

Passing the Torch of Leadership to the Next Generation

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The Making of a Leader Series

Numbers 27:12-23

One of the greatest challenges facing businesses as well as non-profits such as churches is succeeding after a strong leader retires or moves on or dies. In 1982 Tom Peters and Robert Waterman wrote a best-selling book titled, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons From America's Best Run Companies*. It was one of those landmark books and it was on the best-sellers list for 3 years.

What Peters and Waterman did was to sift through corporate America where they found 36 companies which had cleared "all the hurdles for excellent performance." Some of the 36 companies they selected are still doing well. Others are case studies for good companies gone bad like Kodak or K-Mart. And many are no longer in existence, casualties of corporate takeovers. Now a major reason for many of the businesses decline is the failure of a strong leader to set up their successors for success.

In Jim Collins' wonderful book *Good to Great*, Collins asks us to consider the Rubbermaid company. It was a company that rose from obscurity to become number one on *Fortune Magazine's* annual list of America's most-admired companies. And then, just as quickly, it disintegrated into such sorry shape that it had to be acquired by another company to save itself.

What happened? Rubbermaid had a brilliant, egocentric, hard-driving leader named Stanley Gault. The company was built entirely on Stanley Gault's personality and drive. He was a great leader, but he left behind a company that could not be great without him.

The Challenge of Successful Succession

It is not just businesses that struggle to succeed after a strong leader departs. Churches regularly struggle with this as well. So, for example, after 3-time Southern Baptist President Adrian Rodgers retired from Bellevue Baptist Church in 2005, his church rapidly declined in attendance.

First Baptist in Atlanta has struggled for years trying to find a co-pastor and eventual successor for pastor Charles Stanley.

And perhaps the saddest case of all, involving the unsuccessful passing of the torch happened down in Dallas, Texas, at First Baptist Church back in the early 1990's. The long-time pastor of First Baptist Church was a man named W.A. Criswell, who was in his 80s and had pastored the church for over 50 years. The

church became fabulously successful under Criswell's leadership. The church owned blocks of prime downtown real estate. Tom Landry, the Dallas Cowboys' football coach, along with other Dallas Cowboy football players attended First Baptist. First Baptist of Dallas was considered to be at the very top of the heap among the tens of thousands of Southern Baptist churches in America. It was number one! Many Southern Baptists jokingly said, "Well, Muslims face Mecca when they are praying, Jews face Jerusalem, and we Baptists face Dallas."

But, as I said, Criswell was in his 80s and it was time to pass the torch. So the search committee brought in Joel Gregory, who was a successful Baptist pastor, to succeed the legendary and much-loved W.A. Criswell. Twenty-one months later, Joel Gregory resigned in total failure. He wrote a book about this unsuccessful handoff of power. It was called *Too Great a Temptation*, in which he details the failure of this succession plan. Looking back, he wondered why in the world he ever took the job. And as he examined his own heart, Pastor Gregory said it was hard to resist a church that offered its pastor a \$500,000 home, a salary of \$165,000, a signing bonus of \$100,000, and a study paneled in cherry with shelves for 6000 volumes, Waterford crystal chandeliers throughout, four Dallas Cowboy season tickets in a corporate box, a luxury auto. This was back in 1992. You could double all of those amounts today.

But he said in the book that Criswell never intended to let go of leadership. This is, of course, just Pastor Gregory's view. But instead, Pastor Criswell undermined Pastor Gregory at every turn. He blocked any new initiative. He bad-mouthed him to the Board. In short, Pastor Gregory painted Pastor Criswell to be like Shakespeare's King Lear, or the Old Testament's King Saul – an old man who refused to pass on the torch long after his days of effective leadership were gone.

Now some Christian leaders have solved the issue of succession by passing the torch on to their children. So you see that in the Billy Graham organization. The torch was passed to Franklin Graham. And Joel Osteen's dad passed the torch along to Joel. And Robert Schuler passed the torch to his son. Other Christian organizations have looked for clones of their former leaders. "We're looking for someone who is exactly like the leader that we have."

Torch passing is something that we have to constantly think about here at the Vineyard. We have created a church that is committed to constantly give away our best leaders. We've sent out 24 church plants from this church and well over a thousand people from Vineyard Columbus have joined those church plants over the years. We'll also have 24 full-time missionaries on the field along with 17 kids. Forty-one people from this church will be on the mission field by January 1st serving in Tanzania, Amsterdam, Brazil, and the Sudan. So all of those leaders are sent out. And then, of course, like every other church we have pastors and leaders who move on from here to other cities and other jobs. Our

church constantly has to figure out how to successfully pass the torch of leadership to the next generation.

I've been doing a series on leadership over the summer that I took from the life of Moses, a series that I called "The Making of a Leader." And in this last talk, I want to talk about the final task of great leadership which is to ensure the success of your successor. I've called today's talk, "Passing the Torch of Leadership to the Next Generation." Let's pray.

Numbers 27:12-23

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. 13 After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, 14 for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes." (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.) 15 Moses said to the Lord, 16 "May the Lord, the God of every human spirit, appoint someone over this community 17 to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." 18 So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. 19 Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. 20 Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. 21 He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in." 22 Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses.

Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves finishing well

Let's look at this.

Numbers 27:12-14

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. 13 After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, 14 for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes." (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

You know, the first task of a leader who wants to successfully pass the torch is to finish well. The apostle Paul was absolutely obsessed with finishing well. Paul

understood life to be a race that you have to run until you cross the finish line. You can't stop five yards short of the tape. When he met with the Ephesians elders for the last time, these elders whom he loved, Paul said in Acts 20:24:

Acts 20:24

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

He challenged the Corinthians to finish well:

1 Corinthians 9:24

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Paul describes his joy at the end of his life this way in 2 Timothy 4:7:

2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

There are many, many leaders in the Bible as well as in church history who have finished well. There is Joseph, Joshua, Daniel, the apostles, John Wesley, William Wilberforce, Pope John Paul II, Billy Graham, and millions of Christians who are not nearly as well known. They did not stop ten yards short of the tape, but ran all the way through to the end, right into the arms of Jesus.

There may be even more leaders who ran out of gas before the end because of bad choices that they made somewhere along the way, because of sinful compromises, because of a growing hole in their inner lives. They never got to the place to make the handoff well.

How many of you were screaming at your TVs, like I was, when you watched the two Olympic relays – first the men fumbling the handoff of the baton and then the women. I don't think there was any American who watched that who didn't just scream at the TV, "No! This can't be happening!"

And over and over again, you see in both the Bible and in contemporary churches leader after leader who fails to hand the baton off successfully, dropping it before it gets into the hand of their successor. Sad stories are found everywhere in scripture. There's Noah, King Saul, King Solomon, King Asa, Judas, Demas.

And we know from the newspapers of so many leaders, folks on the national scene as well as the local scene, who have failed to make the handoff. How many churches have suffered terrible declines because the current leader was discovered to have had an affair, or was involved in some shady business deals?

Many people leave the church disillusioned. People are hurt. It is so difficult for the successor to regain trust and initiate new vision. Have you ever been in a church where a leader has dropped the baton before the handoff?

Moses was in danger of not finishing well. Let's look again at Numbers 27:12-14:

Numbers 27:12-14

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. 13 After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, 14 for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes." (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

The reference in verse 14 is to an incident that is recorded back in Numbers 20. Moses was told by the Lord to speak to a rock and command it to gush with water. Instead, Moses in anger struck the rock. Apparently, Moses had set himself up over against God's people. He didn't speak to the rock, he spoke to God's people. He misused God's gifts.

There are any number of things from the Numbers 20 account of Moses sin that caused God to reject Moses as the one who would lead the people into the Promised Land. We need to understand Moses' sentence. Moses wasn't excluded from the blessing of eternal life. But he was excluded from leading people into the Promised Land of Israel.

Do you know there comes a time when the Lord will put somebody on the shelf because of repeated acts of abuse, disobedience or immorality? When the Lord will say, "You are disqualified."

Leaders, potential leaders, people, your doctrine of grace must include the notion of the Lord's freedom to say to you after repeated acts of disobedience, "You have disqualified yourself from leadership in my son's body." I don't believe that a person can be disqualified from a relationship with God, but I do believe that the Lord reserves the right to put a person on the shelf and to say, "You are disqualified from your present position of leadership."

I see that in 1 Corinthians 9 when Paul says:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 26 Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the

air. 27 No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

I think Paul was talking about disqualification from the great privilege of being able to carry the gospel to others as an apostle, the privilege of Christian preaching, the privilege of Christian leadership. What a tragedy to disqualify yourself!

What the apostle Paul is saying here and what we read in many other scriptures is that we can lose our place of usefulness and, indeed, of leadership, and God will select someone else to work out his purposes in the world. God's purposes don't end with the failure of a leader. God will simply select someone else. We see this really well illustrated in the book of Esther where Esther's Uncle Mordecai speaks to her in Esther 4:14:

Esther 4:14

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

A moment of destiny had come for Esther and she was wavering in her response. So Mordecai warns Esther and says to her, "Listen, God has a purpose. He is intent on doing something in this world. And he will do it – if not through you, he will do it through someone else. But you won't have the privilege of leading this. You won't get to participate." What a tragedy to disqualify yourself!

You know, in this regard, one of the saddest verses in the Bible of a man who disqualified himself for a period of many years from ministry, back in the book of Judges we are told the story of Samson. Samson had a great anointing from God, the great empowering from God to do ministry, tremendous impact as a result of the work of God in his life. Samson had the physical attributes of leadership. He had the calling of the Lord. But as a result of unchecked passion, repeated immorality, he disqualified himself.

And in the story of Samson in the book of Judges, I think there is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. Samson is being tied up by Delilah, his newest sexual conquest. And he continually breaks the bands, whatever she ties him up with, he is able to break the bands. And then finally she finds out the secret of strength is in his hair and she cuts his hair. He is tied up again by her. And it says in Judges 16:20:

Judges 16:20

Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

There comes a point in a person's ministry, where after continuing on empty for so long, being rendered insensitive to the voice of God for so long, that the person may not realize it, but the Lord leaves. And he shakes himself like Samson and does all the things just like before. Only there is no affect any more. The anointing is gone. And all you have now is the show.

See, I think the Lord works this way: He chooses to put an anointing on a person. Then he tests the person's integrity. He checks the man's obedience. If the person is disobedient, however, the gifting may continue for a time, and this becomes deceptive to the man because he says, "My goodness, I still have the same impact even though I am doing my own thing. The Lord will probably continue with me forever like this." But at a certain point, the Lord says, "You have now disqualified yourself. The kingdom is being ripped away from you." And one day the man wakes up, shakes himself like Samson, and discovers that the Lord is not there any more. And so the man can continue to do the razzle-dazzle, continue to pretend that things are happening, but it is over. There is no more real healing. There is no more real prophecy. There is a change in their teaching effectiveness. God is gone! And the Lord says, "You are now on the shelf. I have gone on to look for a man after my own heart."

But here's the thing about Moses, though he stumbled badly several times in life (killing one of the Egyptian masters and then trying to cover up the murder, and in Numbers 20, an incident referred to here where he struck the rock in disobedience to God, among others) he always got up! And so he is an example of a man who finished well.

I want to read to you a portion of a poem titled *The Race*, by D.H. Groberg:

*But as they speeded down the field
Across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win
Lost his step and slipped.*

*Trying hard to catch himself
His hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd
He fell flat on his face.*

*So down he fell and with him hope
He couldn't win it now –
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow,*

*But as he fell his dad stood up
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
“Get up and win the race.”*

*He quickly rose, no damage done.
Behind a bit, that’s all –
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.*

*So anxious to restore himself
To catch up and to win –
His mind went faster than his legs;
He slipped and fell again!*

*He wished then he had quit before
With only one disgrace.
“I’m hopeless as a runner now;
I should not try to race.”*

*But in the laughing crowd he searched
And found his father’s face.
That steady look which said again:
“Get up and win the race!”*

*So up he jumped to try again
Ten yards behind the last –
“If I’m to gain those yards,” he thought,
“I’ve got to move real fast.”*

*Exerting everything he had
He gained eight or ten
But trying so hard to catch the lead
He slipped and fell again!*

*Defeat! He lay there silently
A tear dropped from his eye –
“There’s no sense running any more;
Three strikes: I’m out! Why try?”*

*The will to rise had disappeared
All hope had fled away;
So far behind, so error prone;
A loser all the way.*

*"I've lost, so what the use," he thought.
"I'll live with my disgrace."
But then he thought about his dad
Who soon he'd have to face.*

*"Get up," an echo sounded low.
"Get up and take your place;
You were not meant for failure here.
Get up and win the race."*

*"With borrowed will, get up," it said,
"You haven't lost at all,
For winning is no more than this:
To rise each time you fall."*

*So up he rose to run once more,
And with a new commit
He resolved that win or lose
At least he wouldn't quit.*

*So far behind the others now,
The most he'd ever been –
Still he gave it all he had
And ran as though to win.*

*Three times he'd fallen, stumbling;
Three times he rose again;
Too far behind to hope to win
He still ran to the end.*

*They cheered the winning runner
As he crossed the line first place,
Head high, and proud, and happy;
No falling, no disgrace.*

*But when the fallen youngster
Crossed the line last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer
For finishing the race.*

*And even when he came in last
With head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he'd won the
Race to listen to the crowd.*

And to his dad he sadly said,

"I didn't do so well."

"To me, you won," his father said.

"You rose each time you fell."

I wonder how many of you here have stumbled somewhere along the line – a public way - for most of you who are not in the public eye, the stumble would be known perhaps only by a few folks – or perhaps you stumble or repeated stumbles are known only by God. I wonder how many of you have stumbled along the line and you are still lying face down on the track. Here is the Word of the Lord to you:

Get up and finish the race!

You may not be able to regain your former position. You may now run with a limp. But like Moses, get up and finish the race. Serve the Lord and be useful in the place you now find yourself. If your influence is less, so be it. The Holy Spirit would speak to many of you regarding the God of second, third, and fourth chances, "Get up and finish the race!"

Successfully passing the torch involves waiting upon God's appointment

We read in Numbers 27:15-17 these words:

Numbers 27:15-17

Moses said to the Lord, "May the Lord, the God of every human spirit, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."

There is a tremendous principle for passing the torch to the next generation. The leader does not appoint the successor. The Lord appoints the successor. Moses did not submit a slate of candidates to the Lord and say, "OK, God, I've narrowed the list down to these four people. My strong preference, if you don't mind, is Candidate number two."

Here's the problem: When leaders, especially strong leaders, appoint their own successors, they usually appoint people who look and think very much like themselves. But the Lord, who knows everything about the future, the God who is over every human spirit, may want to appoint a person who has very different skills, and a very different orientation, a different gift package than their predecessor because he may want to take a church or ministry in a whole different direction. The whole context is changed; the mission is changed; we need someone totally different than we did in the past.

And Moses understood this. He said, "Lord, I want to wait on your appointment. You indicate who you are choosing because you know the hearts of people. You

know the challenges of the job. You know the future context that this leader is going to operate in. You choose the person. Don't make them a clone of me." God is the God of every human spirit. In other words, God sees through right to the spirit. We only see the outside package. God reminds us of this in 1 Samuel 16:7:

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Many of you know the story that this verse came from. Samuel, the prophet, is sent to find a successor for King Saul, who failed to finish well. He is sent to the house of a man named Jesse. The Lord said that the new King is going to be found in Jesse's house.

Well, Samuel gets to the door and sees one of Jesse's sons, a young man by the name of Eliab. And Samuel said to himself, "That's it. He's the one. He is tall, strapping, he looks like a leader." But here is the problem. Samuel was looking for a clone of King Saul. He said, "I have in mind what leaders look like. They look like the former leader. That's what we need, someone with the former leader's gift package, someone who thinks like the former leader. No change at all." And the Lord said, "Not so fast. I want someone who is totally different than King Saul. I want to select a young shepherd boy, a teenager, who is overlooked even by his own father. I'm picking King David."

Successfully passing the torch involves waiting upon God's appointment. How are we to discern God's appointment? Apart from a prophetic word (and often prophesy is involved in selecting someone) but in addition to prophesy, or to complement prophesy so that we have in an appointment the best of both the natural and the supernatural, what are the natural, rational tests for appointing a woman or man to a position of leadership?

Well, as I said, what we should not do is look for someone just like the predecessor. "We need a children's pastor, or worship pastor, or youth pastor, or senior pastor, let's pick someone who is just like their predecessor." That's a huge mistake! Changing context requires a very different set of gifts and skills and temperament. What it takes to start a work is different than what it takes to sustain a work, or to take the work to the next level, or to carry it to the next generation.

What it took to lead the children of Israel through the wilderness is different than what it is going to take to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan River and do armed battle with the Canaanites.

So what are we looking for? How do we discern who the Lord might be appointing?

Let me give you some general tests of leadership and then we'll look at Joshua's specific qualifications. In Luke 16:10-12 Jesus gives us three general tests of leadership. And these three tests ought to be applied to virtually any leader before they are appointed.

Luke 16:10-12

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Now here is Jesus' first test of leadership, Luke 16:10:

Luke 16:10

Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

In other words, one of the ways that you discern whether God may be appointing you to a position of leadership is to watch how you do in small things. Are you good about hosting a kinship group? Are you on time? Do you show up even when it is totally inconvenient? Do you complete your assignments? It is easy to immediately move to the issue of gifting. It is easy to be dazzled by someone's knowledge. But Jesus says don't rush to consider the person's giftings as an initial matter.

Have you been faithful? Have you broken any promises? Have you repaired the damage they did in the past? Are there any unfulfilled commitments? Faithfulness in little things before you get to be set over much. How would you say you do on this test of faithfulness?

Here's the second test, verse 11:

Luke 16:11

So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

In other words, before you are given spiritual leadership, Jesus says, how are you doing in what we might call the "secular realm"? An integrity test that is often missed in appointing leaders is what is your reputation at your jobs? If you can't study, or can't force yourself to open a book, or can't hold an 8-5 job, why would we give you spiritual responsibility? What's your reputation at your secular job? Do you show up on time? Do you put in a full day's work for a full day's pay? Are

you a really diligent worker? If not, you won't be a hard worker at the church. Jesus is underlining the obvious for us. A wonderful test for spiritual leadership is secular leadership.

I am so grateful when I hear of a member of Vineyard Columbus who is well thought of in their particular job, or in school. Ministry is not an escape where a person says, "Well, I'm failing at everything else, why don't I try to become a pastor or a worship leader?" Spiritual leadership in the church ought to sound more like I am doing really well in my other job, but God seems to be pressing me and pushing me to work in the church.

Here is the third test:

Luke 16:12

And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

Before you get to lead a ministry and have your own vision, how have you done in fulfilling someone else's vision in ministry? You know, it is not hard to find people of vision. There are lots of folks with great ideas. Great ideas are a dime a dozen. Jesus doesn't ask, "Do you have a great vision, or great ideas?" Rather, he asks, "Have you been zealous in carrying out the vision and great ideas of someone else?"

How have you done in carrying out Vineyard's vision? How have you done in carrying out the vision of the children's ministry leader, or the women's ministry leader, or small group leader? In other words, before you get other people to carry water for you, how have you done in carrying water for others? Have you been loyal to those who are over you? Do you speak well of your leaders in private? Are you really supportive of your leaders? Or do you always have a better idea and critique them privately? If you always critique leaders, then you have failed a basic integrity test and the Lord is not going to appoint you with that which is your own because you haven't been faithful in dealing with that which is another's.

These are the three general tests before we appoint anyone to a position of spiritual leadership: faithfulness in small things, a good reputation in a secular position, and the ability to strongly support someone else's vision and leadership.

Successfully passing the torch in leadership involves matching the need to the person chosen

We read in Numbers 27:18 these words:

Numbers 27:18

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him."

Why did God appoint Joshua to be Moses' successor? Why did God say, "Moses, it is Joshua. Of the people who passed these general tests, Joshua is the one I'm specifically designating to lead the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land"?

First of all, Joshua is:

Someone whose skill set intersects with the need

The children of Israel were going to have to battle for the Promised Land. The inhabitants were fierce warriors. Many of them were much better equipped militarily than were the Israelites. The children of Israel needed a general with great strategic skills at that moment in their history. And this was part of Joshua's resume. He was an army general. He had a history of military accomplishment. Here is what we read in Exodus 17:8-10:

Exodus 17:8-10

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." 10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

But no matter how faithful a person is, no matter how great their character, discerning God's appointment means that the person's skill set has to overlap with the job. If you are a baseball player, it is not enough to be a wonderful human being. You also need to be able to hit a curve ball that is thrown at you at 90 MPH and field and throw and run the bases. If you are a college professor, you need to be able to teach and do research. Before someone is appointed to a position, we need to ask do their skills intersect with that position. If you can't speak and if you don't have good study habits, you are probably not called to preach. If you don't love people or don't have strong biblical wisdom, you are probably not called to counsel.

And second, Joshua was:

Someone who has interned with the leader

We read in Numbers 11:28:

Numbers 11:28

Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"

Joshua was an apprentice to Moses for many years. So this idea of apprenticeship, or internship, is found all through scripture. We find Samuel interning with the priest Eli and being taught how to hear the voice of God. Elisha was trained by Elijah in the miraculous. Solomon was trained by King David to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord. Jesus trained the Twelve. Barnabas trained Paul. Paul trained Timothy.

In church history there are so many wonderful examples of internships and apprenticeships. The great church father, Ambrose, trained Augustine in leadership. Martin Luther had as an apprentice a man named Philip Melancthon, who was the author of all the famous Lutheran confessions.

A century and a half ago people didn't go to seminary, generally, to become pastors. They would often move into the home of an older, experienced pastor and they learned from that pastor the disciplines of devotion to God. They were able to watch the pastor study and pray. In talking with the pastor, they learned how to deal with problems of feeding people and leading a congregation. They learned how to preach. The great Charles Spurgeon habitually trained young men in becoming pastors and then sent them out.

That's my heart, by the way. Over the last decade or so I've had the privilege of having a number of interns who I've been able to train up, to raise up for pastoral ministry. Many of them have become pastors now: Eric Pickerill who is leading our team to Amsterdam, Jay Pathak, Jeff Cannell and Joshua Weir who have planted churches, Amanda Nash who is going to Amsterdam, was a pastoral coordinator here on staff, and Jonathan Rue who recently became a pastor on this staff taking over Joshua House, our young adult ministry. If you want to lead, how about training with an experienced leader? Assist a strong teacher in Children's Ministry. Assist a good small group leader or women's group leader. Intern or volunteer here at the church.

Joshua became qualified for his specific test by interning with Moses. What else do we discover about Joshua that made him God's man for the hour? Joshua was:

Someone who is intimate with the Lord.

We saw this a few weeks ago in Exodus 33:7, 11:

Exodus 33:7

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

Exodus 33:11

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

Joshua built a secret history with God. So intimacy with Christ is the foundation for all spiritual leadership. Solomon, the king of Israel, wrote this in Proverbs 4:23:

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Whether someone is going to be able to successfully lead and finish well, always comes down to what is happening in that individual's inner life. And whenever we see someone stumble outwardly; whenever we see someone run, fall and fail to finish the race well, it is always because there is some deficit inside, the person has gotten used to living at a distance from Christ. Where are you at today in your relationship with Christ? Have you stopped caring about causing displeasure to the Lord? Is there a growing gap between your activity for Christ and the size of soul? Are you building a secret history with Christ?

Listen, the job that Joshua was being called to do was huge. He was going to lead the nation of Israel into the Promised Land and do battle with all these various Canaanite tribes. For Joshua to be able to carry that weight of responsibility without imploding, he needed a soul inhabited by the presence of God. Skills intersected with the need of the moment; he interned for years under a great leader; but, most importantly he was intimate with the Lord, who alone could sustain him with the challenges he was going to face in the future.

Some of you might say, "I certainly haven't arrived, but I'm on the way." This leads to the last point:

Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves the willingness to let go of leadership and bless your successor

Numbers 27:18-23

So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. 19 Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. 20 Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. 21 He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in." 22 Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses.

I opened with a story of a pastor allegedly would not let go, who undermined their successor privately and publicly. And there are so many CEOs in business who set up their successors for failure by resisting their successor's initiatives and blocking them from access to the people and resources they need to succeed. So many folks are simply unwilling to give up control of the business or the church they've toiled to build. But not Moses! Moses was willing to hand off the baton. He was willing to pass the torch. Moses was a man who was willing to let go even of something that had formed his identity for 40 years – leadership of the nation of Israel.

There comes a point in every leader's life where they need to let go and hand off leadership to the next generation. Joe Paterno is facing this at Pen State. It takes great humility and a death to self to be willing to do this.

But Moses was one of those men who was willing to let go. The Lord directed Moses to lay his hands on Joshua, an act that we would call ordination today in which spiritual authority is conferred on the recipient. And the Lord instructed Moses to have Joshua stand before the priest and before the entire congregation at a public commissioning service:

Numbers 27:20

Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.

In other words, the Lord said, "Moses, I want you to publicly set up your successor for success." And Moses does just as the Lord commands. No self-pity, no resentment, no judgment, no jealousy. He hands off leadership and then he gets out of the way.

Great leaders don't only build great businesses or pastor great churches during their lifetimes. Great leaders leave a legacy. The work goes on successfully after the great leader is gone. We can have confidence that God's work will go on in ministry whoever the leader is because even when the leader dies, God's work never dies.

The final test of a great leader is to pass on the torch to the next generation. Let's pray.

Passing the Torch of Leadership to the Next Generation

Rich Nathan
September 6-7, 2008
The Making of a Leader Series
Numbers 27:12-23

1. The Challenge of **Successful Succession**
2. Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves **finishing well** (Numbers 27:12-14)
3. Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves **waiting for God's appointment** (Numbers 17:15-17; Luke 16:10-12)
4. Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves **matching the need to the person chosen** (Numbers 27:18)
 - A. Someone whose skill set **intersects** with the need (Exodus 17:8-10)
 - B. Someone who has **interned** with the leader (Numbers 11:28)
 - C. Someone who is **intimate** with the Lord (Exodus 33:11)
5. Successfully passing the torch of leadership involves **letting go** (Numbers 27:18-23)