

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

June 2017

Passing Down the Truth of God

By: John MacArthur



I learned a vital spiritual lesson while participating in a track meet during my college years. I was running in the 4x400-meter relay at the Orange County Invitational. ... I wasn't the fastest runner on our team. So, I ran the second leg.

Our strategy was simple. The first runner, a speedy sprinter, would get as big a lead as possible right out of the starting blocks. My job was merely to run a clean lap without dropping the baton. Our third man was strong and fast, and our fourth man was a blur. They could make up whatever ground I might lose.

Several prestigious teams were competing that day, and our team managed to get into the finals. We were convinced we had a

good shot at winning.

Our first man ran a great leg and made a perfect baton pass. I managed to finish my lap in a tight battle for first place. The third man went around the curve, came halfway down the back stretch, stopped, walked off, and sat down in the grass. The race kept going.

We thought he had pulled a hamstring or twisted an ankle. We all ran across the infield, expecting to find him writhing on the grass or at least wincing in pain. He wasn't. He was sitting passively. We anxiously asked, "What happened? Are you hurt?" He said, "No, I'm OK. I just didn't feel like running."

I confess that all my thoughts in that moment were carnal. My teammates and I spontaneously responded with an outpouring of frustration, all three of us basically saying the same thing: "You can't do that! You're not in this by yourself! Do you realize the effort we have all put into training for this? Too much has been

invested in you!"

I've thought often about that moment in relation to our duty as believers. We are supposed to take the truth that was handed to us by our ancestors in the Christian faith and run with it—not aimlessly (1 Cor. 9:26), but always pressing on toward the goal (Phil. 3:14)—so we can hand off the faith, intact and uncorrupted, to the next generation.

The Apostle Paul gave this charge to Timothy in his final epistle: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul was facing imminent martyrdom (4:6), and he was of course concerned with the question of who would continue his missionary work and who would lead the church after his departure. He therefore outlined for Timothy this simple pattern of succession and stability.

The command itself looks beyond Timothy to younger men whom he would

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The command itself looks beyond Timothy to younger men whom he would

train. It lays out a perpetual strategy for raising up generation after generation of church leaders. The baton that was passed from Paul to Timothy would ultimately be handed off to faithful men, who in turn would pass it to a fourth generation—and so on.

Although Paul’s primary concern here is leadership development, the principle he gives Timothy has clear implications for every Christian in every era. We are all part of a living chain. Each of us has been taught by someone who learned the truth from someone else. If you follow that chain backward, link by link, it goes back to the original Apostles—and beyond them to Christ Himself.

In order to be faithful stewards of what we have received, each of us needs to pass on to others what we have been taught. In other words, every Christian ought to be a teacher. No matter who you are, you can find someone who knows less than you and teach them. That responsibility is inherent in our Lord’s Great Commission: “Make disciples” (Matt. 28:19).

The writer to the Hebrews scolded believers who were derelict in this duty: “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God” (5:12). Because of their failure to become teachers, they needed to start learning from the beginning again. No wonder. What you teach you retain, and what you don’t teach you tend to forget. Passing on what you have learned not only helps the person who is being discipled; it also strengthens the teacher.

Paul’s charge to Timothy is carefully focused. He doesn’t tell Timothy to be innovative. He doesn’t encourage him to adapt his style to the fads and fashions of secular culture. He doesn’t employ words like *fresh*, *original*, or *imaginative*, the verbal glue that binds so many twenty-first-century church-growth strategies together.

In fact, Paul gives Timothy practically the opposite mandate. It is a clear, narrowly defined directive. Timothy is to guard the deposit of truth he has received (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14) and pass it on,

unmodified and unadulterated, to the next generation. Being an effective disciple-maker is not about being chic or creative. It’s about faithfully guarding “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and accurately transmitting it to another generation.

It sounds paradoxical, but each Christian has a personal responsibility to keep the faith and to pass it on to others. That’s what is required of those who would win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 4:7).

Anyone who breaks that centuries-old chain is like a relay runner who abandons the race before finishing. And what’s at stake in this race is infinitely more important than any earthly trophy. Failure to run well and with endurance would be an inexcusable insult to our Lord, an offense against those who have taught us, a disappointment to those who have trained alongside us, and a grievous sin against those to whom we must hand the baton.

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