



One of the big challenges large companies and churches face today is the issue of succession. Because many are led by Baby Boomers getting ready to retire, the question naturally arises, Who will take their place? Who will succeed them? I have a baton here that represents the critical moment in a relay race where the exchange takes place and one runner ends his part in the race and another takes over. If you don't get the exchange right, the race is lost.

The Bible is full of succession stories where the baton is passed. Sometimes it's done well and other times it's messy. Moses spent years grooming Joshua to lead God's people when he was gone. Joshua didn't skip a beat. Saul fought God's choice of David to succeed him as King. He held on too long and it was a messy exchange. The prime example is Jesus. He spent three years preparing his disciples to carry on his mission and then he passed the baton, telling them to make disciples as well.

Paul's Final Days

One of those disciples was Paul and today were looking at Paul's Final Days and how he passed the baton to a young disciple named Timothy. We saw last week how as a zealous Jew he persecuted the church. But then Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and he became 100% committed to finishing his part of the race.

You see this more than ever in his final years. It started when he sensed God's call to go to Jerusalem. Even though he was warned again and again by fellow believers that danger was awaiting him there, he insisted on going. He arrived there in June of A.D. 58 and things went south fast. He was accused of bringing Gentiles into the Temple, which for the Jews was punishable by death. Only the intervention of a Roman troop commander saved him from being lynched. He brought Paul to the Roman governor's headquarters in Caesarea where Paul was kept under house arrest for two years. Finally, believing God wanted him to go to Rome, Paul appealed for trial before Caesar, his right as a Roman citizen.

Paul's journey to Rome was epic. Sailing westward was tedious because the winds were in their face. And they set sail in October, when the weather was awful. On the way to Rome, their ship was enveloped in a massive storm lasting two weeks. They had to throw the cargo overboard, ration food, and the Bible says *"they gave up all hope of being saved"* (Acts 27:20). Then the ship ran aground on the island of Malta. Just when they thought

they were out of danger, Paul was bit by a deadly viper. It was a miracle he survived. Not until March did he arrive in Rome.

Paul spent at least two years in Rome under house arrest, awaiting trial. It's at this point the book of Acts ends and we don't know exactly what happened to him. Tradition says he was acquitted in A.D. 62, went to Spain, but then was rearrested and executed 2–5 years later under the persecutions of Nero. We do know during this time Paul wrote some letters, the last to Timothy. He'd met Timothy on his first missionary journey. He led him to Christ and when he visited him a few years later he found Timothy's faith had matured and he was well regarded by leaders in the church. So Paul took him with him. He traveled with Paul for 15 years. Eventually Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to lead the church there. This was a tough assignment. Ephesus a challenging place to do ministry. Timothy was relatively young, timid and sickly.

But Paul believed Timothy was crucial to the future of the mission. So he wrote this last letter to him and it's hard not see the baton is being passed. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 1. As this baton is being passed, what does Timothy need to know? This is relevant for each of us. As we look at what Paul says to Timothy think about where you are in this exchange. Are you getting ready to pass the baton? Who are you investing in? Are you receiving the baton? How will you run your part of the race? And it is a race. Paul will later write to Timothy, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith"* (4:7). I think we'd all like to be able to say that some day, but how is it possible? Paul answers that question in 1:1–12.

Remember Those Who've Impacted Your Life

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with 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 ancestors 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 am 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 (2 Timothy: 1:1–5).

In some ways this looks like just a regular greeting, but notice how he writes about Timothy's relationships. Paul wants him to remember the people who've impacted his life. Timothy's father wasn't a believer, but he mentions his grandmother and his mother. He's reminded of their "sincere faith." Timothy had a godly heritage. This should be an encouragement to parents and grandparents. Maybe you're in a marriage where your spouse doesn't share your faith in Christ. You wonder if your kids will ever get it. Keep planting seeds. Keep praying for them. Keep exposing them to God's Word. Continue to be a model of genuine, sincere faith. Be real with your kids. Let them see how your faith makes a difference in your life. Grandparents, don't underestimate your influence. Maybe your grandkids are far away; maybe their parents are far away from God. But you can speak into their lives like no one else.

Not all of us have this kind of godly heritage. I didn't have it. Many of you didn't have it, but some of you did. You can point to parents or grandparents who prayed for you and invested in you. That's a gift you shouldn't take for granted. I often run into believers who downplay their Christian heritage; like they're embarrassed by it, but it's a gift. When you're weary and the race seems long you can look back to loved ones who've gone before you. They ran well; draw strength from that.

But if you don't have that, you can remember others. Paul also reminds Timothy of the relationship the two of them have. He calls Timothy his "dear son" in the faith. As Timothy's spiritual father, he constantly remembers him in his prayers. He longs to see him. He recalls the tears streaming down his cheeks as they parted ways. And he affirms him. He thanks God for him and for the reality of Christ at work in his life.

What a great model of discipleship! How do you disciple someone? What does a spiritual mentor do? Look at Paul's example. Besides writing a letter, he's faithful in prayer. He's warm in friendship. He's affirming in speech. Do you have someone you're investing in, a spiritual son or daughter? Keep Paul's model in mind. I've been so blessed with spiritual mentors. The Lord more than made up for my lack of a godly heritage with wonderful mentors: Norm Frankenberger, Paul Robie, Jay Grimstead, Mike Dunkel, Tom Virtue, Steve Zeisler, Ray Stedman, Leron Heath, Jeff Farrar, Haddon Robinson. You don't know most of them, but they changed my life. Without them I wouldn't be here. Sometimes when I'm discouraged I remember one of them and it helps me to keep going. I'd love to see each of us with our own Paul and with our own Timothy.

Rekindle Your Gift

One of the things a mentor does is challenge us. That's what Paul does next in verses 6–7.

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 the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Not only would Timothy need to remember the people who impacted him, he'd need to rekindle the "gift of God which is in you." God gave a gift to Timothy. We don't know for sure what gift Paul was talking about, but the fact that it was bestowed on him by the laying on of hands is a clue. When Joshua took over for Moses, Moses laid his hands on him to show he was being set apart for leadership. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries, the leaders of the church laid hands on them. It's clear this gift has to do with Timothy being set apart as a leader in the church. Paul wants him to remember the time this gift and calling became a reality to him.

Not all of us have the same gift Timothy had, but all of us have a gift and a calling. We've all been given some unique ability designed specifically to build up others in the faith. Someone once said your calling is the place where your heart's deep desire and the world's great need intersect. When you experience that intersection, you know it; you know you're doing what God created you to do.

But sometimes that gets buried. Maybe we get discouraged or exhausted or just too busy. That's why Paul says, "fan into flame the gift of God..." God's gift is likened to a fire. Fires die down unless you tend them; stir up the coals. There are times when for whatever reason we've failed to keep the fire roaring. What do you do? Stir up the coals; fan the flickering flame. But how? I think what that means is you choose to step back into the fray. Use that gift which has been barely flickering.

Recently I had my road bike stolen from the front of my house. I've been missing my rides and thinking about getting a new bike. Then someone gave me a generous gift certificate to a bike shop. I was so excited and yesterday I went and bought a new bike. Now what if I brought that bike home and put it in my garage and for whatever reason failed to ever take it out for a ride? Maybe I got too busy. Maybe I was afraid I didn't have it in me anymore. Maybe I was fearful of getting in an accident. Or maybe I was just afraid the bike would get stolen again. So I didn't use it. That would be awful!

That's what it's like when we don't use the gifts and calling God gives us. You can understand why Paul would tell Timothy to fan the flame; take the bike out of the garage and go for a ride. Why? Look what he says, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." God has given each one the Holy Spirit. He doesn't produce timidity. That word means fear or cowardice, a lack of courage or moral strength. He produces power: strength to stand up to whatever it is keeping us from fulfilling our call. He also produces love: this power isn't in service of self; it's in service of others. That's what love is. It's

the act of giving yourself, of laying your life down. Finally, he produces self-discipline. A better translation of this word is a sound mind. It's having control over your thinking. When everything comes unglued, being levelheaded keeps you focused on God and able to persevere. Whatever keeps you from taking the bike out of the garage, the Spirit more than makes up for it.

Suffer for the Gospel

We need to remember those who've impacted our lives and fan our gift into a flame. But that won't be easy. There'll always be opposition. Timothy's church was rife with conflict and false teaching. His critics were many. Rome was becoming more and more opposed to Christians. They were being rounded up and thrown in prison. His mentor awaited execution at Nero's command. It was a tough time to be a Christian. So Paul challenges him to suffer for the Gospel. Look at verse 8.

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

The theme of these verses is suffering for the Gospel. Paul urges him to not be ashamed. Timothy was in a situation where he could avoid a lot of hardship if he backed out of his commitment to Christ out of shame. Shame is a powerful force. We do things to avoid it. Paul mentions three things we might be tempted to be ashamed of when it comes to being a Christian.

Don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord

First, he says don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. We're all called to testify or bear witness about our Lord. It might be in a classroom where your professor is a hardened atheist who loves to criticize the Christian faith. I had a Philosophy professor who gave me a "C" because I was a Christian. It was the only "C" I ever got in college. It might be speaking up at a dinner party when you're the only believer and someone brings up how many atrocities have been committed in the name of Jesus. Don't be ashamed to stand up and say, "I believe in him. He's my Lord and Savior." Do it graciously, but don't stay silent.

Don't be ashamed of me his prisoner

Second, he says don't be ashamed of me his prisoner. Sometimes we're embarrassed not so much by Jesus but by one of his servants. Paul was about to be executed as a criminal. It would be easy to be embarrassed by that. Have you ever been tempted to disassociate from a fellow believer because you're ashamed of them?

Don't be ashamed of the Gospel

Third, he doesn't want him to be ashamed of the Gospel. He says, "join with me in suffering for the gospel." Why might we be ashamed of the gospel today? The attitude today is whatever you want to believe is fine. If it works for you, that's cool. But as soon as we say this isn't just for me; this is for you; as soon as

we say Christ isn't just a way but **the** way, then we're viewed as intolerant. That can be embarrassing.

Notice what God has accomplished through the Gospel.

He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher (verses 9–11).

He saved us. The gospel is about salvation. We've been saved from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death. We've been forgiven. But the gospel is about more than just forgiveness. The God who saved us also "called us to a holy life." God is holy and when he calls us he begins to make us holy. But that's not all. Through the Gospel, he also "destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light." God didn't just eliminate death, he put it out of commission. Spiritually, we're no longer dead but alive. Physically, though we may die, we're immediately ushered into immortality. I was speaking a few weeks ago to a brother who is suffering from cancer and dealing with the reality of his own mortality. He said to me, "Everything depends on the resurrection. If it really happened, I have hope." He does have hope. It did happen. The Gospel says Jesus destroyed death. He made immortality a reality!

That's what God accomplished through the gospel. Why would we ever be ashamed of that? The reason might be found in Paul's describing the way God accomplished all of this. He says this wasn't accomplished by our own works, "but because of his own purpose and grace." We can't earn this salvation. We have nothing to offer God; nothing to gain any credit with him. That's offensive to some people. We don't have what it takes. We're sinners to the core. Our most righteous deeds are filthy rags to God. Instead of earning it, before we could do anything, he granted it to us as a gift for all eternity.

Paul says in verse 12,

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame...

Then he makes this great statement of personal trust:

...because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

He doesn't say "I know **what** I've believed," though that's true. He doesn't say, "I know **when** I believed," though that's also true. He doesn't say, "I know **how much** I have believed," though he had great faith. He says, "I know **whom** I have believed." His confidence is in a person; a faithful God. He's entrusted something

to him, and believes God is able to guard and make good on that investment until the day all accounts will be settled.

What's he entrusted to God? His life. His work. God will keep that investment safe until the day he sees Christ. This is the secret of living a life free from shame, unembarrassed of the gospel. The secret is to know whom you've believed. Not just to know **about** him, but to **know** him; to know his faithfulness; to know you can entrust your life to him; to know a day will come when he'll make good on that investment.

In the *Market Report*, Bill Barnhart once explained the difference between investors and traders in the stock market. A trader makes decisions minute by minute in the hope of shaving off profits in fractions of a dollar. Traders are wheelers and dealers. They buy for short term profits. They don't necessarily have any confidence in the companies they buy stock in. On the other hand, an investor buys or sells a stock based on research about the company. They're in it for the long haul. They commit their money to a stock, believing over a period of years it will steadily grow in value. They aren't flustered by the ups and downs of the market because they believe in the quality of the company.

Are you an investor in the kingdom of God or a trader? Do you believe in the long term quality of the One you've invested in? Paul knew his investment was good. He wouldn't be deterred by a few ups and down in the market. How about us? Are we just trying to improve our lot in this world, and when pain or hardship comes we sell out? Or will we stay invested no matter what happens, knowing eternal dividends await us?

I don't think it would be right for me to end this message not to mention that like Paul there are many men and women today enduring imprisonment and even death because they are

investors and because of their commitment to run the race and pass the baton no matter what. I hope we're reminded to pray for them. Kayla Mueller, 26 years old, was captured by ISIS, and on February 10, 2015 U.S. officials confirmed Muslim extremists had murdered her while in captivity. In the spring of 2014 as a captor she wrote to her family. The letter begins with her assurance that she'd been treated well. She goes on to apologize to them for the suffering that she's put them through because of her captivity. Then comes this:

"I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator b/c literally there was no one else." Kayla goes on to relate how "by God and by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in free fall. I have been shown in darkness, light, and have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it." She concluded, "Please be patient, give your pain to God. I know you would want me to remain strong. That is exactly what I am doing. Do not fear for me, continue to pray as will I. By God's will we will be together soon. All my everything, Kayla."

That's someone who knew the One she believed in. Do you? Do you believe he's able to guard that which you've entrusted to him? You have a baton that's been passed to you. Are you running the race? Don't forget to remember the people who've impacted your life. Rekindle your gift. Be willing to suffer for the Gospel. It's an investment worth making.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.