

MARATHON RELAY RACE

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

Hebrews 11 and 12 remind us that we have the great privilege of being part of God’s family. We are His sons and daughters. We are part of God’s team. And we are in a cosmic marathon relay race.

We win by being faithful to previous generations of the faithful and carrying the torch they so valiantly carried, passing this flame of Faith and freedom to the next generation, who must faithfully carry it to future generations.

God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – we need a multi-generational vision.

“And the things that you have heard from Me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2

The apostle Paul discipled Timothy in the Faith and solemnly charged him to entrust these doctrines to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Here we see four generations being discipled in the Faith.

Inspiration

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a crowd of witnesses...” We need to derive inspiration from the lives and legacy of the heroes of the Faith, our spiritual ancestors, the prophets, the Apostles, the church fathers, the martyrs, the missionaries and Reformers. There on the battlements of Heaven, on the grandstands, so to speak, those who have run the race with honours are cheering us on: Elijah, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Patrick, Columba, Boniface, Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Tyndale, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, William Carey and David Livingstone, and so many others. Their examples should inspire us, and encourage us, and urge us on to run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Separation

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us...” We need to separate from all those hindrances that slow us down, from the weights that hold us back, and from the snares and entanglements that trip us up. Nothing can be tolerated that gets in the way of our discipleship and service for our Lord and Saviour.

Athletes do not load up backpacks full of rocks to lug around the track. No marathon runner would attempt to win the race while dragging balls and chains around their ankles and nooses around their necks! So, then, also we need to repent from all known sin. Restitution frees us from these obligations and liberates us from the snares of the devil. To run the race we need to be free of fear and from all those things that keep us from finishing the race. Doubt, discouragement, distraction, deviation and defilement all spell defeat and death. Determine to separate from all that holds you back.

Dedication

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” You need to be dedicated to run the race, to finish the race, to win the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus. Run with endurance. This is not a short distance sprint. It is a long distance marathon. And it is a marathon relay race involving multiple generations. You have received the Faith from a great cloud of witnesses and you have the duty to pass on this Faith to future generations. We Christians have a race set before us. It is marked out by the Word of God and by the examples of faithful servants, a great cloud of witnesses who have already completed their race with honours.

Endurance

“...run with endurance...” We need to persevere and run with endurance inspired by the examples of those who have gone before us. Hebrews chapter 11 reminds us of some of the great patriarchs that have gone before us.

Consider What They Sacrificed:

Abel gave his life. **Enoch** walked with God. **Noah** spent much of his life building the Ark and then stocking it and serving thousands of God’s precious creatures for the year that they were confined in the Ark during the Flood. The Ark reminds us that in the ship of life we are all crew, none of us are passengers. We have work to do.

Abraham left his home and country and even offered up his son Isaac. **Sarah** was barren her whole life and late in life gave birth to a child, Isaac. **Joseph** lost his freedom, and his family. Betrayed by his brothers he was condemned to slavery and unjustly accused, he was incarcerated in prison.

Moses willingly forsook the comforts, riches and power of Egypt. **David** risked all for God’s honour, walking into the valley of the shadow of death to confront the fiercesome giant that all the army of Israel dreaded. All of the prophets and apostles suffered persecution and most gave their lives for the Faith once delivered unto the saints.

Consider What Obstacles They Overcame:

Think of the overwhelming obstacles that missionaries such as **Patrick**, **Columba** and **Boniface** overcame in order to evangelise and disciple the savage tribes of Europe. Think of all that the Reformers Professor **John Wycliffe**, **Jan Hus** and **Martin Luther** had to confront as they sought to bring Reformation to a Europe steeped in papal superstition and Romish heresy.

English Bible translator **William Tyndale** had to flee to Europe and live as an outlaw with a price on his head, continually on the run as he sought to translate the Bible into English and have these first printed copies of the New Testament in English smuggled back into England. The first consignment of thousands of English New Testaments were intercepted by the Bishop of London and burned. William Tyndale had to start a new print run, but God’s outlaw finally succeeded in providing the first printed English New Testaments in defiance of the laws of the Roman Catholic church and the Holy Roman Empire.

Fiery evangelist and debater extraordinary **William Farel** won whole cities to Christ with his dynamic denunciations of papal superstitions and error and bold proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although poverty stricken and deprived of a high school education, **William Carey** persevered to launch the modern missionary movement. Funding himself by repairing shoes and teaching

himself many languages, William Carey wrote the book that launched the modern missionary movement and devoted the last forty two years of his life to establishing mission stations and Christian schools in India. He translated the Bible, New Testament and Gospels into a staggering thirty six different Asian languages, ended widow burning and launched a Reformation that brought dynamic change to India.

Despite being raised in abject poverty, working fourteen hours a day, six days a week, in a cotton mill from age ten to twenty, **David Livingstone** overcame all obstacles to get to the mission field and then to explore vast sections of Southern and Central Africa, being the first messenger of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in many of the previously unexplored regions.

Inspired by David Livingstone's example, **Mary Slessor** became an effective missionary to Calabar, in what today is Nigeria. David Livingstone also inspired many other missionaries including **Dr. Kenneth Fraser** who converted and disciplined the Morus in Equatoria, Sudan.

Why Are Some People So Faithful and Loyal?

Why are some people so faithful and loyal? One thinks of Joshua following Moses, Elisha following Elijah, the Apostle John, the disciple that Jesus loved, following Jesus all the way to the Cross and beyond. The church father Polycarp faithfully following his mentor the apostle John. Heinrich Bullinger faithfully consolidating the Reformation so dramatically launched by Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich. Theodore Beza building on the solid foundations laid by John Calvin. Susi and Chuma, faithful servants to David Livingstone to the very end carrying his body back to the coast, a journey which took over a year to see the body of the best friend Africa ever had returned to his people for burial in Westminster Abby. There are many good examples of those who are faithful and loyal.

Why Are So Many Disloyal and Unfaithful?

The Gospels record many who forsook Christ: "*When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*" Matthew 19:22 "*From this time, many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.*" John 6:66 "*Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.*" Mark 14:10 "*Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.*" Matthew 26:56

The apostle Paul wrote of those who had "*wandered away*"(1 Timothy 1:3), and of those who had rejected the Faith and violated their conscience, having made a shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20).

Paul reported that: "*everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.*" 2 Timothy 1:15; "*Demas, because he loved the world, has deserted me and has gone...*" 2 Timothy 4:10

The father of modern missions, William Carey, against all odds launched the modern Missionary Movement. Yet, he was the victim of character assassination and was rejected by the mission that he had founded.

When Ministries Are Hijacked

Over the years I have the privilege of being hosted on Dr. James Kennedy's radio program *Truths that Transform* and on the *Coral Ridge Hour* on TV. On numerous occasions I had the privilege of being invited to minister at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, including as a guest speaker during missions events and from the pulpit on Sunday services. During a recent ministry trip to the USA I was invited to record some programs for Coral Ridge Ministries. It was heartening to see how this

publishing and television ministry has continued to remain faithful to the principles and vision of its founder Dr. James Kennedy.

However, when I walked around Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church I was horrified to see how much had changed. The big and bold Great Commission and Cultural Mandate opposite reception were missing. The display cabinet with examples of each of James Kennedy's fifty published books next to reception was gone. The huge world map with pictures of foreign missionaries supported was missing. The hundreds of tract stands and sermon stands were empty. All I saw were blank walls where once God-honouring posters, Scripture displays and mission boards had stood. I saw a Ten Commandments display on the floor next to the trash can. Behind Dr. James Kennedy's pulpit were drums. In front of the two thousand eight hundred pipe organ, one of the largest organs in North America, was a keyboard! A once dynamic and packed book store was now gutted with very few of Dr. Kennedy's books still on the shelves. Walls of empty shelves stood where once they were covered with cutting-edge Reformed books.

I felt like I was visiting many of the Cathedrals in Europe, where deadening liberalism has hijacked the magnificent structures built up by dedicated Christians of centuries ago. However this was barely three and a half years after the passing of Dr. Kennedy!

On one of my visits to Dr. Kennedy he had commented that he doubted that many of these ministries around him would survive long after his passing. He also questioned the salvation of many of his staff and even of his elders and pastors.

The Cathedrals of Europe are more often than not in the hands of people who are not faithful to the Faith of the builders. The mainline denominations have, in all too many cases, betrayed their founders and have dropped the torch.

How many Lutheran congregations are faithful to the bold and life transforming message of Dr. Martin Luther?

Most of the Methodists today are far from the doctrines, devotions and dedication of John Wesley.

Most Anglicans in North America and Great Britain are not faithful to The Thirty Nine articles.

Most Baptists are far from the doctrinal standards in the London Confession of Faith.

How many Presbyterians today are true to the Westminster Confession of Faith?

How many Dutch Reformed ministers are faithful to the Belgic Confession and the Synod of Dort?

The World Council of Churches have hijacked and led astray many denominations which once were faithful to the Scriptures. They have assigned church funds to support Marxist terrorists who were at that time killing missionaries in Rhodesia and elsewhere.

How many Reformed and Presbyterian churches are true to Reformer John Calvin's motto: *"Promptly and sincerely in the service of my God"* and to his emblem: A Heart Aflame in the Hand of God?

How many Scotsmen are true to the faith of John Knox?

Many Have Dropped The Torch

The US relay women's team was confidently predicted to win gold in the 2004 Athens Olympics. They had performed extremely well in the semi-finals. However in the main event, Lauren Williams, the third team mate, bolted from her starting position and ran as fast as she could out of the exchange lane before team mate Carla Marion Jones could pass the baton to her. The whole team was disqualified because of that failed baton pass!

Civilisation Is At Stake

Because many in the present generation have failed to take up the baton/the torch of previous faithful generations Western civilisation is in danger of collapsing.

Will Durant observed: *"From barbarism to civilisation requires a century (or more), from civilisation to barbarism needs but a few days"*.

Like it or not, we are either part of the problem or we are part of the solution. Being faithful to take up the torch of Faith and freedom and carry it through to the next generation is of utmost importance.

What are you living for?

What are you passing on to others?

Are you a giver? Or a taker?

Do you build something of eternal value? Or do you walk away from difficult situations?

Do you leave others better off? Or do you flee responsibilities?

Do you rescue the perishing? Or are you selfish?

Do you care for God's creation? Or are you thoughtless and careless?

Are you generous? Or are you needy and demanding?

Do you live? Or do you merely exist?

Do you produce? Or do you merely consume?

Do you ensure that your children will have greater advantages and a better shot at winning?

Or do you just live for yourself, live for the moment?

The Rat Race

The trouble with the rat race is – even if you win – you are still a rat.

Apathy

"The sin of our times is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing and remains alive only because there is nothing for which it will die." Dorothy Sayers

Aimless and Selfish

Meaningless, aimless, selfish, media-saturated people with no sense of duty, no sense of direction, no sense of obligation or integrity, are dominating and producing most of the news media, entertainment industry and educational institutions. The far reaching effect of this hedonism and existentialism on many in the present generation is incalculable.

"The future of civilisation depends on our overcoming the meaninglessness and hopelessness that characterises the thoughts of many today." Albert Schweitzer

The Curse of Inactivity

As Edmund Burke so eloquently put it: *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing."*

There are three types of people in the world:

1. Those who make things happen.
2. Those who watch things happen.
3. Those who don't have a clue what's happened.

We Christians need to be those who make things happen.

Live in the Light of Eternity

“Without a vision a people perish”. We need to live a life of purpose, based on the solid rock of God's Word, The Bible, as our firm foundation. Inspired by the examples of excellence in church history we need to live in the light of eternity.

Fulfill the Cultural Mandate, make the Great Commission your supreme ambition. Be true to your duty to God, and to your parents, and to others. Love God and His creatures. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

“Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations for those who love Him and keep His Commandments.” Deuteronomy 7:9

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