

*The Great*  
EXCHANGE

PASSING THE BATON BETWEEN  
GENERATIONS OF WORLD SHAPERS

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# Your Amazing Race

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Definition of a Relay race:

*A track-and-field sport consisting of a set number of stages (legs), usually four, each leg run by a different member of a team... The runner finishing one leg is usually required to pass on a baton to the next runner while both are running in a marked exchange zone.<sup>1</sup>*

Everyone loves a good race. As a young adult in the 1980s, I was in awe of the ‘Golden Milers’, an elite group of athletes who constantly set new world records for running the mile. But my favorite was the 26 mile marathon. It seemed so *extreme*.

Not so any longer. Since the ‘X Games’<sup>2</sup> debuted in 1995, racing events have been getting longer, wilder and more dangerous. Pounding the pavement for 3 hours? Barely worth being called a marathon anymore. Now we have *week-long* mountain Death Races and Peruvian Jungle runs where broken limbs are optional but not unexpected. And how about the ‘Yukon Arctic Ultra Marathon’, a 300 mile winter endurance footrace in which you pull your own supply sled? In 2018, twenty-one people began the race in temperatures below -40C/F. Eleven days later, exactly one person crossed the finish line. The rest dropped out, losing not only the race, but also toes, fingers and even whole feet to frostbite!<sup>3</sup> In spite of such stories, new extreme races are constantly appearing with no signs of abatement.

I would like to add one more to the list. I refer to it as The *Most* Amazing Race. Unlike the frantic competitions mentioned above, this unique race offers ample adventure without the broken bones or frostbite. And best of all,

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1      retrieved May 2018 from <https://www.britannica.com/sports/relay-race>

2      The **X Games** is an annual extreme sports event hosted, produced, and broadcast by ESPN

3      reported in many news articles such as [www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-arctic-ultra-changes-1.4677313](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/yukon-arctic-ultra-changes-1.4677313)

you don't have to be an adrenaline junkie or extreme athlete to win! Many people with ordinary abilities have entered with low expectations only to experience the joy of standing upon the medal podium when it's over.

So what is this race? And why is it the most amazing one?

It is the Great Relay Race of Faith and Destiny. The Christian faith is often described as a 'walk' with God. That it is. However, when it comes to fulfilling your destiny, that special purpose for which you have been placed upon this planet, the New Testament seems to prefer the metaphor of running rather than walking. Followers of Jesus are called to emulate great heroes of the faith by *running the race* that is set before them.<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul also talked about *running his race* of faith.<sup>5</sup> Today's preachers use this metaphor to encourage perseverance using catch-phrases such as, '*Life is not a sprint, it is a marathon*' and, '*Keep your eyes on the prize, stay focused on Jesus!*'

A relay race is the only  
event where you don't  
have to cross the finish line  
to win a medal.

But those messages miss one vital element. This Great Race of Faith and Destiny is not meant to be a series of solo runs where everyone gives it their best shot. It is actually a *relay* race. That one word makes a fundamental difference. A relay race is the only event where you don't have to cross the finish line to win a medal. Wrapped inside that pithy statement are some profound insights that have shaped my personal values and defined my destiny. I refer to them as life-shaping truths. Here are the top three:

### **Life-Shaping Truth #1**

*Your personal destiny is not a call to individual greatness - it is a team event.*

Your life is not a solo run. Who you are today, what you will accomplish tomorrow and who you will eventually become, are all connected to others

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4 Hebrews 12:1-2

5 2 Timothy 4:7

in the same race. This includes not only those you are currently running alongside, but *also those who came before you and those who will come after you*. Therefore every destiny is actually a shared destiny, passed from generation to generation. Understanding how this works requires a shift to what we call ‘generational thinking’.

God always thinks and acts generationally. It is rooted in the way He views time.

Let’s talk about that for a moment. Think of your life as a parade containing all the events you will experience within your lifespan. Because you have a ground level view, you are limited to experiencing the sight and sound of each event sequentially as it marches by. We call this ‘time.’ God, on the other hand, has the ‘Goodyear Blimp’ view of your parade.<sup>6</sup> From that vantage point, God can effortlessly view and access any portion of your parade at any time. Every action God takes in the current moment takes into consideration the entire parade. It is all NOW to Him. Not only that but He knows how each of the many parades connects to the next.

When we experience that same aerial view that God has, even for a few brief moments, we instantly realize that life’s greatest prize is far larger than we can see from ground level. Every personal victory has generational impact somewhere down the timeline of history. Here’s a stunning example: *Every time you lead one person to faith in Jesus Christ you may have changed the history of an entire family line*. You may have impacted thousands of lives! That thought dramatically increases the stakes when considering how and when to share your faith. The same dynamic is in play in the events preceding your life. You and I are benefitting from the faithfulness of those who went before us in ways we cannot comprehend this side of heaven.

Every life is limited by time and talent. Generational thinking frees your destiny from these limitations. Think of it this way: who has a better chance of winning a relay race, an *exceptionally talented* athlete who runs the entire four laps on her own, or four *fairly talented* runners running one lap each?

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6 I was going to call it the ‘God-year’ Blimp but that pun is too terrible to even mention in print.

(I hope the answer is obvious.<sup>7</sup>) When your life is lived with the expectation of inter-generational success, that's when the possibilities become limitless.

Generational thinking doesn't come naturally when our days are constantly being chopped up into tweet-length conversations and endless Instagram posts. Today's tech-driven, hyperactive culture constantly spews forth information that may fascinate for the moment but serves no purpose in our lives next week. Even when not staring at a pixelated screen, our energy is often consumed by attempts to 'keep our boat afloat' in the midst of urgent family needs, work commitments or health issues. Making time to pause and reflect on the long term picture can feel like trying to stop that boat while shooting the rapids. Nevertheless it's worth the effort. Discovering how your personal destiny is connected to those who came before you and those who will come after you will give shape to your prayer life, your business life and your most important relationships.

## **Life-Shaping Truth #2**

*The Race is won or lost in the baton pass.*

To understand the importance of the baton pass, let's contrast the relay race with other team sports competitions. In high school I ran as part of the cross-country team. Each school was permitted to have as many runners as they wished. However, only the top four finishers on each team count. The rest are ignored when tallying the total team score. So although it is technically a team event, it's really just a bunch of individual runners doing their best. As long as you have four good runners, it doesn't matter how bad the rest of your team performs (which is precisely why I 'qualified' for my school's team). Even a swimming relay requires only that the next swimmer wait until the previous one touches the wall. There is no physical connection between team members. They merely take turns trying to do their best.

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<sup>7</sup> just in case the answer is not obvious, it may help the reader to know that most Olympic relay teams complete four laps quicker than the individual world-record holder for the same distance.

Whoever currently holds  
the baton also holds  
the aspirations of the  
entire team.

But the track and field relay has one unique element that must be completely mastered by everyone before anyone can feel the weight of gold around their neck: *the baton pass*. While brief in timing and simple in concept, the baton pass is challenging to execute. The transfer between runners takes place within a marked ‘exchange zone’. The members of a track and field relay team have only one goal: *move the baton to the finish line*. It literally determines the outcome of the race. Therefore whoever currently holds the baton also holds the aspirations of the entire team. One Olympic sprinter describes it this way:

*“In the individual event it’s all about you and how you’re feeling and how fast you can go. In the relay...you have the momentum from the other runners to help you. It no longer becomes about how fast you run but how fast you get the (baton) around (the track).”<sup>8</sup>*

When the baton pass is successful, every team member has the chance to share a spot on the winner’s podium. When the baton falls to the ground, winning is impossible, regardless of how well any individual performs.

So, with respect to your own amazing race, *what is the baton?* It’s not a shiny piece of hollow aluminum. Your baton is the *Spiritual authority* that you carry as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is a good kind of authority. It comes from heaven and exists for the purpose of serving others, never for manipulation or control. Day by day it can be observed in the amount of healthy influence you have in other people’s lives. It’s light to the touch, but weighty in power. In your hands, it has the ability to bestow not only God’s presence, but also the accumulated wisdom and knowledge that the next runner in your race needs to succeed.

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8      Anchor leg runner Bolade Ajomale as quoted in the article ‘Life in the Fast Lanes’ by Kerry Gillespie, Toronto Star Sports, August 11, 2017



How this actually works will become crystal clear throughout the pages of this book. We will continue to circle around this theme, showing how it applies to your faith, your family and your life calling, whether you are a CEO or the boss of nobody in particular.

I am astounded at how many leaders I have spoken to have put little or no thought into how their role will be transferred to the next generation. We have often treated the sacred batons of faith and leadership like a set of car keys left on the counter with a note for the next one who happens along.

Fortunately every generation includes a few leaders who think generationally and prioritize the baton pass. Here's one example from the life of Apostle Paul, the first-century pioneer missionary. Paul's desire was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the entire known world. Through his outstanding efforts, this Good News story had already taken root for the first time in many new lands. While en route to the ends of the earth, he was sent to prison where he would eventually die. From his 'death row' cell, Paul wrote a letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, announcing "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race..."<sup>9</sup>

How could Paul assert that his race was finished when his major life goal was not yet fulfilled? Because his 'finish line' was not defined by task or location but by relationship. Paul had been intentionally preparing his protégé for such a time as this.<sup>10</sup> Paul knew that Timothy was ready and waiting in the 'exchange zone' with an open hand. As long as Timothy took the baton from Paul's outstretched arm, Paul's leg of the race was finished even though many more generations of runners would follow.

### Life-Shaping Truth #3

*Three in a row creates the opportunity for permanence.*

When three generations *in a row* successfully pass along what they carry to the next generation, the momentum becomes *unstoppable* for generations to come. In the Bible, the number three is often associated with

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9 2 Timothy 4:7

10 both through mentoring and the impartation of Spiritual gifts e.g. 2 Timothy 1:6

completion or fulfilment. This concept has an observable quality in life and in scripture.<sup>11</sup> Some sociologists have recognized that family traits or habits become ensconced around the third generation.<sup>12</sup> And in Major League sports, when a team wins a championship twice in a row it's called a 'repeat' but *three* times in a row is a '*three-peat*'. At that point you will hear them referred to as a dynasty. Three-in-a-row creates a momentum that draws even more top talent toward that team.

A *spiritual* three-peat can also represent the tipping point from individual destiny into a corporate dynasty. There is a famous three-peat family team in the Bible whose intergenerational story graphically illustrates our point. The backstory is that God had made a powerful 'family blessing' covenant with Abraham in which He promised to oversee the spiritual and physical welfare of every descendant of Abraham.<sup>13</sup> When God recruited Moses to deliver the enslaved nation of Israel, He began by revealing a new name for Himself:

*God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of **Abraham**, the God of **Isaac** and the God of **Jacob**—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation." Exodus 3:15*

In contrast to some of the more formal names of God revealed in the Old Testament, "*I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" sounds more like a nickname between friends. Why would He insist on this new name? The purpose was to remind Moses that the 'family blessing' passed between these three generations was the fountainhead for God's faithfulness to all the generations that would follow. Forty years later, Moses reminded the

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11 I am not a numerology guy but it is self-evident that the number three is significant in scripture. For example, the nature of God is completed by three distinct personalities: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the redemption story is completed in three parts; life, death and resurrection.

12 for a great example, try Googling 'Shirtsleeves to Shirtsleeves in three generations'

13 for a more in-depth look at the nature of the 'family blessing' promised to Abraham and accessible to everyone who believes, see *The Family Blessing Guidebook*, which Melissa, my wife, and I wrote together.

upcoming generation of this truth when he told them, “*It is not because of your own righteousness that you are going in to take possession of the land... the Lord your God will drive them out before you to accomplish what He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*”.<sup>14</sup>

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives faced unique battles and sometimes went ‘off track’. The mistakes they made are shamelessly recorded in the Biblical narrative.<sup>15</sup> However, *each one was faithful to pass along the family blessing*. In every generation the blessing not only continued but increased. The fourth generation produced Joseph - someone who truly changed the world in which he lived. He carried such unstoppable favor that a murder plot, false accusations and jail time couldn’t keep him down. Joseph’s wisdom and favor shaped the destiny of a nation.

At that point in time, the blessing resting upon the extended family clan become a permanent fixture. The centuries long trials in Egypt didn’t change God’s intention or weaken His resolve. Today, over three thousand years later, no amount of rebellion from within, or persecution from without, has been able to destroy the nation of Israel.

Full credit for this goes to the faithfulness of God to His own spoken Word. But His promise also needed to be ratified by three successive generations of obedience. It was set in stone by the family ‘three-peat’ of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their victory in the battle for permanence is still evident in the land of Israel today.

### **What does this look like today?**

Turning now to a more recent example, I want to share with you the story of a man whose small victory in an obscure mountain village helped changed the course of Christianity in many nations. Between the two World Wars of the twentieth century, a simple carpenter in Romania prayed constantly for the Lord to allow him to lead at least one Jewish person to faith in Christ.

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14 Deuteronomy 9:5

15 If you are not yet familiar with these three champions of the faith, perhaps you want to take time to read their four generation family story in Genesis chapters 12 through 50.

The problem was there were no Jews living in his village. One day a wealthy young Jewish atheist came to the village to recuperate from an illness in the fresh mountain air. The carpenter opened up his house as a convalescent home for this stranger and led the Jewish atheist to faith in Christ. The carpenter died a few years later, oblivious to the rest of the story.

The name of the Jewish man was Richard Wurmbbrand. Over the course of the next three decades, Wurmbbrand led thousands of people to Christ. After boldly confronting the atheistic Communist government in his own country, Wurmbbrand became the first Christian to be thrown into prison for his faith by that new government. After fourteen tortuous years, Richard was ransomed by Christians from the West. In short order, he and his wife Sabina began a world-wide movement called ‘Voice of the Martyrs’ which as I write is helping Christians who suffer for their faith in dozens of countries around the world. *One rural villager in Romania ran his race and passed the baton of faith to one man.* Three generations later, the impact is still being felt around the world.

### **Closer to Home**

My own childhood was devoid of the concepts we have been talking about. My parents never heard of terms such as ‘family blessing’ or ‘Spiritual authority’. In our home the word ‘blessed’ was used as a substitute swear word, while the phrase ‘kingdom come’ was a slang phrase used as a warning that I would soon be punished (don’t ask, it’s complicated). Thankfully, my Heavenly Father assigned angels to watch over me from the observation deck of His blimp. Consequently, I became a Christian at 15 years of age, a Holy Spirit intervention in the life of an aimless young man who was heading for trouble. The process included multiple attacks on my unbelief using strategically placed neighbours and a runaway teen aged girl. An African-American named Humphrey Duncanson from Long Island, New York was used to complete the intervention on a never-to-be forgotten Friday evening in Northern Ontario.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Humphrey was the guest Bible Teacher at a Bible camp which I had attended, so I thought, merely to develop my relationship with one or more of the female participants. Humphrey led me to Jesus that week.

My Heavenly Father subsequently arranged for a select few runners to meet me in the exchange zone of life and ministry. The leader of my first youth group, Bart Wiles, was mid-thirties when I met him. He was the first to pour in some of the family blessings I had missed early in life. He rewrote the script of what I believed possible for a kid like me. His passion for soul-winning marked me for life. Bart had huge plans for our growing youth group but his life was suddenly cut short by cancer before his thirty-ninth birthday.

The following year I landed at a church where the Pastor was legendary for thinking 'outside the box' of his generation. Pastor George Tunks was a true pioneer in ministry, planting churches from scratch, attracting new people of all social strata and imparting spiritual gifts into the lives of average people. George was a fearless risk taker, willing to go where others wouldn't as long as he perceived it to be a win for the Kingdom of God. Having recognized a call to ministry upon my life before I did, Pastor Tunks was willing to mentor me and place me in his pulpit on occasion even before I had formal Bible training. I learned much from him in those early days. To my disappointment, those days came to an end when my wife and I purchased our first home and moved out of town. Soon we lost touch with Pastor Tunks. Twenty-five years later, circumstances brought him back into my life and the bond between us resumed. Now in his nineties, Pastor Tunks was eager to finish his race well. He met with me one day and announced that he was conferring upon me what he called the mantle of his ministry. He prayed that I would pick up where he left off in the ministry of spiritual gifts for which he was renowned. Not long afterward George Tunks was 'promoted to Glory'. His act of faith bestowed upon me something invisible yet very real. Since that time, I have been privileged to see God's presence and power released upon many lives in many countries.

You have been given  
authority to receive and  
carry a baton in three  
areas of life: Your faith, your  
family and your life calling.

I thank God for a small number of men from the previous generation who saw me as God sees me *and were willing to trust me with what they carried spiritually*. Humphrey, Bart, George, and a couple of others are the precious few who showed me the race course, handed me a baton and cheered me on. They saved me from years of aimless running. It proved to be a Great Exchange!

### **What About Your Race?**

Are you aware of the areas in which you carry the baton of Spiritual authority? Maybe you have been running for years and are tempted to set it down quietly on the grass beside the track. Or perhaps you are still looking and waiting for a baton to carry.

Whatever your place in the race, be assured that *you have been given authority to receive and carry a baton in three areas of life*: Your faith, your family and your life calling. With respect to your faith, the authority you carry is the baton of the Gospel. For parents, it's your ability to impart not only the Gospel, but also a 'family blessing' to your children and children's children.

In the life calling or leadership arena, it is about recognizing and releasing the next generation of leaders to grasp the authority handed to them and take it to entirely new places. *It's critical that we get this right*. Those holding the baton cannot afford to cling to their positions of influence as if the baton itself is the prize. The destinies of others must not be put on hold while you wring out every last drop of self-fulfilment from your position of authority and influence. The generation of leaders currently emerging have 'world shaper' written across their hearts. Those of us who have been running our race for decades need to meet these potential heroes in the Exchange Zone *now* in order to accomplish a successful transfer of authority, gifts and anointing. The emerging generation is primed and ready to take what we carry to a whole new level. It's time to release them to become an unstoppable force in the earth!

CHAPTER 2

## World Shapers on the Way

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*You say you want a revolution*

*Well... you know*

*We all want to change the world...*

*From the song Revolution*

*by John Lennon & Paul McCartney*

**O**n March 24, 2018 a diminutive African American girl stood on a make-shift stage, her eyes scanning across a crowd estimated at a quarter of a million people. With the wireless microphone held close to her chin, she spoke with as much volume and authority as her nine-year-old voice could deliver.

*“My grandfather had a dream that his four little children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character,”* Yolanda Renee King, granddaughter of Martin Luther King Jr., continued, *“I have a dream that enough is enough.”*

The throngs had gathered in Washington D.C. for the ‘March for Our Lives’ anti-gun violence rally in response to a string of school shootings earlier the same year (in the USA). This spirited nine-year-old was just one of many speakers that day, and *all of them were pre-teens or teenagers*. Yolanda King then led the crowd in this impassioned chant she had prepared as *an eight-year-old* for the anniversary of her grandfather’s death:

*“Spread the word! ... Have you heard!*

*All across the nation!*

*We ... are going to be!*

*A great generation!”*

Yes they *are* going to be a great generation!

They are the first generation of ‘digital natives’, able to navigate the internet since they could hold a spoon.

They are calling out hypocrisy found in my generation.

They are questioning our methods and moving our boundaries.

They are assaulting the status quo and sweeping aside time-honored traditions with a shrug.

This new generation is also  
hungry for illustrations of  
integrity in the lives of the  
older generation.

I believe that, as long as the Word of God is not dishonored, that is what they are supposed to be doing! The emerging generation won’t take ‘no!’ for an answer. They are hungry for change and willing to make it happen with or without the blessing of those who went before them. If you are over forty years of age and feeling uncomfortable with this then I have a word for you. *Get over it.* Ready or not, what looks abnormal to the previous generation is about to become the new normal. A new generation of world shapers is well on their way.

### **Famous Baton Passes from the Past**

This new generation is also hungry for illustrations of integrity in the lives of the older generation. They aren’t unwilling to be led, but they are unwilling to trust a generation of leaders who have produced far too many moral failures. They also refuse to view previous accomplishments as their gold standard for success. (After all, isn’t this the definition of a relay race? The next runner receives the baton from the previous runner, and runs with it into new territory.)

Looking again at some famous Bible duos, we see that Joshua was not at all bound by the limits surrounding the life of Moses. Moses had taken the Israelites *out of* Egypt and *through* the wilderness but was unable to get them *into* the promised land. Moses even argued with God about that, for



he desperately desired to finish the race he had begun. However, the Jordan River would become an uncrossable boundary line. It would also become an exchange zone as *Moses' finish line became Joshua's starting line*. Once appointed, Joshua marched the children of Israel through that river to the other side without working up a sweat (or even getting wet). Immediately he began the conquest of the promised land. Unburdened by past failures and filled with fresh energy, Joshua also carried a new anointing upon his leadership. With Moses' mentoring and blessing, Joshua was 'ready to rumble' and fully equipped to lead the next generation into new territory.

Moving forward several generations in the Old Testament narrative, we read that the prophet Elijah performed more miracles than anyone had since the days of Moses. His victory over the false prophets on Mount Carmel had begun to turn the hearts of the people back to God, yet as his life came to an end, the nation was still in the grips of a corrupt queen and king. His protégé, Elisha, held his mentor in great esteem, yet something rose up within him that said, *'Elijah's anointing wasn't enough to complete the task - there must be more! And I am going to have it!*' On Elijah's last day on earth, Elisha looked him in the eye and requested a double portion of the miracle anointing Elijah had been carrying. Elijah replied *"You have asked a hard thing"*.<sup>17</sup> This is likely the summary of a much longer conversation. I imagine the full text of Elijah's reply may have sounded more like this, *"You want double my anointing!? No one has ever equaled the signs and wonders shown by my hand. Also the more I prophesied and performed miracles, the more trouble I received. Maybe you should lower your expectations. You can always ask, but you have about as much a chance of receiving a double portion as seeing me go up to heaven live in chariots of fire..."*. The chariots did come and Elisha was heartbroken to lose the most influential person in his life. Yet he immediately got to work and began to exercise his new level of authority. 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' he cried out as he struck Elijah's fallen cloak upon the water. Putting that into modern vernacular, Elisha was saying *"Ok, let's see this new authority in action!"*

Joshua and Elisha did greater exploits *than* their mentors, but they couldn't have done greater exploits *without* their mentors. Moses and Elijah willingly facilitated a transfer of Heavenly authority to the next generation.

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17 2 Kings 2:10

Consequently, Elisha and Joshua didn't miss a beat. They took the baton from the previous runner and *instantly picked up the pace*.

These examples are exceptional. More often, the history books serve up stories of failed opportunities and poor transitions. Today we are also hard-pressed to find examples of great transitions between leaders. And we have not yet arrived at the place where transferring the faith between family generations is the norm. I still hear far too many stories of adult children who do not desire to walk in the 'faith of their fathers'.

Success requires trust at  
both ends of the baton.

So this begs the question, what can bring the generations together long enough to enable a successful baton pass? The answer to that question came one Sunday morning to me from an actual track coach who heard me teach on this topic during a church service. Gordon Roddy used to coach relay teams at a local high school. The baton analogy profoundly spoke to him in ways I hadn't yet fully considered. His description of a winning relay team painted a perfect picture of what needs to happen between today's generations. Here's Coach Roddy in his own words:

*"I found that trust was a key component in relay building. Four strangers will never make a good relay team even if they are good runners. Developing strong relationships between the members of a relay team is crucial to success. Without positive interpersonal ties between its members, relay teams will disintegrate when things go wrong.*

*As for the race itself, runners racing into the exchange zone had to trust the next runner to take off at the right point in order to reach their maximum speed while still being inside the zone, and to then accept the baton. The outgoing runner had to trust the incoming runner to catch him/her and to blindly extend the correct hand back to accept the baton. Teams that developed trust often went far. Those that did not were seldom successful."*

Trust is the foundation that undergirds it all. The exchange zones are often crowded and confusing, with multiple hand-offs occurring simultaneously. Each runner must know what to expect from the one holding the other end of the baton. If the incoming runner does the job, the outgoing runner will feel the baton firmly pressed into his or her hand before they exit the zone.

To succeed in that environment requires trust *at both ends of the baton*. At one end trust is expressed by a willingness to let go at the right time. At the other end, it is seen as a willingness to wait just long enough to take hold of that which is being offered. Moses and Joshua had it. Elisha and Elijah had it. King Saul *didn't* have it. And David, the one waiting on him, paid the price. Saul was the first king appointed over Israel and he started out well. But Saul faltered when the rightful heir to the throne began to make a name for himself. Bursting onto the scene as a giant-killer, David's well-earned reputation only grew from there. It soon became apparent that David would not only become king, but also that he would eclipse the accomplishments of his predecessor. Rather than seeing this as God's plan to bless the nation, Saul became jealous to the point of obsession. Years of conflict ensued with an inevitable result. David became king anyway and by the time he died, Saul's reputation and legacy were demolished.<sup>18</sup>

David practised extreme honor toward Saul as an outward sign of his inward trust in God. He understood that an early start would disqualify him, not from being a physical king, but from carrying *the full weight of Spiritual authority* available in that role. So David waited arduously in the exchange zone unwilling to begin his leadership laps until, at long last, the baton of kingly authority was handed to him by those who buried Saul.

A story like that is brimming with applications for leaders and for families today. But before we return to the 21st century, I want to share the story of one more famous Bible duo that profoundly illustrates how to bless and release the next generation with the full authority that God intends.

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<sup>18</sup> I just compressed 20 chapters of the Bible into a few sentences. It's a fascinating read found in the book of 1 Samuel chapters 8 through 31

The main characters are two pregnant women, one middle-aged and the other a teenager. You may have already read their story, but this time think of it as two generations conducting one of the world's all-time great baton passes.<sup>19</sup>

Elizabeth's home became  
an exchange zone where  
Mary received exactly what  
she needed to begin her  
own amazing race.

Mary was engaged to a young man named Joseph when her life was interrupted by a high-ranking angel named Gabriel. The angel announced that the Holy Spirit would do the impossible by causing the young virgin to become pregnant with the Christ child, Jesus. Gabriel declared that Mary was highly favored in God's eyes, but in the eyes peering at her from doorways in her small village, Mary would likely be seen as an adulterer, eligible for severe punishment under the religious law. Was there no one able to perceive what God was doing? Mary's only action had been to embrace the great thing that God had revealed He wanted to do in her life. Who would believe her story and understand her situation? Who could bless what God was about to do? There was at least *one* person, Elizabeth, Mary's older relative. The same angel had visited her husband, Zechariah, six months previously to announce that Elizabeth would have an improbable birth in her postmenopausal years. The baby would grow up to become John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. Mary hurried to Elizabeth's home in the hill country with anxious anticipation. "Maybe Aunt Lizzy will understand me!" she thought. Her highest hopes would soon be fulfilled.

Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth burst into a prophetically inspired blessing declaring that Mary was carrying the Messiah. Elizabeth considered the event a great honor saying "Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" She understood that what Mary was carrying went beyond anything Elizabeth would ever deliver to the world. Elizabeth knew by the Holy Spirit that her child would spend his life pointing to the

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<sup>19</sup> see Luke chapter 1 for the full account

ministry of Mary's Child. Elizabeth's spiritual perception was matched only by her selflessness. Elizabeth didn't use Mary's visit as an excuse to tell her own story or dish out advice. She didn't begin the visit by saying "*Well young lady, I also heard from the same angel, and I too am expecting. If I can do it at my age, you'll be just fine.*" Elizabeth was focused upon Mary. She was fine with the fact that Mary's pregnancy was the bigger story. Elizabeth had an *improbable* pregnancy but Mary had an *impossible* pregnancy. As a result, Elizabeth's home became an exchange zone where Mary received exactly what she needed to begin her own amazing race.

Thirty years later their children would share a similar moment. When speaking of Jesus, John the Baptist declared, "He must increase, but I must decrease".<sup>20</sup> At that time John was the most famous person in the nation. But he knew that *now* was time for the greater One to take center stage. And so at the height of his popularity, he willingly surrendered the attention and Spiritual authority he carried. He pointed at the One who would pick up the national revival where John left off, and turn it into a redemption story. (Perhaps John inherited that attitude from his mother.)

Now let's pull the lessons we learn from these stories into the 21st century. We have some 'Marys' among us right now. They may not stand out in a crowd, but what is happening on the inside is profound. Their faith levels go beyond the norm. They have had personal encounters with the Holy Spirit and heard God's voice in private. They have said 'yes' in their heart to challenges that the previous generation has written off as impossible. As a result, they carry within them a revelation of what God wants to do in the world around them. Who else can see what they see?

In some instances, close friends or family have rejected them for what they carry. Misunderstood and unblessed, they still nurture a hope that there is someone who is spiritually in tune and selfless enough to help them deliver to the world what they are carrying. When they come to my generation for counsel or advice, they don't want us to use the conversation as an opportunity to tell our own story. Their desire is not for a fifty or sixty-year-old cool companion who dresses and acts like them. They don't need a buddy, they need an 'Elizabeth'.

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20 John 3:30

Someone who looks at them and recognizes them according to the Spirit.

Someone who prophesies about who they are in God's eyes.

Someone who calms their anxiety and affirms their future.

Someone who blesses them to go beyond the limits of the previous generation.

### **One Someone Can Be Enough**

Here's a timely word regardless of which end of the baton you find yourself holding: *Just one 'someone' can counterbalance all the negative voices by speaking truth on God's behalf.* Elizabeth was that one someone for Mary, and her actions more than counterbalanced an entire village full of unbelieving friends and family.

In spite of showing great bravery in battle, future King David was dishonored by his brothers and overlooked by his father. Yet when the prophet Samuel recognized David according to the Spirit, a life-pattern of being neglected was overturned. *One anointed person* launched David onto the pathway from shepherd boy to great king.

Looking at it from the other end of life, it may only take one baton pass to enable you to turn apparent failure into a stunning success. Moses tried to take a whole generation into the promised land, but only two made it; Joshua and Caleb. Joshua led the entire next generation into the fulfillment of Moses' deepest desire.

### **Someone Please Stand in the Gap**

When the Baby Boomers were young rebels, our parents coined the phrase 'Generation Gap' to refer to that empty void between the older and younger generations. We could not see eye to eye on many matters, both important and trivial. It felt as if neither side was willing to budge. We eyeballed each other and said 'come on over to my way of doing things'.

It's a place where destinies  
converge and dreams are  
fulfilled.

Today I see that gap becoming an overlap, one which contains a richly-textured Exchange Zone of ideas and shared goals. It's a place where destinies converge and dreams are fulfilled. We all need to intentionally spend time in that zone for the relay to succeed. It's time for some counter-cultural revolutionaries to rise up and do life together so that models of The Great Exchange become more commonplace. A few things will need to occur for this to happen. Here's a word for people at both ends of the baton.

### **A Word to My Generation**

Wake up and smell the coffee! Don't accept false finish lines and wander off the track. Your race is not over at retirement. Don't allow your life to become a game of 'Trivial Pursuit'. Someone is waiting for you to hand them the baton. For those of you who never left the track, don't treat that baton like it's the prize. Don't forfeit an enduring reward in order to eke out a few more years of status and entitlement. Your greatest accomplishment in life will occur when you, like Moses, give some of your authority and hard earned wisdom to the next generation.

### **A Word to Potential World Shapers**

You're already awake and smelling the artisanal organic fair trade coffee. You care about the earth in ways we should have long ago. You are passionate about social justice issues. You are wary of our identity politics. And you have a deep desire for authenticity in relationships. I do offer this warning though: cafe conversations will never change the world. Your insightful opinions are meant to be the starting line not the end game. You will never fulfill your destiny if you limit your circle of touch to your own kind. We can help you fulfill your destiny, but only if you'll come and meet us with open hands in the Exchange Zone.

### **I See a New Day**

I am hoping that by the time many of you read these words that they will sound obvious. I see some tangible signs of a new day rising. I see successful baton passes happening more often between family members and leaders of all kinds in recent days. I believe that a *new normal* characterized by blessing and honor is already taking shape, where the emerging generations naturally lean towards the wisdom of the previous generation; one where the incoming runners recognize and call forth the greatness of the outgoing runners.

The great intergenerational relay of faith, of family and of life calling is becoming the Most Amazing Race. Ever.