

“Making a Good Handoff”

2 Timothy 1:1-5 ¹

It was suppertime, and a fifteen year-old boy became quite concerned when he found his mother in bed.

“Mom, are you sick or something?” he queried.

“Well, as a matter of fact,” she replied, weakly, “I’m not feeling well at all.”

“I’m sorry, Mom,” the young man offered, and then, after a moment of reflection, added, “Don’t you worry a bit about dinner. I’m getting pretty big now, and I’ll be happy to carry you down to the stove!”²

While you’re pondering that, did you know that a 2013 survey in the U.K. revealed that the average stay-at-home Mom faces an average of one question every two and a half minutes? That comes to nearly 300 questions a day, with four year-old girls being the most curious, accounting for 390 questions a day all by themselves.³

Salary.com has a “salary wizard” that any Mom can use to determine what her worth is to the household.⁴ The job description includes the following roles:

Administrative Assistant	Interior Designer
Bookkeeper	Janitor
Chief Executive Officer	Laundry Operator
Computer Operator	Logistics Analyst
Cook	Nutritionist
Day Care Teacher	Plumber
Event Planner	Psychologist
Facilities Manager	Spiritual Guide
General Maintenance Worker	Staff Nurse
Groundskeeper	Teacher
Housekeeper	Van Driver

The study calculates that the average stay-at-home Mom puts in 96.5 hours a week on the job, for which, if outsourced, a family in Columbia would have to pay over \$122,000 a year. The study concluded that the average Mom who works outside the home should make about \$67,000 a year just for what she does at home. Can I get an “Amen”?

While you hold these remarkable images in your mind with respect to motherhood, let me add one of a different sort. This one has to do with track and field.

In the 2004 Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, the American women’s team was favored to win the gold medal, relying heavily on Marion Jones, a sprinter who had won four gold medals at the previous games in Sydney, Australia. The American team was already off to a strong start when Jones took the baton for the second leg of the race. She gained ground as she ran her 100 meters and approached Lauryn Williams, a young speedster who would run the third leg.

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on May 10, 2015, Mothers’ Day.

² Dan Meyer, in the sermon, “God’s Love for Weary Mothers,” Christ Church of Oak Brook, 5.11.03.

³ “Mothers asked nearly 300 questions a day, study finds,” *Telegraph*, 3.28.13.

⁴ http://swz.salary.com/MomSalaryWizard/LayoutScripts/Mswl_LocalRange.aspx

Williams began running as Jones drew near, but when she reached back to receive the baton, they couldn't complete the handoff. Once, twice, three times Jones thrust the baton forward, but each time it missed William's hand—she couldn't seem to wrap her fingers around it. Finally, on the fourth try, they made the connection, but by that time, they'd crossed out of the 20-yard exchange zone and were disqualified. Everyone knew they were the fastest team on the track. The night before, they'd had the fastest qualifying time. But when they couldn't complete the handoff, their race was over.

Another famous handoff is recorded in the New Testament, though it's not called by that name. The back story to this handoff began during Paul's first missionary journey when he and Barnabas first preached in the city of Lystra in Acts 14. After Paul healed a crippled man there, he and Barnabas were briefly thought to be the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes; but the cheers soon turned to jeers, and Paul was dragged out of the city, pelted with stones, and left for dead. That was not a very good start for a revival meeting!

When Paul began his second missionary journey in Acts 16, Lystra was one of the first places to which he returned, concerned, as he always was, to check on and to encourage the believers there. Among the believers in Lystra, Paul met a young disciple named Timothy, whose mother was a Jewish Christian.⁵ Timothy was well thought of by the Christians of the area, and Paul decided to take him along on the journey.

Timothy accompanied Paul on the remainder of his second and his entire third missionary journey, and the two of them became very close. As he began the letter we know as 2 Timothy, Paul wrote, *"I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also"* (2 Timothy 1:3-5).

That was the "handoff"—did you catch it?—***"I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."*** In that passing comment, Paul confirms the handoff of personal faith over three generations. We don't know whether Timothy's mother or his grandmother was the first to believe in Jesus, or whether they both did at more or less the same time; but however it began, it's clear that Paul saw evidence of faithfulness across all three of those generations. The "handoffs" were made, and made successfully.

It's as true now as it was then that faith is more caught than taught. Our children have an unnerving ability to discern the moral values that really guide our lives. They watch us, and who we are is inescapable, no matter what we say. If you and I don't practice what we preach, our children may parrot our preaching, but they will copy our practice. That's how spiritual DNA really gets passed on to the next generation. Lois and Eunice didn't just "talk the talk." They "walked the walk" of faithfulness, and Timothy followed in their footsteps.

It's still true today that we parents are the primary teachers of our children, for better or for worse, whether we intend to be or not. In the formative years in which the die is cast, the twig bent, and the neurons connected, we parents have virtually unlimited opportunities to shape the lives, hearts, minds, and spirits of our children; and there is absolutely nothing more important for us to do.

⁵ Timothy's father was a Gentile (Greek), but we don't know whether he was a believer or not.

In his book, *Revolutionary Parenting*,⁶ pollster George Barna noted that there are currently three dominant approaches to parenting in these United States. He called the first of these approaches “parenting by default.”

According to Barna, “**parenting by default**” has to do with taking the path of least resistance. Parents who take this approach are heavily influenced by cultural norms and traditions, with the result that they try to keep their children as happy as possible while they themselves continue to focus on and to enjoy the non-parenting aspects of their lives.

The second approach, which Barna called “**trial-and-error parenting**,” is based on the notion that since there are presumed to be no trustworthy and universal guidelines for parents to follow, the best that they can do is to experiment, to observe outcomes, and hopefully to improve upon their successes and failures. In this approach, parents’ goal is to perform better than most other parents they know.

Barna found that the least common approach to parenting these days is so distinct that he called it “**revolutionary parenting**.” According to Barna, revolutionary parenting takes the Bible’s teachings on life and family seriously and attempts to apply them faithfully and consistently day by day.

Perhaps the most important difference in these approaches to parenting has to do with their desired outcomes. According to Barna, *parenting by default and by trial-and-error are both approaches by which parents raise their children without having parenting define the central priority of their lives*. On the other hand, Barna notes, revolutionary parenting makes parenting a life priority based on the parents’ faith in God. Those parents who pursue revolutionary parenting “*define success as intentionally facilitating faith-based transformation in the lives of their children, rather than simply accepting the aging and survival of the child as a satisfactory result.*”⁷

That’s another way of talking about “making a good handoff” of faith to the next generation. As generations come and go, there always comes a point at which a handoff must be made in which the next generation receives the baton of faith and begins to run with it. And as many of you know, that handoff isn’t as easy as it looks. It isn’t automatic. It only comes as the result of thousands and thousands of practice runs.⁸

In his best-selling book, *Good to Great*,⁹ Jim Collins has offered a powerful image of what it looks like to make those “thousands and thousands of practice runs” that lead to a good handoff of faith to the next generation: “Picture a huge, heavy flywheel” he says, “a massive metal disk mounted horizontally on an axle, about 30 feet in diameter, two feet thick, and weighing about 5,000 pounds. Now imagine that your task is to get the flywheel rotating on the axle as fast and long as possible.

“Pushing with great effort, you get the flywheel to inch forward, moving almost imperceptibly at first. You keep pushing and, after two or three hours of persistent effort, you get the flywheel to complete one entire turn.

“You keep pushing, and the flywheel begins to move a bit faster, and with continued great effort, you move it around a second rotation. You keep pushing in a consistent direction. Three turns . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . the flywheel builds up speed . . . seven . . . eight . . . you keep

⁶ George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting: What the Research Shows Really Works* (Barna, 2007).

⁷ *Barna Update*, www.barna.org, 4/9/07.

⁸ Bryan Wilkerson, “From Generation to Generation,” www.preachingtoday.com.

⁹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don’t* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001).

pushing . . . nine . . . ten . . . it builds momentum . . . eleven . . . twelve . . . moving faster with each turn . . . twenty . . . thirty . . . fifty . . . a hundred.

“Then, at some point . . . the momentum of the thing kicks in in your favor, hurling the great flywheel forward, turn after turn . . . its own heavy weight working for you. You’re pushing no harder than during the first rotation, but the flywheel goes faster and faster. Each turn of the flywheel builds upon work done earlier, compounding your investment of effort. A thousand times faster, then ten thousand, then a hundred thousand. The huge heavy disk flies forward, with almost unstoppable momentum.

“Now suppose someone came along and asked, ‘What was the one big push that caused this thing to go so fast?’ You wouldn’t be able to answer; it’s just a nonsensical question. Was it the first push? The second? The fifth? The hundredth? No! It was *all* of them added together in an overall accumulation of effort applied in a consistent direction. Some pushes may have been bigger than others, but any single heave—no matter how large—reflects a small fraction of the entire cumulative effect upon the flywheel. . . . There was no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no wrenching revolution. Success comes about by a cumulative process—step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn by turn of the flywheel—that adds up to sustained and spectacular results.”¹⁰

I think Collins’ image of the flywheel is a pretty good illustration of how we get to a good handoff in parenting—by keeping on keeping on doing the fundamental things we know to do with all the excellence we can muster, with the help of God’s Spirit. We don’t get there all at once.

John Wooden, the legendary coach of the UCLA Bruins, coached that team for fifteen years before they won their first championship. “From 1948 to 1963, Wooden worked in relative obscurity before winning his first championship in 1964. Year by year, Wooden built the underlying foundations, developing a recruiting system, implementing a consistent philosophy, and refining the full-court-press style of play. No one paid too much attention to the quiet, soft-spoken coach and his team until—wham!—they hit breakthrough and systematically crushed every serious competitor for more than a decade.”¹¹

“*There was no miracle moment*. Although it may have looked like a single-stroke breakthrough to those peering in from the outside, it was anything but that to people experiencing the transformation from within. Rather, it was a quiet, deliberate process of figuring out what needed to be done to create the best future results and then simply taking those steps, one after the other, turn by turn of the flywheel. After pushing on that flywheel in a consistent direction over an extended period of time, they’d inevitably hit a point of breakthrough.”¹²

And the same thing is true for you as a parent. “If **you** diligently . . . continue to push in a consistent direction on the flywheel, accumulating momentum step by step and turn by turn, you will eventually reach breakthrough. It might not happen today, or tomorrow, or next week. It might not even happen next year. But it *will* happen.”¹³

Successful parenting involves a long obedience in the same direction. **Keep pushing the flywheel, my friends. Keep pushing the wheel.**

¹⁰ Collins, pp. 164-165.

¹¹ Collins, pp. 171-172.

¹² Collins, p. 169.

¹³ Collins, pp. 184-185.