

6/8/08

Passing The Torch

Today we wrap up our series called “Generations” in which we have been considering together what it means to be a part of an inter-generational church family. We’ve anchored our thinking in a verse from Psalm 71

Psalm 71:17-18

Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

A few weeks ago we explored the idea of “**Starting Right**”. We talked about the responsibility of the older generation to the pass the torch to the next generation, a generation that faces some very unique challenges in terms of their faith.

The next week, we explored the notion of “**Finishing Well**”; it’s not like we come to a place where we retire from God’s call on our lives. No matter the stage, no matter the age we can still lead and serve and bless those around us!

Today I want us to bring those two previous messages together and ask the question “**How Do We Pass The Torch?**” How do we pass on what we’ve received from God to the next generation?

Finish this phrase for me, “**If you want to get something done,**
_____”. Yes, most of you know the saying “do it yourself.”

We live in a very individualistic, get-it-done, me-and-me alone society. We live in a world where individual achievement is the highest goal. But life in the Kingdom of God is different. It is not an individual race. It’s more like a relay race. Do you what is the most important moment in a relay race? It’s when you pass the baton. No matter how fast the individual members of the relay team, if you fumble the passing of the baton, you can’t win the race.

So to get us thinking about our influence, I'd like you to think of the name of someone who has been a good influence on you, someone who has passed something on to you. It could be the name of a parent or grandparent, a mentor or friend; it could be a spouse or a sibling.

The person you identified should be a concrete reminder that we did not arrive at this point all on our own. We are here because someone passed the torch to us. Every summer as a kid, I worked for my dad. The summer I was sixteen he said, "Son, this summer is going to be different. I'm putting you in charge of the Levelland farm." I worked hard that summer and learned a lot. I realize now that my dad was passing the baton.

Now it seems to me that the strategic question we should be asking is "**How Can We Pass The Gospel of Jesus To The Next Generation?**" Now I don't want to spend a lot of time talking about the core values and core beliefs of City View. I believe with all of my heart there is a passion among us to be a biblically rooted, Jesus-centered church. That's in our DNA and will always be in our DNA. And just as it is with human beings when good DNA gets passed down the rest basically takes care of its self.

So I want us to think about how we pass this DNA of ours down to the next generation. To do so I want us to look at Paul's second letter the Timothy. Scholars believe that this is the last of Paul's letters which is important to remember because in these final words we find a man not burdened with his own legacy per se, but with the burden of passing the torch to one of his apprentices.

2 Timothy 1: 1-7

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus

our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Timothy, the things you have heard me (1) say in the presence of many witnesses (2) entrust to reliable men (3) who will also be qualified to teach others (4). (2 Timothy 2:2) [Parenthesis mine]

Now look at 2 Timothy 2:2 again. How many generations do you see there?

2 Timothy 3:10-15

You, *Timothy*, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So let's make some big picture observations here:

- **To pass the torch to the next generation, you've got to love the next generation.**

Did you catch how Paul opened his letter to Timothy.

Timothy, my dear son, I thank God as I constantly remember you in my prayers and I long to see you that I may be filled with joy...

Pretty obvious that Paul loves Timothy; he delights in him; he's overjoyed just in thinking about him.

One of the strongest mentors in my life would have to be James Cameron, my college football coach. He dealt with me sternly when the need arose, but he also reached out to me in love when that was what was needed. He was the one who confirmed my call to preach when I was serving as a youth pastor. I knew I had those inner urges to preach, suspected that God was stirring that unction in me to function, but God sent me some one who was my hero, a friend, a coach, a mentor, someone who cared about me, who I knew wanted the absolute best for me to seal the deal. And that next week I sat down with my Senior Pastor and shared my urges with him. Guess what he said, "Gary, before you launch we have a Adult Education position open on our staff. Why don't you take that position, learn a little about working with adults, enroll in seminary, and let me teach you what I know about the ministry." Those were some of the most valuable years of my life.

And when thinking about how to pass the torch, there is nothing more essential, more fundamental than the love and support and advocacy of those who came before you. It spans far beyond fathers and sons, or even parents and children, although those relationships are clearly crucial, this is about having someone in your life who is a true advocate.

And while that's always been the case as it was with Timothy, it is never been more needed than today. More and more young people are coming from broken homes, from unsafe family situations, from a void of love, an absence of trust, a lack of advocacy.

The result in part has been this increasing period that we referred to a couple of weeks ago as Emerging Adulthood. And more of the norm today is that there is this period between puberty and about 30 or so that our younger generation is still hammering out their identity and their vocation, "what will I do" "who will be my mate" "do I want a mate." This is not an easy period.

We've noted that more and more young people who are raised in the church are leaving the church in record numbers; fewer and fewer of them are seeking their answers in the Christian community. While researchers point to different reasons for this, what we know for sure is that no one is leaving because *we* are *too* trustworthy with people who are uncertain, or *too* gracious with people who are struggling, or because we are *too* loving toward people who strike out.

So in order to pass the torch we have to love the next generation. So just find one and love them. You don't need to be Mr. Perfect Christian (as a matter of fact those kind of folks make me nervous). Now let me be clear, I'm not just talking about old folks loving young folks. I'm talking about whether you're thirteen or 80 you can love the folks coming up under you. That's where we have to start.

You can't just share your faith, you have to share your life.

Did you catch the impact of verse 14?

2 Timothy 3:14

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it...

Now let me ask you something. What makes that verse so convincing? It's that phrase "**you know those from whom you have learned it...**" And Paul isn't just talking about his own relationship with Timothy; he's talking about Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Notice the age-spread of those people who invested in Timothy in an authentic way, giving Timothy convincing reasons to continue in what he's learned.

What I really want to impress upon you this morning is to get transparent with the next generation—so you can't just share your faith, you have to share your life along with your faith. You have to walk with them in an open, authentic way.

You know it's always an easier thing to hand a person a list of things that they're doing wrong. What if instead you shared your life's

foibles, frustrations with situations, questions you have about God--share warts and all? You see, whether you are a parent or a mentor when you become vulnerable, it creates vulnerability in the next generation and vulnerability is a good thing because there's a deep seated something that God has put in us that makes us want to tell our story, but we are only willing to do that with people we trust and people who will meet us half way.

Here's the deal: when you begin to know the one from whom you are learning, things they say become convincing. Did you know that you can know *about* Jesus all of your life, but you might never know Jesus personally, relationally until another human being makes Him real by sharing His human life with you. That's the way it works. When we begin to sincerely trust someone, we start becoming impacted by what they believe, what they say, and what they do. It's called modeling. And no one has ever done that better than Jesus modeling for his disciples. That's why we are so excited about this summer series that starts this Wednesday night called "Modeling the Ministry of Jesus." Jesus' modeling so impacted eleven that they turned the world upside down.

And Paul did the same with Timothy. Can you imagine all the conversations they had that were never written down? Paul writes about a thorn in his flesh. Scholars have argued about what that is for centuries. Timothy knew what it was.

So at the risk of sounding presumptuous, let me try to speak for this up and coming, emerging generation. Just imagine that I'm 20-something. "We don't need another voice that just wants to share their faith; we need an advocate who's willing to share their life and their faith. Like Timothy, we need to know your way of life, your purposes, your faith, your patience, your love, your endurance, your suffering and even your failures. We need to see your life at it's best and at it's worst. To pass the torch to the next generation, you will have to share your faith with us."

- **To pass the torch, you must find your victory in the victory of another.**

Do you remember the movie Seabiscuit?

In the final scene, Seabiscuit and his jockey Red Pollard are racing for the first time after both were seriously injured, and they are running dead last in this race until another rider, George Woolf, who had been the more successful rider throughout his career slowed his horse down so Seabiscuit could catch up to him. When he did, Seabiscuit found his strength again and won. George Woolf sacrificed his own position in the race and any hope for personal glory in order to see his friend ride to victory.

Now I want you to listen very closely—To pass the torch, we have to find our victories in the victories of the next generation, even if it means slowing down, even if means letting go of certain goals we've set, even if it means not winning every race or receiving all the glory. To those of you who are the, shall I say, *more seasoned and experienced* Christ followers in this community, there are younger people in this church and here in this city that be maybe thinking about or perhaps have already given up on the Church. They need you to slow down, to meet them where they are, to look them in the eye and remind them that you love them, that you believe in them, and that you are ready to watch them run.

This is not about whether the Church of Lord Jesus is going to look different because it is going to look different regardless. Our styles, our methods, our ways of conducting worship, those have always changed over time, and they will continue to change. So it not about that stuff—it's about whether or not we are willing to put Jesus' Church in the hands of the next generation because until they own it, they won't accept their role in the race. It's about us finding our victories in the victories of those who will be City View Christian Fellowship for years and generations to come.

You know what? Not many churches have figured out how to do this well, and yet we know what happens when churches can't make needed changes while not changing the message. Every day you drive by churches that were once thriving communities, now empty and lifeless.

I believe you and I and, most importantly, God wants this to be a thriving place of grace and transformation and restoration and

redemption and where people all of backgrounds and life-stages come to learn about the thing that's most important to all of us and that's about our Lord Jesus. We've got to remember that it's not about a particular style or strategy; it's about doing whatever it takes to pass the gospel on.

It was Paul's passion. And he knew it must become ours because the gospel is always just one generation away from extinction.

And so *we must* do this! I know from the sacrifices many of you have already made that you want to do this. The really good news in all this is that *we get* to do this. You see, one of the greatest gifts in the Christian life is not an individual legacy or award, it is the gift of passing the torch, the gift of passing the baton to the next runner; the gift of seeing someone else run the next leg; watching as to how God will use them in their own style.

And do you know what a lot of our high school students and college students and young adults desire? A lot of them really do desire for someone to take them under their wing, someone who would walk alongside them. And some of you could fill that need. If we learn anything from second Timothy, it's that the real tragedy for Paul would not have been if him not writing this letter to Timothy, the real tragedy would have been if he *couldn't have written* the letter to Timothy. Paul had a huge assignment—to take the message of Jesus Christ to the world—get that in perspective. Hey, it's first-century. No cars, no planes, just mostly feet. “Uh, Gary, your assignment is uh to take the gospel to the world.” Wow. And in the press of that assignment Paul brought Timothy along by his side, not to teach him a certain church structure or a worship style, but to help prepare a person who could carry the gospel to the next generation.

I would like you do something as we close. I want you to imagine that you're writing a letter like Paul wrote to Timothy.

I, [your name], a follower of Christ, in keeping with the promise of life in Christ Jesus, am writing to _____.

Who would you put in the blank? It could be a son or a daughter, a grandchild, a younger person at work or school. Maybe it's someone

in your home group. Maybe it's someone who's younger that's in business and you could minister to them by bringing them to the MCN Luncheon this Wednesday. Maybe it's a younger student who struggling with their grades and you as an older student could help them. Maybe it's someone you could bring to our Community of Men or someone you could bring to our ladies' Real Girl Time meetings. Many of you now have been through Directions and it's blessed you; what if now you encouraged someone to go through and offered to go with them?

Who goes in the blank? And if no one comes to mind, ask God for a name because that name could be your greatest victory in this life. I'm going to give you just a moment. Why don't you bow and pray about it and think about it for just a moment.

Psalm 71:17-18

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