

Pat Bode Presentation

“Telling the Next Generation”

Let us begin with prayer. Dear Lord God, Father of us all, we thank you for bringing us here today to hear about the importance of “Telling the Next Generation” of your great love for us. We thank you for Easter- when you displayed that great love on the cross and the empty tomb. Give us a sense of urgency, to tell our family, friends and everyone around us about your son Jesus. Send your Spirit to bless our gathering today and grant that it will be a blessing to all of us here and all those who we reach in our lives. In your Son’s name. Amen

We are here today to deal with a very important topic and that is how do we “Pass the Baton—Telling the Next Generation of God’s Love.” This has been a responsibility of God’s people since the beginning. God commands us to tell our children about Him. Ps 78: 1–7 is the basis for our discussion today.

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob, and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God,
and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

We know that God has given us this responsibility—to tell the next generation—because if we don’t do it, who will? Why are we to tell our children and grandchildren, why are we to serve as mentors to others? Because there are great threats out in the world and we are to take up the struggle. The world, the culture and Satan himself are out to destroy the family, the Church and even our morality as a nation. All around us there are those who want us to compromise, to give up our principles and beliefs. People of faith are regarded as old fashioned, prejudiced, and judgmental, and we are to sit down and keep quiet about our deeply held beliefs. We are even losing our personal and religious freedoms in this country and we need to tell our children how it is that GOD wants us to live as His people!

Just what is our purpose here? I have realized as I have grown older that my priorities for my children and grandchildren have changed and even intensified! My heartfelt desire and my daily prayer is to see them all in Heaven with me and to fulfill the purpose for which God put all of us on earth. And how will this be accomplished if I do not pass on my Christian heritage to them? I want them to know who they are—children of God—and who they belong to their earthly family and God’s family. And we do this, we pass the baton on to our children by teaching them about Jesus in our homes and churches, leading by example, worshipping together and praying for and with them.

What is your passion in life? Do you love music, art, sports, cooking? Whatever you are most passionate about, you will want to share that passion with those around you. Take for example, music: let's say you love classical music and you want your little girl to love it too and become really good at it. You will play music in your home, you will teach her all about the great composers and their compositions. You will get little Susie signed up for piano lessons, you will urge her to practice every day so she will become proficient at the piano. You will take her to concerts and you will attend her recitals- music will be a focal point in your lives. And chances are that little Susie will grow up to love music just like you do. But she may never acquire a love for it if you never talk about it, never play music, never let her know how important it is to you that she love music too. So it is with our Christian faith! Our children and those who we mentor are much more likely to have a strong faith in God if they see us exhibit our faith on a daily basis.

When do we need to start mentoring the next generation? Can we wait until the kids are old enough to make up their own minds? We all know that doesn't work. We need to teach our children about their Savior when they are young. Prov 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it." Studies have shown that if the Gospel has not been presented to people when they are young, certainly by age thirteen, it becomes a much greater challenge to bring them into the Kingdom. Not impossible, but certainly more difficult.

We are very careful to take care of the physical needs of our young children, their medical care, their education, their social activities and so on. How much more important is it that we also take care of their spiritual needs—"the one thing needful"—the very thing that can determine their eternal destiny. Would we neglect this, or deny this to our children? It is very easy to get bogged down in the daily struggle of work, feeding the kids, attending their school activities and games etc., and then we don't have the energy to take care of the most important things! Let us not ignore this very important command of God!

In Scripture, life is compared to a race. In Acts 20:24 Luke says: "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace." And in 2 Tim 4:7, St. Paul says: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

So what's with the baton example? Well, it's a sports analogy that has been used in other areas, business, faith, etc. We all know a relay race is like our life; we are running around the track—our race through life—and the next runner comes up behind us to grasp the baton and continue the race when we drop out. It is at this point that the race is won or lost. If we trip or the runner behind gets distracted and doesn't grasp the baton, then the heritage may be lost at that point. This is a crucial time between generations—you will see Mom and Dad in church, but not the kids. Now this doesn't have to be the end—it's not too late—the next runner may pick up the baton later and resume the race, but it is a tricky time in the spiritual life of families. And what we are dealing with today is how we can avoid dropping the baton between the generations.

In preparing to pass the baton we want to make sure that we do this **INTENTIONALLY**. Jesus was **INTENTIONAL**! In Mark 10, "People were bringing their children to Jesus so He could touch them. When the disciples saw this they said, "Jesus is too busy; take the

children away. He doesn't have time for them. He has more important things to do." When Jesus heard about this He said. "STOP! Let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them for the Kingdom also belongs to them." Jesus took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." He noticed the children and welcomed them! He was INTENTIONAL! We want to be INTENTIONAL as well. We need to have a plan as to how we teach our children—to be careful in our speech and actions and to always deal with them in love.

We all know teenagers are bombarded with a host of issues every day as they go about learning important life lessons. Besides all the competitions vying for their time and interest, teens are faced with numerous temptations and decisions regarding their use of: drugs and alcohol, sex, abortions, online safety, peer pressure, depression and suicide, self image and self esteem, whether they will attend church and youth activities, prayer life etc., as well as dealing with hurricanes of emotion and hormones that at times overwhelm and confuse them. A recent poll confirms that kids are suffering from emotional pain and pent-up anger resulting from a variety of factors (including divorce, all kinds of abuse, peer relationships, chaotic family life etc.) and are looking for HOPE and HELP as they transition from childhood to adulthood in an increasingly malicious and fast-paced world. There's a LOT AT STAKE! Teens who seek help, but don't find it often abandon religion, generally never to return to it. Our current culture with it's cool videos and music, it's technology together with the pressures of peers and political correctness—all tend to steer young people away from their spiritual roots. The Barna/Group Youth Poll did some research and their statistics show that there's a good reason to believe that the current generation of young adults are fleeing churches in greater numbers and will be harder to lure back! So what are we to do? We need to begin the race when they are young!

Running the Race... On your Mark... Get Set... Go! The relay race begins with parents. Parents function much like a coach... we prepare our children for adolescence and adulthood, teach the fundamentals, drill them and practice getting them ready for the approaching contest. Our coaching should have many teachable moments. We need to give examples to follow and those examples should speak volumes. The formative years are critically important for the spiritual development of our children and that should not only take place at home, but also at church. That is why it is so important to bring your children to church as well as teach them at home. If we fail to teach our children about the Lord we rob them of their true inheritance, the knowledge of God and His will. We cannot pass anything off to our heirs that we do not possess ourselves. If we fail to prepare, we prepare to fail! We need to have constant communication and to pray for them as well as with them. The coach doesn't run the race for the athlete, but is present as needed, prepares the best she can, encourages, teaches, supports, and makes them practice and keep practicing. Then that moment of truth eventually comes when we send them off on the next chapter of their lives. We gently remind them to not forget what we have taught them and to watch out for the demons in life. They need to know that storms will come and the enemy will try to bring them down. And we need to remind them that Jesus will always be there; they just need to go to Him. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Just remember that God said this the children of Israel as they were being taken into captivity by the Babylonians. He told them to marry, have children, build houses, plant crops and to be blessing to all those around them. This is what we are to do when we go out into the world!

KEEPING THE PACE. Impress upon children while they are young that God is a wonderful God and that all things are possible with Him! Give your children an advantage at the start of the race... equip them from birth... don't wait to start when they are about ready to leave home. Do daily devotions, encourage Bible reading and memorization, teach them to forgive, read Bible stories before bedtimes, listen to Christian music, review their Sunday School lessons, pray together, monitor their movies etc. We need to put God first in our lives and to demonstrate what it means to trust God in all areas of life. Children learn faith from people who practice faith. We need to model it for them. The greatest hope for our children is that they fully put their trust in God. Encourage them to do their best in school and their activities and to always glorify God with their accomplishments. Cheer them on in their successes; be there for disappointments. Enlist others to cheer them on... we need to do just as a coach would do and assemble the best team possible for our children and surround them with healthy and supportive friends, relatives, pastors, youth directors, teachers and neighbors. Make family a HUGE priority! Be There! Be Available! Being there for your child is authentic, intentional engagement in conversation and discussion. Make it quality time... get their undivided attention at least once a day, turn everything off, unplug the cords, take the batteries out and be there for your child.

ROUNDING THE CORNER. Nothing is ever too big or too little to talk to God about. If your child stumbles (drops the baton) whatever the issue or problem, be there for them. Don't necessarily step in to solve it for them but express your unconditional love, pass on your wisdom and spiritual wealth; and if appropriate express your disappointment if it is due to a bad choice. Proverbs 3:11 says, "my son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke." It tells us that discipline is not necessarily punishment if it is given in love, it is correction with instruction. Encourage kids to turn their problems over to God to lighten the burden. Just remember who you are, or most important, whose you are! 1 Peter 2:9..." But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Before her children left for college, a friend of mine laminated a list for her kids called... **MOM'S COLLEGE RULES:** 25 things as a gentle reminder encouraging them to be wise. (College Rules to Follow)

Keep the finish line in the runner's view. Unless you talk to your children about life, how will they know what the eternal prize is? If you do not remind them, who will? They have multitudes of distractions and other sources to turn to. We can't expect to run a good spiritual race if our spiritual health is poor, so we have to take the time to maintain and improve our spiritual health, just like our physical health.

TRANSFERRING THE BATON. If a failure is to happen, it will be in the exchange between the generations. The baton is not taught... it is caught. You pass the baton of faith moment by moment, in a thousand ways. Christianity is not just a Sunday sport! Those teachable moments with our children can happen while shopping at the mall, playing football, watching TV, in the classroom, whenever they observe how we interact with and treat others and so much more. And when your children give you those windows of opportunity, take them, and teach them words of faith. We must understand that the Church

is only one generation away from extinction! We have a sacred trust to pass on to our heirs—as families and as a Church! We have the Word of God and are empowered by the Spirit of God. Keep your eyes on the Cross and do not forget that we are all missionaries in one way or another, called to make a difference in the place where God has placed us. We are to be gatekeepers and guard the gates with every breath and every action because the enemy is pushing in on us. Wouldn't it be great if each generation improved over the previous one? If each new generation loved God more, followed God more, praised God more! Let us not turn our back on our children! Let us tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. So you may say, How can I tell anyone anything? If God has ever encouraged you through His Word, then PASS IT ON! If God has ever taught you anything through your life experiences, THEN PASS IT ON! If God has imparted any important lessons through personal life failures, THEN PASS IT ON! PASS ON TO OTHERS ANYTHING GOD HAS GIVEN YOU!

We need to communicate with the next runner. As we run the race we acquire the wisdom to be able to warn the next runners of pitfalls, detours and other entities that would detract from the race. One of my favorite Far Side cartoons depicts a bunch of lemmings running headlong into the sea. But there is one little lemming there that has a lifesaver on! He is in the position to warn others of the looming danger. We can be like that little lemming; we have Jesus Christ as our “lifesaver”! We should warn other runners of the dangers around them and their need for a Savior!

One of my favorite stories about a parent's Christian example is one I heard from Pastor Hannemann, a retired pastor in my congregation. He remembers when his father (who was also a pastor) would go up to his bedroom at night. Everyone in the house would listen for the “clump-clump,” the sound of his shoes hitting the floor as he knelt at his bedside to pray. Clump-Clump. It was the sound that spoke volumes about their father and his relationship with God. And he didn't have to say a word! He was telling the next generation with his actions, the sound of his actions! And I am sure his family grew to depend on that sound; it was part of his legacy to them.

I hope that we all can leave a similar legacy for our descendants. What will those runners who replace you say about YOU when you have finished the race? Will they remember that you had a great faith, that you shared that faith with them?

The last thing I want to tell you is that “It's not too late”! Even if the baton has somehow been dropped that does not mean that it won't be picked up by another runner. So often our young people leave the baton on the track and go off for a while to pursue their own thing. But many of them will later return, pick up the baton and continue the race. It often happens when they have children of their own. Recently I talked with my sister and she shared this story with me. For years she had been agonizing over and praying for her son. He had sort of dropped out of church in his teens. Then he married a girl who did not share his faith and they did not attend church, even when they had a baby girl. My sister nagged, cajoled and prayed and nothing happened. Then about a year ago she visited them and as usual whenever she visited they offered to take her to church. Afterwards my sister spoke with the Pastor and asked him to call on the couple. He did so and offered to instruct the young wife in the faith, but both of them had all sorts of excuses: we're tired, we work all the time, we have only Saturday afternoons off. You know the routine; we have heard all the excuses!

But the Pastor persisted! He would not give up and they finally agreed to have him come to their home and give them private instructions, on Saturday afternoons! They took the classes, they joined the church, they had their baby baptized and they love their new Pastor and Church. They picked up the baton and returned to the race! All of us have someone in our sphere of influence who needs to pick up the baton. Let's pray that after today's gathering we will be even more urgent about praying for them! Because if we do not do it, who will? The Holy Spirit will help us in this effort, His promise is sure. We can do nothing without God's help, but with Him all things are possible!

Let us Pray: Lord God, Go with us today as we return to our homes and help us tell the next generation about your great love for us. May we never forget what you have done for us through your Son Jesus Christ. And may we all, with our children, grandchildren and those children yet to be born, be with You in Heaven someday. In your Holy Name. Amen