



## Passing the Torch

By Pastor Mike Curtis

Over the centuries God has moved in awesome, powerful ways in bringing revival to entire countries. Our present day vantage point slows us to look in retrospect at these might visitations of God in the Wesleyan movement with John Wesley and George Whitfield; the First and Second Great Awakenings with men such as Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney; and many more. Thousands, even millions, of people were dramatically changed as a result. The salt of the Gospel even profoundly influenced the cultures through these revivals. With each movement of God, however, came a corresponding failure on man's part—his responsibility to keep these revival fire burning. To the point, Judges 2:7 & 10 says, *“The people served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel...After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.”* The pitfall of both Israel then and the church today has been its failure to train its children, those next in line to take the torch or revival. How can we properly train them so that this torch is not extinguished, and a new generation emerges with a vital, world-changing faith!

### “Don't extinguish the torch...”

Before tackling this all-important question, let's ask ourselves first how we today are snuffing out these flames? Let me quickly paint a portrait of the “typical” Christian homeschooling family in America. The parents

are very busy, but manage to squeeze in some personal devotions several times per week. This helps in starting the day off right just before dad heads off to the office and mom starts cracking the homeschool whip. The children plod through mathematics and history. It's time now for the Bible lesson and all listen tentatively as mom gives them some historical background of Samaritans before delving into John 4, where Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman. After science, lunch is promptly consumed (with prayer preceding) and a few other subjects are tackled before calling it quits for the day. Mom checks off these subjects covered in her homeschool organizer and begins to prepare for dinner as the little ones head out the door to play. Some time later, Dad arrives from home and shares some of the more complicated aspects of his exhausting day as the family sits down to a well-prepared meal. The children indulge in small talk as Dad's audience slowly dwindles to just Mom. And then, of course, it's mom's turn. Soon it's bedtime and the troops get ready. Just before going to bed (at least most nights), mom prays with them and kisses them goodnight.

The week progresses in this fashion until Saturday, where we find Dad busy in the garage trying to fix the mower while the children do some chores and again head out to play. Sunday's pace is a little different with church in the morning and evening with a big meal, nap and movie sandwiched in between. Monday morning rolls around and the cycle starts again. Many at this point may be saying, "Yes, that for the most part is us, but I see nothing wrong with it." We say this in part because that's what we grew up with (except for the homeschooling aspect) and we know nothing else. May I suggest a difficulty that most wrestle with that lies at the root of the problem? We compartmentalize our Christianity. We pray in our devotional time and at meals, but we fail to allow that discipline to permeate our day. We relegate teaching biblical principles to Bible lesson time and Sunday mornings alone. We teach "secular" history and "biblical" history as two separate subjects, creating a sense of dichotomy between the two. Growing up, my experience was similar, causing me to view the Bible set in "unreal" history, almost a fairy tale, though I believed it to be true. We can't afford to separate the two: All is genuine history and needs to be taught as such. Do we bring the Bible into subjects other than "Bible Time"? Dads, are we involving ourselves in this moment by moment process of discipling our children or do we delegate this task entirely to our wives? AS we all know, if we don't seize the opportunities to instill values into our children, we know who is all too willing to—the world, society. So far it has fed us

well with this compartmentalizing mentality, doing its best to squeeze the church, biblical principles and morality in general out of education and politics, and their encroachment continues. Our society is disrobing itself of every vestige of Christianity **and** morality...and we are letting it!

This mentality has produced in the next generation some disturbing consequences. The Bible is seen as irrelevant and not applicable to daily life. Our faith is not endeared, but viewed as legalistic, rigid and cold. The result is rebellion, not a vital, world-changing faith. If we are to produce a generation that engages its culture with a biblical worldview, we must learn to walk moment by moment in a relevant faith that touches every aspect of life and leaves no stones unturned in its quest to change ourselves and this amoral generation!

Now let us return to our original question of “How?”. Well, obviously, truncating our compartmentalist view is simply the beginning. I believe that God has a ready answer for us that takes a lifetime of implementation. Deuteronomy 6:4-8 tells us, *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*



### **“Devotion to God...”**

There are three keys this passage gives us in unlocking the answer to our question. The first is devotion to God. These verses, called the Shema (“hear” or “listen”), are often used by our Jewish friends to declare the singularity or oneness of God. To this we heartily agree. The word, however, translated “one” (“echad”) in verse 4 literally means “a united one” and is used for example in Genesis 2:24, in which husband and wife shall be united to become “one flesh.” The importance of this cannot be overlooked. We need to have a living relationship with each member of the

Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A book could not deal with this subject sufficiently, but suffice it to say, for many this is seriously lacking. In addition, we must visibly live out this relationship before our children. When our oldest daughter, Katie Beth, was between two and three years old, she would often wake up relatively early and “interrupt” my devotional time with the Lord. After much complaining to the Lord about this habitual intrusion, God finally showed me the importance of this “interruption” for Katie Beth. Whether she wandered in during my prayer time, worship time, or Bible reading time, she observed first hand how her daddy was daily building a relationship with God.

This has happened with each successive child and God continues to reassure me of its importance. Recently, our youngest, Jenny Rose, who just turned two, “interrupted” me in my prayer time out on our porch. At times I enjoy walking around the room while I pray (partly because it helps keep me awake in the early morning). Jenny rose laid down her toys and began to follow me. At one point I turned around to find her mumbling “Father, Father,…” and gesturing with her hands in similar fashion as myself. I couldn’t help but laugh and cuddle her in my arms. As I learned, our children need us to exemplify our devotion to God in tangible ways such as this, or perhaps by including them in our Sunday morning worship (and just living with some of the distraction) or involving them more in our regular family worship time.



**“Love is more important than knowledge…”**

The second point this passage teaches us is that love is more important than knowledge. The greatest commandment is not to know **ABOUT** God, but to **LOVE** God with all of our heart, soul, and strength. To often our regular time of Bible instruction is focused on knowledge rather than the application of that knowledge. I know of too many adults who can quote Scriptures and numerous Bible facts but who clearly and admittedly lack a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This is not to say that knowledge is not important. II Peter 1:5-8 gives us the eight building blocks of faith, of which knowledge is the third and love is the eighth, the capstone, the ultimate goal. So, knowledge is very important when treated properly, a

stepping stone to grow in character. As an end in itself, knowledge puffs up, producing pride, while love builds up (I Corinthians 8:1).

Later, we will discuss family devotions and the relevance of this principle, so let me highlight here the importance of regular thanksgiving to God in demonstrating our love for Him. Focus on answered prayer and build testimonies into our children that they can constantly look back to as a stake in the ground marking God's faithfulness or mercy or love or provision. These will be anchors in years to come. God knew this and so instructed the Israelites to regularly remind their children of His mighty acts. Some recent testimonies come to mind that we as a family regularly thank God for in our worship time. Several months ago (editor's note: 1994), we were near closing on our house purchase and ran into an unexpected eleventh hour snag. We appealed and asked to speak with the bank manager who wouldn't be in until after the weekend. Our three girls prayed furiously as mom and dad fasted and prayed with them. Come Monday, the bank manager called, immediately apologized, made amends, and signed our loan—nothing short of a miracle and the girls knew it! God drove a stake in the ground.

On another occasion, while my wife and children were out of town and unbeknownst to me, Julianna, our second-oldest, prayed rather boldly that when her daddy went out to work the next day that although it may rain, it wouldn't rain where I was working (I tent-make by doing paint touch-up work on cars). Wouldn't you know, the next day a terrible thunderstorm enveloped our city (rather usual for a Central Florida summer afternoon) and was sure to cut my day short. However, I noticed that even though the clouds were moving, they seemed to encircle me rather than pass straight over. This continued throughout the afternoon, allowing me to work the full day, and a good one at that. That night when I called my wife and mentioned what had happened, she explained how Julianna had prayed for exactly that. God drove another stake in the ground.

Also, very recently, our finances were not going to permit us to attend a pastors' conference, where I was to teach a workshop. We prayed and asked God to intervene. The weekend before we were to go, a friend handed us an envelope with a card and check that cover the long trip. Through this unforeseen gift God pounded yet another stake in the fertile ground of my daughters' minds. As a result, our worship time as a family overflows with

testimonies of thanksgiving to God for what He has done—tangible, real-life application of what my girls are learning about God.



### “Impress them on your children...”

The third and final principle this passage teaches us about how we are to pass the torch of revival on to the next generation is **HOW** we are to instill the Word of God in our children’s hearts. *“These commands that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children.”* (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) The Hebrew word translated here “impress” (“shanan”) comes from the word “to whet or to sharpen.” It appears in the intensive active form, so its meaning is heightened, “to teach incisively.” The imagery of the word portrays teachings that lay open the heart and penetrate like a knife. Is it any wonder that Hebrews 4:12 boldly declares, *“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any two-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* But we may rather readily admit, “I’m not a particularly gifted teacher. How can I do this?” God gives us a four-fold answer in verse 7 of Deuteronomy 6: when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. Notice that God answers our “how” question with “when”. As we will see, the implication is that the only way to impress (or teach “incisively”) the Word of God on our children is to focus on applying it in daily life situations as **they arise!**



### “When you sit at home...”

The first of these four directives is “when you sit at home.” The idea is that the Word of God needs to be taught at every opportune life situation around the home. When Dad sits down to a hot dinner, does he chill the potential conversations with dreary, non-relatable “exploits” at the office? Perhaps Dad could share some incidents at work that could have direct

bearing on personal character building. The office manager was more than a bit cranky today, so Dad, even as bothered by it as he was, sought an opportunity to encourage his boss and go out of his way to serve him—the principle of love in the face of opposition clearly illustrated to his children in a real-life situation.

We enjoy watching a video now and then as a family and discussing it afterward. This regularly reinforces a (constructively) critical attitude toward what we read, see, or hear. Our children enjoy watching a particular show on video (made when shows actually sought to convey moral values). Occasionally, I get the chance to watch an episode with them and love highlighting underlying values with questions that require some thought and discussion. Discipline times in our home are another opportunity for “incisive teaching,” though not so cherished by our children. With each incident a format is followed: verbalizing the wrong, understanding its inappropriateness, suggestions of more appropriate behaviors or responses, punishment, prayer for help and change (they do this), reaffirmation of our love (perhaps a tickle thrown in), and making amends with any offending by the wrong.

Obviously, as with any form of instruction, consistency is key. For whatever reason, these incidents occur at the most inconvenient times. Why little Jenny Rose has to flush the whole roll of Charmin down the toilet while Mommy is administering an important test to Katie Beth will forever remain a mystery. Nonetheless, appropriate measures, as inconvenient as they are, are taken and Jenny Rose is disciplined...and Daddy is called at work because the toilet has now begun to trickle down the hallway staircase. The bottom line is how involved are we in our children’s lives? And I speak here most specifically to us fathers.

One of my favorite questions to ask my two oldest daughters is, “What did Jesus teach you in your Quiet Time this morning?” Can we crawl into our children’s day with a few casual questions? One of the hardest things for parents, especially dads, of our day is to talk casually about spiritual matters with our children. This is in part because we don’t know what to talk about or what principles to cue in on. Let me list a number of items that can be used for regular family or one-on-one discussions:

Loving the unlovely

Forgiveness

Truth telling

Perseverance  
Helping the helpless  
Encouraging people rather than putting them down  
Sharing  
Expressing good attitudes instead of grumbling  
Obeying cheerfully (without fussing), immediately & completely  
Being responsible (e.g. in the chores)  
Not envying  
Praying  
Witnessing  
Worshipping God  
Being grateful  
Not arguing  
Standing alone  
Giving to the poor  
Not stealing  
Being diligent  
Being fair and not cheating  
Serving  
Focusing on others' needs more than their own  
Winning or losing graciously  
Greeting with a smile  
Being courteous  
Being patient  
Not speaking revenge  
Loving God with a passion



### **“When you walk along the road...”**

The second directive is to impress God’s Word on our children when we walk along the road. This is done when we interact with people and events away from our home. Many Christian dads in my field of reconditioning used cars at car take their teen or pre-teen sons along with them and teach them how to sell their service with integrity, how to produce

a product of high quality, how to be diligent in their tasks, how to persevere when doors of opportunity are closing, and how to serve and minister to others on their job. Granted there aren't too many jobs out there in which a dad can do this, but character principles in business can be taught in other ways. How about a visit during lunch time with a guided tour? This will help lend some tangibility to Dad's dinner discussions about the office. Be sure to introduce your children to as many fellow employees as is possible and is permissible. Little gifts from the children, such as Easter drawings or cards to employees, allows them to reach out with the love of Jesus to others and at times plant seeds of the Gospel as the child "deciphers" the drawing, explaining its relevance to the Easter season and the reason for celebrating Christ's resurrection.

Taking the children on missions of ministry is also very helpful. My wife just started to help with the Meals on Wheels program (Note: this was in 1995). She takes the children with her as she ministers to the shut-ins and elderly. Soon, as a family, we will be distributing flyers about the church that we are starting. Undoubtedly, there will be opportunities to minister, and to witness. This will allow our girls to see firsthand what we have been discussing in our morning devotions on evangelism. When I was in seminary and my wife and I were ministering to teens in our church, we regularly brought our children along with us to the meetings. They loved the teens and had a great time, but most critically, the experienced ministry first hand.

As a family we enjoy taking walks around our neighborhood. Inevitably, we find ourselves in conversations building relationships. Our children try to interact as well or play with the neighborhood children as we visit. Modeling is key here. We attempt to focus the conversation on others rather than ourselves. We seek to find out what their interests and hobbies are and zero in on them with a mutual interest or "teach me" attitude. As a family we often visit our paraplegic friend, Jim, across the street. We met him through his air compressor. I have found that most people enjoy helping others who are new to the neighborhood. Since we arrived quite recently, I don't hesitate to turn to our neighbors to borrow things now and then, such as a step ladder, loping shears, or tools. Not too long ago we need a pump to inflate some air mattresses. My two oldest girls went with me to visit Jim who has an air compressor. He was thrilled to help out and let the girls take turns pumping up the mattresses. We learned a lot about Jim that evening, including his accident that caused his paralysis. We pray for him

and other neighbors regularly in our family devotions. I can turn to our list of character qualities and point out a number of them (and some that aren't listed) that God is building in our girls through these neighborhood friendships.



## “When you lie down...When you get up...”

The last two directives “when you lie down” and “when you get up” can be understood to be evening and morning devotions. Referring to the wise man, David says in Psalm 1:2 **“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night.”** These two devotional times are for just that...meditation or reflection. The error of compartmentalizing Christianity is that we segregate it to certain areas and do not allow it to “spill over” and influence other areas. But there do need to be regular times set aside pacifistically for learning and applying the Word of God.

Since my wife is with the children all day, I look forward to the opportunity to take them for the night. Evening devotions and tuck-in are called ‘Family Time’ and we thoroughly enjoy it together. We have built many memories here. Because I am not pressed by a strict time schedule as in the mornings, our evening times allow for more spontaneity and creativity. We do not hesitate to sue devotional guides, though we have discovered that many are very shallow and don't rely on the Bible much, if at all. I enjoy browsing through the children's section Christian bookstores. Consequently, we have managed to pick up a few good devotional books, which I would like to mention here (please understand there are **MANY** others out there that are excellent): Kenneth Taylor's (translator of The Living Bible) books Wise Words for Little People (on Proverbs), Big Thoughts for Little People (on miscellaneous character qualities), and Giant Steps for Little People (on the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments); V. Gilbert Beers Growing up with God series of books (4 in all) featuring the Muffin Family with each Bible story; Ella K. Lindvall's Read Aloud Bible Stories (4 volumes each with 5 Bible stories); Karyn Henley's The Beginner's Bible; and then Jesse Lyman Hurlbut's timeless Bedtime Bible Story Book (365 stories, one for each day of the year). Hurlbut's book is very good for telling the Bible story but is lacking in

application discussion questions. Just simply pick one main point from the story and ask questions on your own.

As good as devotional guides may be, however, a heavy reliance on them can be harmful. Don't underestimate the ability of your children to understand the actual Word of God. Remember Scripture says, **“YOUR WORD have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11)**. Our own personal family guidelines have been to use a devotional guide in the evenings and just Scripture in the mornings. We have gone through books in the Bible such as Proverbs, Luke, Acts, and John. With each of these I made a personal decision to select portions to read or, as with Proverbs, certain verses in each chapter. A common error made by many parents is to attempt to cover more than the child can digest. I must confess that I have tried all too many times to feed our children with shovel-sized bites, but have since attempted simply to highlight one principle during each devotional time. This required us studying only one verse per day when we went through Proverbs, but our children thoroughly enjoyed it. Why? This brings us now to ways of reinforcing and applying the Word.



### **“Reinforcing and applying the Word...”**

After discussing what each Proverb meant and I felt our children had a good grasp on it, we would each take turns making up our own story that applied the principle. Sometimes this was hard, but usually it was relatively easy and always lots of fun, as my girls love listening to and telling stories. I figured if Jesus valued storytelling as a method of teaching, why shouldn't we? Often Julianna would tell almost identical stories to either Katie Beth's or mine. At first Katie Beth felt threatened by this; but after I explained that copying is often the first step in learning and being creative, she understood and quieted down. Now when this happens, we just wink at each other and enjoy a remake of a previous story.

Another means of reinforcing Biblical principles is to act out the story. If the principle is grasped, then ad-libbing the characters' part is not

too hard. Since our girls enjoy doing this, on one occasion they prepared a David and Goliath play for us. Katie Beth stuffed a pillow under her shirt and stood on a chair that had its front two legs in Daddy's work boots. We were surprised with how accurately they quoted their lines, but nearly died laughing when "Goliath" fell from his chair and landed on the pillow under the shirt. Katie Beth tried lying flat as if dead but with no success until she finally flopped on her back.

Another way to emphasize the main point of the devotions is to play a game. One night we watched a "Last Chance Detectives" video produced by *Focus on the Family*. Afterwards, we read some Bible verses, focusing on the one in their study guide. After the discussion on using the Bible as our compass instead of our emotions (specifically dealing with forgiveness), we played a game. Each took a turn to be blindfolded, while the other set up "roadblocks" in the room. Standing on the other side of the room, one of us directed the blindfolded person toward us with specific (and literal) step-by-step directions. The one being guided had to listen carefully instead of just trying to walk toward the voice; otherwise, he or she would bump into or trip over obstacles (no purposeful misguiding was allowed!). Still my girls can remember the fun we had and how the game was linked to the biblical principle we had studied.

Another instrument for learning is hand motions. Recently, we concluded our discussions on sharing the Gospel. Scripture verses, a brief outline with accompanying hand motions for each point, and a picture diagram of the cross spanning a chasm that separated man from God were memorized. The girls even took turns role playing the Gospel. We did this at the breakfast table while our two year old, Jenny Rose, was scarfing down her cereal. One morning during her milk dribbling efforts, she put her spoon down and to all of our amazement blurted out (with correct hand motions), "Man, God, Jezuf, faif!" We all roared and clapped our hands. Soon she too joined in (as I quickly moved her bowl of milk a good, safe distance away!).

As foundational as Bible training is, it cannot stand alone in our endeavors to disciple our little world-changers. Worship and prayer are vital elements in this process. Much of a person's spiritual thermometer can be read by how he or she expresses himself or herself in worship and prayer. There is a dynamic in worship that is outside of our ability to comprehend or explain. There is nothing more beautiful than watching a child express his or her love for God in worship. We, as parents, must take care in

demonstrating an excitement and joy as we lead our children in this discipline. And don't be afraid to round up some good songs that utilize hand motions. This again helps involve the little ones so their focus is more on the song than how much they need to fidget or squirm to get comfortable.

Lastly, model and encourage prayer. It's been said that prayer is not just preparation for the battle, it **IS** the battle. In planting a church in a very unfamiliar city, we have found this to be quite true. We are having to pray all the time. There have certainly been challenges, and yet our children are growing by leaps and bounds through it all. In the process our girls have learned to be bold and cry out to the Lord. They look forward to prayer (unless Daddy started evening Family Time late and they're tired!), because they know it works. God's stakes line our pathway of prayer. When we receive the monthly newsletter from our missionary friends in Vladivostok, Russia (whom they know personally), we read it and pray for them regularly. Operation World by Patrick Johnstone is another very helpful tool in praying for countries around the world. It has been instrumental in giving our girls a global perspective on what God is doing world-wide (in addition to addressing issues on politics, language, economics, and education).

As our world's future turns on its decision of whether to follow Jesus or not, it desperately needs a new generation of on-fire, torch-bearing, faith-infused world-changers who will take their stand against this world's decadent system, combat its frontal attack on Christianity and morality in general, and extend the truth and love of Jesus with conviction and power that causes evil to crumble and nations to repent and turn to God with such global impact that revival is commonplace and the whole earth is **“filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14)**. This may indeed happen in our day, but the key moment is not the time when the last leg of the relay crosses the finish line, but the passing of the baton, or victory torch, from one generation's hand to the next. Will we drop it as generations since Joshua have or will we keep the fire burning? To put it forthrightly, the entire consummation of Christian history and evangelization of this world **MAY** rest in our ability to do this. How seriously then do you suppose we should take this responsibility?