see some of them go on and grow into mighty servants for God.

What are some of the other needs that our young people face as they are starting out in life? Certainly they need our prayers, but what about practical help? How can we encourage them? Are we available to give Godly counsel? Are we helping them become assimilated into assembly life? Are we good listeners and are we given to hospitality?

Along with prayer, everyone needs the encouragement of knowing that others are genuinely concerned for their well-being. When someone truly cares,

it shows. As an example, our daughter has been living in California working on a degree in linguistics. As parents living on the east coast, we are so grateful for those Godly men and women in her life who have played a vital role in encouraging her. How wonderful it is to see the body of

are to an assembly what a newborn is to a family. This is a time of great rejoicing. It is also a time of major adjustments.

The Lord gives us a timeless principle in Deuteronomy 24:5 (ESV) that is very practical in this regard. "When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any

Newlyweds are to an assembly what a newborn is to a family. This is a time of great rejoicing. It is also a time of major adjustments.

public duty. He shall be free at home for one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken." One way we can demonstrate this in the assembly is to not request anything from our newlyweds for their first year of marriage. Scripture encourages us not to become weary in well doing for in the end

Christ working together as our Lord intended.

In the past six months, we have had an influx of young married couples who have become a regular part of our assembly family. We feel a strong sense of duty to help them succeed in their marriages. Newlyweds

we will reap a bountiful harvest, even if it is someday.



Reviving a Weak Visitation Program (continued from page 2)

helpful to reduce the number of regular elders meetings, using the freed-up time for visits instead adding more nights out in the week.

Reaping the Benefits

Space does not allow a full discussion of blessings which will follow, but here are several. Pleasing the Lord tops the list, as He said: "Feed [care for] my sheep" (John 21:15f.) Could there be a better indication that those in leadership value people? And it's hard to think of a better way to extend practical discipleship to young men than to involve them in true shepherding work.

Then there is the satisfying sight of people within the church coming to a higher understanding and practice of fellowship among themselves, opening their homes to one another freely. As society continues to degrade, it is inter-

esting to note the growing trend of people evaluating churches by the fellowship available rather than doctrinal details.

One of the largest benefits is best seen in hindsight. Troubling issues that once required large blocks of time (and

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therefore extended elders meetings) are detected early, like sparks diffused before turning into forest fires. This in turn allows more time to be spent with people.

Finally, looking farther down the road, additional (or replacement) elders will eventually be needed. It's a good sign when men desire the work of an elder (I Tim. 3:1) having seen it as a loving team serving among the people rather than the frequently heard, "I'm glad to do the work, but I

don't want the title." This attractive quality of an elder group (that is, doing the work of elders in love) is better displayed through time in the homes listening to the saints, than time hidden away in a room making decisions into the night. Both have a place in the Lord's

work of course, but we dare not neglect the former because of the demands of the latter.



Passing the Baton of Leadership *(cont. from page 1)*

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 we are 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, de-

clared, "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.



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