

Weekly Reflection – “It’s A Relay Race”

Most of you are familiar with what a relay race is. It’s a race in which there are normally four runners and they each run a segment called a leg of the race, and they have the responsibility of carrying, during their leg of the race, something called a baton; and then they are to pass that baton to the next runner who then runs their leg of the race with that baton.

That makes the relay race kind of unique for a couple of reasons. One is that the relay race is a team sport. It’s not just one individual that’s striving to win, but you got some guys or some ladies that got to work together. The other thing, with regard to the relay race, is that the relay race is not won necessarily by the team whose last runner crosses the finish line first; but rather by the team whose last runner crosses the finish line first carrying the baton, and that during the race the baton was passed on within the designated exchange zones.

It’s interesting to think that you can have all of the fastest runners and you can be the overwhelming favorite but not win the race because you didn’t handle the baton correctly.

2 Timothy 1 – 2:3

- In chapter 2 verse 2 we see this idea of a relay race: ***“and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”***
- Paul to Timothy, Timothy to faithful men, faithful men to others also.
- It begs two questions from us that we need to let this text answer.
- One is really about the identification of this baton, and that’s really important. What is it? In other words, what is it that we are responsible for? What is it we have been entrusted with? What is it that we are to handoff to the next runner of this race?
- And then the second question is how do we do it? How do we go about being faithful with this baton? How is it that we run this relay race in such a way that we don’t get disqualified?

What is the “baton?”

The baton is the Gospel of Jesus, the Word of God, the truth of Jesus. ***2 Timothy 1:8 – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”. 2 Timothy 2:2 – “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*** Paul is saying, “Pass on the things you have heard me say that have been verified by many witnesses.”

This is significant because what we pass on really, really matters, it has eternal consequences. In a relay race you can’t just drop the baton that started the race and pick up something else along the way. To win the race you must pass on the baton that started the race.

The baton that started the race of Christianity, of following Jesus, is the Gospel of Jesus, the Word of God.

How to run the relay race.

2 Timothy 1:6 - 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,

“Fan into flame” or nurture the gift of the Gospel. Paul knew this about the fire of the gospel, its tendency, by virtue of human flesh, is to go out. Left unattended it goes out. Paul wouldn’t use an imperative command to say, “Timothy, you got to fan this thing,” if it was going to keep burning white

hot regardless of Timothy. Sometimes we get confused about why we don't feel passionate about the gospel and sharing the gospel; could it be because we are not fanning it into flame? Paul is telling Timothy and us that this is not going to burn vibrantly if you are passive about it. Nurture it. Hang out with people that love the gospel. Keep coming and hearing the gospel sung and preached but take steps to fan this flame by thinking about it and meditating on it.

2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

"Do not be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus." Do you know what the opposite of being ashamed of something is? Owning it. Boast in the cross. And this should raise the question, "Why would anyone be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus, the good news that Jesus came to save us, redeem us, give us eternal life?" The fire, you remember, its natural tendency is going to be to go out. These fleshly bodies that we have, the natural tendency is, in that moment of witnessing opportunity, to shy away.

2 Timothy 1:13 - Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

"Follow." In other words, live this out. Let this effect everything you're doing. This word "pattern" has the meaning of framework, what everything is built around or on. For example, the church building has a steel framework, a pattern, and when I saw the framework, I knew what the shape of the building would be when it was finished. Our lives, when we build them around the framework of the Gospel of Jesus will be Gospel shaped.

And the word "sound" carries the idea of health, the source of health, health-giving. In other words, the uncompromised Gospel message is the only source that can give salvation, restoration, healing to our minds and souls. The Gospel message is the only source of true freedom. This gospel framework is the only thing because it is God's framework on which everything else is built.

2 Timothy 1:14 - By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

"Guard the good deposit." "Protect the gospel." We don't compromise to be popular, we don't compromise to get butts in the seats, we don't compromise to make people feel good about themselves. We don't compromise in the name of loving and accepting people. The reality is, compromising is the most unloving thing we can do for people. Compromising the Gospel actually keeps the people we love from experiencing the fullness of God's love and the freedom He wants for them. We have an obligation to guard the Gospel so that people can know Jesus and be saved.

2 Timothy 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

And finally, we see that we are to pass this baton to faithful men and women who will pass it on to others also. We make disciples who make disciples.

Content, Intent, and Context

I came across something for capturing what I think are essential components of life-on-life disciple-making: content, intent, and context.

- **The content is the gospel.** This is what we center on and aim to pass to the next generation. Not our quirks and idiosyncrasies and hobbyhorses, but the main things. Not the backroom conversations, but “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,” the heart of the faith.
- **The intent is multiplication.** It’s not merely addition; just simply discipling. It’s making disciples who make disciples. Part of the disciple-making process is training up disciples who will then turn and themselves make disciples.
- **The context is relationship.** It is personal and time-consuming. Books and sermons, conferences, and articles play a wonderful supplementary part in the discipleship process, but no distant writer, speaker, or preacher can sit across the table from you and apply Christian truth precisely to your specific life because they know you intimately.

Are these components in your life, in your relationships? Are you making disciples who make disciples?

Future Grace

2 Timothy 2:1 - You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus,

Paul is telling Timothy and us to continue to be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What I have just laid out is impossible for you to do in your own strength. Remember John 15:5: ***“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*** Jesus does not ask us, and in fact tells us that we cannot do any of this apart from Him. BUT He also tells us very clearly that when we abide in Him, live completely dependent and reliant upon Him for everything, we (that means you) will bear much fruit. Paul is clearly telling Timothy, and you and I, that the way to make disciples who makes disciples, the way to run this relay race, is by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. There is always future grace available for everything He asks us to do. Our responsibility is obedience, faith, to take a step; and it’s in that step of faith that we will receive the grace, the strength, the help we need.

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:21-23 ESV

One of the great enemies of hope, perseverance, and boldness is forgetting God’s promises. The prophet Jeremiah wrote this, and we can learn a real, practical way we can live by future grace. By remembering, calling to mind the promises of God. What happens when Jeremiah calls to mind the unceasing steadfast love of God, the never ending always new mercies of God, and the absolute faithfulness of God?
THEREFORE, I HAVE HOPE!