

I begin this evening with a poem called “The Bridge Builder.”

An old man going a lone highway,  
Came, at the evening cold and gray,  
To a chasm vast and deep and wide.  
Through which was flowing a sullen tide  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,  
The sullen stream had no fear for him;  
But he turned when safe on the other side  
And built a bridge to span the tide.

“Old man,” said a fellow pilgrim near,  
“You are wasting your strength with building here;  
Your journey will end with the ending day,  
You never again will pass this way;  
You’ve crossed the chasm, deep and wide,  
Why build this bridge at evening tide?”

The builder lifted his old gray head;  
“Good friend, in the path I have come,” he said,  
“There followed after me to-day  
A youth whose feet must pass this way.  
This chasm that has been as naught to me  
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;  
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”

I love this inspiring poem, don’t you? But did you notice there are two pilgrims on this journey, the old man who had enough foresight to build a bridge for those following in his footsteps and his fellow-pilgrim who had no vision nor heart for the fair-haired youth who would come behind – too absorbed in his own end-of-life story to care about the next generation.

Now, unfortunately, this self-absorbed fellow reminds me of one of the saddest end-of-life-stories in all of scripture – the story of Hezekiah, who began so well but went downhill in his very last lap. He did not finish well.

He became king of Judah at age 25 and reigned for 29 magnificent years of Judah’s history as a true reformer, purifying and repairing the Temple, purging it of its idols, reforming its priesthood, revitalizing the worship at the Jerusalem Temple. He also defeated the Philistines, resumed the Passover, fortified the walls of the capitol and brought in a fresh water tunnel as a means of protecting the city if it were ever under siege. He is portrayed in Scripture as a great and good king.

During his final lap he fell ill, begged God to extend his years, which God did. But then pride seeped into his heart. During those years he foolishly flaunted his wealth

before a Babylonian king. He modeled self-absorption to his whole nation as well as to his son birthed and raised during those last fifteen years – a son who later became the worst king Judah ever knew: King Manasseh.

But saddest of all, when warned by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 39:8 that some of his own flesh and blood would be taken away to Babylon, he callously replied, “The word of the Lord you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

After living such a sterling life as a top-notch leader, in his twilight years he lost his heart and vision for the next generation and forgot to build a bridge for the fair-haired youth who would come behind, including his very own children and grandchildren!

Here are our two sons, their wives and our eight grandchildren, whom I love with all my heart. I can’t imagine not caring about them after our death. And I’m giving my life to training up the next generation at Western Seminary where I oversee women’s citywide community events and teach and oversee the women’s academic track. Both of my Western roles give me ample opportunity to hang out with and train up the next generation, particularly millennials. I love the next generation and I am passionate about seeing their lives count for the kingdom of God long after I am gone.

How about you? Are you building a bridge for those who will come behind?

Now I love to be inspired by the Old and New Testament saints who had a heart for those who came behind, don’t you?– Moses with Joshua, Elijah with Elisha and those in Elijah’s prophets’ school, Naomi with Ruth, Elizabeth with Mary, and of course the best next-generation discipler of all, Jesus in the training of the twelve.

But tonight I’d like to focus on another sterling bridge-builder, Paul, who in his twilight years, challenged Timothy to build into the next generation. Let me read our text for this evening, 2 Timothy 2:1-2, a passage we all love and perhaps know by heart.

2 Tim. 2:1 “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

2 Tim. 2:2 “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.”

As we take a fresh look at this beloved passage, I want us to focus on three challenges or three callings that beckon us to consider our responsibility to the next generation. God’s calling in choosing well, in entrusting well and finishing well.

Now to set the context for choosing well, Paul gave Timothy two commands that help us better understand Paul’s exhortation in v. 2.

In 2 Timothy 1:14, he tells Timothy to “guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit.” *Timothy, before I command you to entrust anything to reliable men, you must first guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.* Guard, *phulasso* in the Greek, is a military term. It connotes a night watchman up on a city wall, marching around it to keep the bad out and the good in. It echoes Proverbs 4:23 “Guard your heart, it is the well spring of life,” and Philippians 4:7 where we’re told that “the peace of God will guard your heart and mind as they rest in Christ Jesus” and Jude 24 “to him who is able to keep you from falling” – same Greek word - to keep you under guard for safe keeping.

*Before I, Paul, can challenge you Timothy, about entrusting to others anything you might have to pass on, you must guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.*

The good deposit, the NIV states. The treasure entrusted to you, the NASB reads. 1 Tim. 1:11 makes clear that the treasure is not the Holy Spirit but the glorious gospel that was first entrusted to Paul that Paul had passed on to Timothy. But I love that with humility Paul admits, *I wasn’t the first to entrust the gospel to you. Though you were born to a Greek, non-believing father, you were raised in a home with a legacy of female women of faith – your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice who first passed on the gospel to you.* And I pray every wife married to a “beloved unbeliever” and even every single mom can take courage from these two godly women who raised up such a godly young man without the spiritual support of a husband.

Now I love that the word “gospel” was first used by the gospel maker. It first fell from Jesus’ lips who spoke it eight times in the gospels. Guard what Jesus died to create, the good news, the treasure within you because Jesus *is* the center of the gospel.

And how are we to guard it? Everyday by falling more in love with the gospel-maker. Everyday by reading his word, by asking for the help of the Holy Spirit to passionately love what we read, to love obeying what it tells us, obeying it because we love the gospel-maker. Our intimacy with Jesus will be what will attract the next generation to us, and through us, to Jesus Christ himself.

I remember a dear friend of ours, years ago now, when he was a high school father. He was very sad that his high school daughter no longer wanted to go to church with him or have anything to do with Jesus. He woke up one morning, looked himself in the mirror and asked, “Is there anything in my life that would cause my daughter to want to follow Christ?” And as his own face stared back at him, his honest response was “No, there is nothing!” And so he set out to change himself rather than his daughter. And no doubt you can guess the end of story. His passionate love for Jesus became the magnet that drew her back to an intimate relationship with Christ.

In a message entitled *Signs of Hope for the Next Generation* by an up-and-coming millennial connected with the gospel coalition, Trevin Wax, we learn that though a good proportion of millennials who grew up in Christian homes are no longer attending church, those who grew up in homes where the following three spiritual disciplines occurred regularly, many of these young people are still walking with Christ.

#1. Regular Bible reading in the home. Bible reading where Christ was the central figure in the grand narrative. Not Bible reading that emphasized the golden-rule gospel of right living, of being nice to people, of behavior modification that leaves Jesus out of the picture with simply a moralistic understanding of the gospel. No, but a believing gospel where a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus was central to how the Bible was read and discussed. For the one thing that still engages today's young people, says Trevin Wax, is Jesus Christ himself.

Secondly, in these homes, children were engaged regularly in prayer, in trusting God to be at work in their own lives and in the lives of those they loved.

And the third spiritual discipline present was service in the church - in contrast to church attendance – service where children were engaged in missions trips, helping in the nursery, ministry to the homeless – somewhere where their faith was regularly put into action with their very own feet.

The first question we have to ask ourselves if we want to impact the next generation is what are we doing with the treasure, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ that dwells within us? If we aren't passionately in love with Jesus ourselves, we'll have no magnet to draw the next generation to us and to our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the young women that I have poured my life into in the last several years didn't take heed to guard the deposit in her heart. She is a wonderful Bible expositor. Some at our seminary feel she is one of the best female Bible expositors that the seminary has ever graduated. I agree, and I began to give her speaking opportunities to teach at our Women's Center events. I spent time with her personally, mostly by phone as she lives about an hour away from the seminary.

But as she got out there, she became way too busy entrusting the gospel to others, and stopped guarding the deposit, the treasure within. She fell morally with a prominent pastor in our area who also stopped guarding the treasure. What made matters far worse, he was her doctoral mentor, and therefore held a position of power over her. She lost her ministry in our city, her doctoral degree, and her rapidly expanding ministry to women even beyond the Northwest.

Praise God her husband, a pastor himself, has passionately stuck by her, as did their church. With great humility of heart, she is slowly rebuilding her broken life.

And I am so proud of how she is walking through this season of facing into the refiner's fire. But it was a sobering example to all of us in the seminary community as to why Paul exhorted Timothy to guard his own deposit first.

The second command that comes right before 2 Timothy 2:2 is "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." *Strong* here is a word derived from *dunamis* that describes the Holy Spirit's power from which we get our English word dynamite. And why was strength in the power of the Holy Spirit so important in Paul's context? Well, in chapter one he reminds Timothy that everyone in the province of Asia had deserted him, except for Onesiphorus. And in much of chapter two he warns Timothy that *if you are going to take what I've taught you and pour it into reproducers, there is going to be suffering for you, too!*

2 Timothy 2:3 "Endure hardship **with us** like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." For in verse 9 he reminds Timothy, "I am suffering even to the point of being chained." And in verse 10 he challenges him, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect."

It won't necessarily be easy to pour into the next generation. It may require us to make adjustments in how we do church, in how we worship, in how we build trust over time. God might call us to die to self in little ways in order to intimately connect and help them grow. So guard the treasure **and** be strong.

Now with these two commands preparing for 2 Timothy 2:2, let's consider three imperatives or callings that are key to success in the disciple-making process of the next generation.

Choosing well, entrusting well and finishing well. First, choosing well, and here Paul defines whom we are to choose: Choose reliable, faithful, trustworthy, stable men and women.

We all only have so much time and energy. If we are to pour into the next generation and help them be reproducers, we must choose well – those who are fleeing the evil desires of youth, those who have already, at a young age, begun to establish a good solid reputation.

Now it doesn't mean that we won't have some in our lives who are not yet reliable, who haven't proven themselves to be trustworthy. I am coming alongside the young woman I just described. I long to be one more voice, helping her to figure out how she got off track and how to now stay on.

But I must be wise about into whom I will pour a good portion of my life. Some of us may be called to choose a pre-Christian and entrust the gospel to them. Others may be called to choose those with or without a Christian heritage. But when you choose, choose intentionally and choose well.

If Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before choosing his disciples, how much more so do we need to be on our knees asking God to lead us.

Moses chose Joshua, Elijah – Elisha, Jonathan chose David, Paul chose Timothy and Titus. Jesus chose the three and the twelve.

But Abraham chose Lot, against the Lord's wise counsel I might add. Though David chose well his mighty men, he had a tendency to choose the questionable – Abner, when Joab, the commander of his army warned him not to trust Abner. He also chose his son Absalom when nothing in his character spoke of trustworthiness.

And when one is choosing individuals to be on a team, we need to be even more careful to choose wisely.

Gail McDonald, one of my favorite mentors, once challenged me when I was struggling with a leader on my team. "The first thing you need to ask yourself when you are having trouble with a leader is "Who chose her?" And "**why** did you choose her? Only for her giftedness, or did you choose her for her passionate heart for Christ?" It is a lesson I've never forgotten. I had not chosen well.

In *The Ideal Team Player*, a book I highly recommend, Patrick Lencioni suggests three top virtues that make a good team player.

#1 is humility. Humble team members affirm others and don't need to be on center stage.

#2 Patrick calls hunger. Hunger to get the job done, to learn, to work hard, to help the team "click" as they move the ball down the court.

#3 he calls SMARTS, which he identifies not as good intellectual capacity but having common sense about people. People smarts.

He proposes that all three virtues are absolutely necessary to be a good team player. Lack only one of these virtues and the team will suffer. For instance, those who are hungry and smart but not humble will function on a team like a skillful politician. If any team member lacks two virtues, they can create even more trouble for the team. For instance, the hungry who lacks humility and SMARTS will be a bulldozer, the humble only will be like a pawn, SMARTS only will erode the team by being a charmer. Read the book. It's filled with wisdom about how to choose wisely. And I've put an article up on-line for how to help team members develop lacking virtues, if coached well.

But as we build into the next generation, not only do we need to be choosing well, we also need to be entrusting well. When Paul speaks here of entrusting, he is using the language of commerce. One commentator states, "In the ancient world there were no safe deposit boxes. Whenever a man went on a long journey, he might leave his valued possessions with someone whom he trusted. When the valuables were deposited, it was up to the one receiving the deposit to keep them

safe. According to ancient legal doctrine, a trustee was obligated to preserve a deposit 'unharmd and unchanged.'"

So we need to entrust the gospel to those who will keep it safe, unharmd and unchanged, thereby praying they will develop a heart like Paul who declared on parting from the Ephesian church after a two-year stay, "I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). No matter what the culture says.

I think of a lovely young millennial, age 34, Bethany Allen, a redhead, who will be our keynote speaker next year at our citywide Portland-Vancouver event. She's a former student of mine who now teaches our introductory course in our women's concentration, *Pastoral Understanding of Women*.

Last year at our citywide event I gave her a tough assignment. I asked her, as a single woman, to teach a breakout session on sexuality, both its biblical basis as well as how we can minister to the sexually broken. She was not afraid to tackle this challenging topic in a day when gay rights and sexual confusion are commonplace. Her biblical underpinnings were clear, her exegesis right on. But so was her Christ-like compassion for those struggling with sexual identity.

Bethany serves on the church staff of mostly millennials, a church in our city well-known for welcoming the sexually broken because they are well aware that above all else, the sexually broken need community, not isolation, in order to heal.

She also lovingly addressed those in her audience that might respond with paranoia or fear when they even think of spending time with someone holding to a different sexual orientation than their own. She encouraged all of us to remember that this individual's identity is far broader than his/her sexuality. *Treat them like a person, with a family and a job and hobbies and backstories. Serve them, listen to them, love and accept them. Help them to hear how the love of Jesus can meet all their needs, transforming them in every area of life.* I was so proud of her. She was the perfect blend of truth and grace, just like our Lord Jesus.

Now as I have personally worked with the younger generation, I've learned that we may need to package our one-on-one mentoring with them a little differently than we did in years past. Sue Edwards, professor at Dallas Seminary who specializes in women, says in her book by the same title, "We need to focus on *Organic Mentoring*."

Sue says, "Older women value programs, structure, and organization. Younger women value organic, flexible approaches. Older women prefer to teach and impart wisdom. Younger women want to process life and learn from real experiences. Older women choose the mentor for the mentee. Younger women prefer to choose their own mentor and prefer to learn from multiple mentors." Great book. So much wisdom as to how to mentor this new generation organically.

I've put a summary of her key points up on-line for you, but I highly recommend you read her book.

When I meet weekly with Amanda Zenzes, my wonderfully gifted millennial admin, whom I chose for her humility, her hunger and her SMARTS, I encourage her to just talk - about her week, her time with Jesus, her course work, her relationships, her fears - and I do the same. We just do life together. I set the agenda to make sure we have adequate time to be the people of God before we do the work of God – before we get to the details of our common projects for the women's center. We share openly, transparently, with gut level honesty what's happened for each of us in the last week, including where we might be struggling. I entrust the gospel to her by helping her to hear how the gospel is impacting my own life, my marriage, my ministry, my processing of life. And she does the same with me. And then we pray together for each other before we even think about the work of the center.

Choosing well, but then entrusting well, shifting our packaging for the next generation to meet their needs organically. But finally, finishing well. Here are the facts of Scripture from Robert Clinton's research found in his book *The Making of a Leader*

- One third of biblical saints finished well
- One third finished so-so
- One third finished poorly

I love how the apostle John described his heart for those who came behind him. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth."  
3 John 4.

How can we positively impact the next generation if we don't finish well? When we don't, not only do we leave no bridge behind for them to cross, but we do damage to their souls, to the souls of those we say we love, to those for whom Christ died, to those we long to draw under our wing and empower to fly. We violate their trust when they see us no longer living out the gospel.

To finish well we need to never stop loving Jesus, with all our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

And I personally believe that finishing well often means that we'll have an eye to train up those who just might be our very own replacement. Do you have your eye on someone who may carry on the torch after you have crossed the finish line? I strongly believe I won't finish well at Western Seminary until I have trained up someone to take up the torch of training up women for gospel ministry.

I want to close with a summary version of an actual experience Sue Edwards lived through recorded in the first chapter of her book. Climb into this scene with me, will you?

As a mentee longing to be mentored, imagine yourself on a pitch-dark road in the middle of a blinding snowstorm where you can't even see for miles, headlights or taillights in either direction. The snow is so dense and the road so dark that the road itself disappears. And suddenly you see the taillights of what you soon discover is an eighteen-wheeler driven by an experienced driver. And as you sneak up behind them, you begin to experience one moment at a time that this practiced driver is leading you right out of the blizzard, a blizzard called life.

What a beautiful picture of what it means to be available to the next generation. Shine your taillights, entrust to them the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why not give your life to building a bridge for the fair-haired, dark-haired or even redheaded young men and women who will come behind. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, give us wisdom to choose well, to entrust well and to finish well so we can love well those who will come behind, for your Kingdom's sake and for your glory. Amen.