

# 10. NEXT- GENERATION DISCIPLES

## 1 Kings 19v18-21.

We know how crucial the handover in a relay is. The UK men's 4x100 metres sprint relay team came a cropper in the Commonwealth games because the hand over failed. I believe God wants to speak to us this morning about passing on the baton to next-generation disciples.

**v19: Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.**

This incident has its background in God's instruction to Elijah to "anoint" Elisha as his successor. (v16) He travels and finds Elisha ploughing. Instead of pouring oil over him Elijah throws his cloak round Elisha and walks off, apparently saying nothing. Elisha seems to know what the action means. It seems that the prophet's cloak and anointing oil carried the same powerful message. We know that Elisha could not claim the cloak as his own until Elijah had passed from the world. (2 Kings 2v13f) But the message was clear.

This morning I'd like to explore more fully what this meant – this throwing of the cloak over Elisha. Our mission is not simply to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, it is to raise up the next generation of disciples. We may not have a cloak to throw over anyone or a literal baton to pass from hand to hand, but we have this Great Commission from Jesus: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28v18ff.) So let's think about this throwing of the cloak.

### 1. Elijah had something to pass on.

This action looks like an investiture. An investiture is when honour or rank is bestowed on someone. Sometimes it involves a robe or gown being put over the shoulders of the one being invested. Elisha is being given Elijah's mantle! What an honour! Elisha would know all about this great man's exploits. But Elijah had more than a cloak to pass on; it was a symbol of his knowledge of God, his calling, his exploits, his whole prophetic ministry.

What do you and I have to pass on to others? You may think you have little to offer. For starters, don't compare yourself to Elijah, or anyone else. The important questions for you and me are:

- What is the quality of my life in God?
- Do other people see anything they would like to emulate in me?
- Do I have a godly character?
- Do I have a serving spirit?
- Am I a worshipper?
- Am I an intercessor?
- Has God gifted me in any way that can be passed on to others?

- Am I making progress in my walk with God?

If I am going somewhere with God, if I am following Jesus, then I have something to pass on to next generation disciples. The apostle Paul cut to the heart of making disciples when he wrote *“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 11v1)

Elijah had something to pass on. He was giving away *himself* as he gave away his cloak. Raising next generation disciples starts in the same way. I read this quote from a book by American writer Lee Strobel recently:

*“Tour-bus Christians’ drive comfortably through life as they gaze out the window at others who are elbow-deep in the daily adventure of serving God and working among spiritually needy people. Tour-bus Christians are insulated from the real-world activity and excitement of God’s work. They may avoid some of the pain that’s involved, and they may protect themselves from the difficulties and struggles, but there’s no real adventure on a tour bus. They miss out on the excitement of living at the edge of expectation. They don’t experience the tremendous counter-cultural truth that the more a Christian pours himself out serving others in God’s name, the more God will fill him to overflowing.*

*The adventure comes when you tell the tour bus to stop, and you jump off and say: “Lord, I want to get into the fray. I want to play a role in the biggest adventure story of all time. Use me to make a difference. Use me to impact a young person for You. Use me to solve someone’s problem. Use me to soothe someone’s pain. Use me to answer someone’s prayer. Use me to feed someone who’s hungry. Use me to rescue a child. Use me to bring someone to You. Use me to ease someone’s loneliness. Use me to raise a godly family. Use me to deepen someone’s faith. Use me to cheer someone on. Use me to help a broken person understand that he’s precious in Your sight. Use me to touch lives in Your name.”*

(‘Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry & Mary’ by Lee Strobel)

Making disciples starts when you give *yourself* to others. It is much more than passing on knowledge or skills; it is about giving yourself, your time, your priority, your love, your attention.. The apostle Paul summed it up like this: *“We were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that were delighted to share with you not only the gospel off God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”* (1 Thessalonians 2v7,8) This is at the heart of disciple making.

## **2. Elijah had somebody specific in mind.**

If we are to have next generation disciples then each of us needs to have specific people in mind. Some of you followed the recent BBC2 Series ‘The Apprentice’ in which Sir Alan Sugar put a group of hopefuls through their paces for the privilege of just one becoming his apprentice. By throwing his cloak over Elisha, Elijah was saying *“You’re the man, Elisha! You are going to be my apprentice.”* From now on Elijah would train him up. Elijah would be responsible for him; he would take care of him and teach him all he knew.

We see the same in Jesus first steps in making disciples. He had specific people in mind, and approached them and invited them: two fishermen brothers. Simon and Andrew, mending their nets: *"Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* (Matthew 4v19) A despised tax gatherer called Matthew sitting at his desk. (Matthew 9v9) Later, having gathered a variety of followers, Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before selecting twelve *"that they might be with him."* (Luke 6v12-16; Mark 3v13-19)

God has specific people in mind for each of us to pass the baton on to. We need to ask God who they are.

For some of us it is very clear. If you are a parent then you have a crucial part to play in your children's lives. Many of us can play some part in helping to shape children in their early years. Let's not undervalue this. It is one of the greatest privileges in life to help a child come to know Jesus and then put Biblical truth into them. Some of you may have been asked to be a godparent; that is another opportunity to play some part in directing them to God. Others are aunts or uncles or grandparents. Some of you are involved with children at toddler groups or school or in church.

Then there are spiritual children - new Christians (young or older) who need someone to get alongside them and encourage them: praying for them and helping them get started with prayer or doing a simple Bible study; keeping in touch, having fun with them, sharing their problems. In church cells each new Christian can be linked with someone from the group to help them for at least their first year. This not only gives you someone to apprentice it also models something to your apprentice; so they will want to do the same.

For any who carry any leadership responsibility it is vital we ask God to give us younger men & women we can apprentice - in every area of church ministry. If we are going to plant multiple churches in Northumberland we certainly need to raise up more elders. I have been reading a dynamic little book by P.J.Smyth, a young leader leading our newfrontiers church in Johannesburg, and heading up an apostolic team working more widely in Southern Africa. He has called it *'The World Needs More Elders'*. He writes: *"Work out how many leaders that you need for your local work now. Then treble it. Why? You need one batch of leaders for the local work now, another batch for the local work as it grows and another batch for sending out to plant other churches."*

### **3. Elijah did not coerce – he invited.**

When he threw the cloak over Elisha he also threw the initiative to him. So we read in v20. **Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?"** Is there a glimpse here of Elijah's lack of social skills? It seems a bit brusque don't you think?

But whatever his manner, Elijah is saying something self-effacing: *"It is God you must respond to Elisha, not me!"* Elijah was not commanding or coercing

him. He was certainly not charming him. Elisha must follow out of a sense of his own call. John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah, did much the same; He pointed his disciples away from himself to Jesus. *“He must increase; I must decrease.” “He must become greater; I must become less.”*

We must respect people’s freedom. We must never control or manipulate others or make them dependent on us. They must always be encouraged to seek God for themselves and respond to Him first. This is a situation where we live with the balance of God’s Sovereignty and man’s freedom. In this instance, God had named Elisha, but we still see Elijah leaving him free to respond or not - to come immediately or throw a party first. There was no guilt trip. No super-spirituality lurking in the background.

**v21: So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate.** Elisha threw a party. A bit like Bilbo at the beginning of “The Lord of the Rings”! Elisha marked the end of his life as a man of the fields. His oxen were his livelihood but he made a feast out of them. His plough was his vital tool, but he burned it. This then was his response to Elijah, and more importantly, to God. There would be no turning back. **Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.**

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So then lets ask ourselves: who we are helping to shape and influence in the next generation of disciples? In years to come they will honour you for it. Some of us can name people who were so important in helping to shape & coach us as disciples of Jesus. Let’s go and do the same.

**John Wilthew. June 2006**

