

PASSING THE TORCH

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



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1 Kings 1:1-2:12
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1 Kings 1:1-2:12

A few weeks ago, I woke up on a Friday morning feeling slightly depressed. I'm not sure why. I didn't go to bed the prior night feeling that way. I just woke up with the blues.

Later that afternoon, I would be leaving to teach at a weekend retreat for Santa Clara University students. I wasn't depressed about the retreat: I felt I had some helpful truths to share with the students from the life of Moses about facing fear, though I have to admit that I was a little worried about relating to them in the times between the teaching sessions. Let's just say I was a little concerned about spanning the generation gap. I'm not twenty anymore. I'm not even forty anymore. I'm not even . . . well, let's stop right there.

Maybe, in light of the generation gap, I was feeling my age, wondering whether I could connect.

David was feeling his age. The depiction of David in 1 Kings makes us wonder whether he was depressed. He doesn't seem to have anything left. Can anything snap David out of it? If we're concerned about personal decline, or even if we're simply in a funk, can anything snap us out of it?

A very beautiful young woman

1 Kings 1:1-4:

Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm. 2 Therefore his servants said to him, "Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms, that my lord the king may be warm." 3 So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not.

David's servants aren't simply concerned that David can't get warm. If they just wanted him to get warm, why do they look for a "young" woman? Why do they seek a "beautiful" young woman? Why is Abishag, the woman they find, described as a "very" beautiful young woman? His servants, by putting Abishag in bed with David, are hoping that he will have sex with her.

Why are David's servants concerned for his sex life? Because they connect his sex life with his capacity to lead. David is "old and advanced in years." He's in decline. David is in bed. His servants hope that they can get him out of bed by putting a beautiful young woman in bed with him.

The servants' plan doesn't work: "the king knew her not." David didn't have sex with her. Twice in 1 Kings the narrator notes that David did not "know" something that a king should have known (1 Kings 1:11, 18). His incapacity in the bedroom mirrors his incapacity in the throne room. His sexual impotence mirrors his political impotence. At least that's how David's servants see it.

There are wrong ways to go about trying to snap yourself out of what you perceive to be personal decline, illicit sex among them. Sex with your wife or husband? Go ahead. Please: go ahead. In any event, is there a right way to snap yourself out of a funk?

Adonijah exalts himself

1 Kings 1:5-10:

Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. 6 His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. 7 He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest. And they followed Adonijah and helped him. 8 But Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Nathan the prophet and

Shimei and Rei and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.

9 Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-rogel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, 10 but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon his brother.

For the second time, one of David's sons makes a grab for the throne. First, Absalom rebelled against David but ultimately failed. Now Adonijah, David's oldest surviving son, steps into the power vacuum created by David's demise. David failed to reprimand or discipline Absalom for murdering his brother Amnon, thereby encouraging Absalom to rebel. Now, in the context of another son's coup, the narrator notes that David had also coddled Adonijah. For the second time, a son who has not been challenged by his father is emboldened to seize the throne.

Adonijah may be the oldest surviving son, but the narrator doesn't present him as a worthy successor. He's "a very handsome man," like Saul, the previous king, and like Absalom, both of whom were handsomest in the land (1 Samuel 9:2, 2 Samuel 14:25-26). Those two men looked good but led poorly. When the Lord was helping the prophet Samuel identify David as king, he told him, "For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). In that the narrator notes Adonijah's striking appearance but says nothing about his heart, he classes him with Saul and Absalom, two unqualified leaders.

Nevertheless, Adonijah is able to enlist the support of Joab, David's top commander, and Abiathar, a priest. Several others, however, remain in David's camp. Those who followed Adonijah have longstanding ties with David in the tribe of Judah, in the south. Joab, by murdering Abner, his counterpart in the north, threatened David's unification efforts (2 Samuel 3:26-30). David, though he hailed from the south, unified north and south. It looks as if Adonijah is driving a wedge between north and south again.

The world is always changing, in some ways for the better and in some ways for the worse. The church is always changing, in some ways for the better and in some ways for the worse. Of course, opinions vary on what constitutes improvement and what constitutes decline. What if you're concerned about personal or cultural or ecclesiastical decline? What can you do?

David does nothing, which concerns Nathan.

Nathan and Bathsheba take action

1 Kings 1:11-27:

Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it? 12 Now therefore come, let me give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then is Adonijah king?' 14 Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words."

15 So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber (now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king). 16 Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, "What do you desire?" 17 She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your servant by the LORD your God, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.' 18 And now, behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. 19 He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited. 20 And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders."

22 While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in. 23 And they told the king, "Here is Nathan the prophet." And when he came in before the king, he bowed before the king, with his face to the ground. 24 And Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? 25 For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold,

they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ 26 But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. 27 Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?”

David’s ignorance concerning Adonijah is highlighted twice by the narrator (1 Kings 1:11, 18). Moreover, David has failed to appoint a successor. The king isn’t on top of things.

The prophet Nathan takes it upon himself inform David. Nathan was not invited to Adonijah’s celebration, presumably because he was committed to both David and Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba. Earlier, Nathan spoke to David about the future of his dynasty. When Solomon was born, the narrator of 2 Samuel observed that “the Lord loved him,” and Nathan gave Solomon a name, Jedidiah, that means “beloved of the Lord” (2 Samuel 7:12-13,12:24-25).

The prophet sees Solomon, not Adonijah, as heir to the throne. Although David is not reported in 2 Samuel as having promised the throne to Solomon, the narrator of 1 Chronicles implies that the Lord all along intended for Solomon to succeed David (1 Chronicles 22:9-13). Inasmuch as David takes no issue with either Nathan or Bathsheba’s contention that the throne was promised to Solomon, the narrator likely means for us to understand that such a promise was made.

Nathan takes it upon himself to not only inform David but also to motivate him to do what he’s supposed to do: arrange for Solomon to succeed him. Nathan sends Bathsheba to David and then he visits David himself.

If you’re moping around because of personal, cultural, or ecclesiastical decline, sometimes it helps if someone like Nathan or Bathsheba gives you a different perspective and lights a fire under you. Perhaps we can challenge each other in that way. Or perhaps Nathan and Bathsheba themselves, as you listen to them address David, are lighting a fire under you even now.

Finally, David does something.

David rises to the occasion

1 Kings 1:28-40:

Then King David answered, “Call Bathsheba to me.” So she came into the king’s presence and stood before the king. 29 And the king swore, saying, “As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, 30 as I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel, saying, ‘Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ even so will I do this day.” 31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, “May my lord King David live forever!”

32 King David said, “Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.” So they came before the king. 33 And the king said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ 35 You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.” 36 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, “Amen! May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, say so. 37 As the LORD has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.”

38 So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule and brought him to Gihon. 39 There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!” 40 And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.

David, in response to the pleas of Nathan and Bathsheba, rises to the occasion. Earlier, his servants sent a very beautiful young woman to lie with him, but David did not “know” her. Earlier, he did not “know” that Adonijah had declared himself to be king. Now that he knows about Adonijah’s activities, and about his failure to appoint Solomon, a very beautiful young woman is not sent to him. Instead, David calls for a woman: Bathsheba, his wife.

It should not be lost on us that the last time we heard about David calling for Bathsheba, she, like Abishag, was a “very beautiful” young woman, and David violated her. (2 Samuel 11). Back then, David should have gone out to war with his troops but instead stayed home, where he ogled Bathsheba. Now, David should be doing something other than lying in bed and, once again, he calls for Bathsheba, but this time, he does so in order to do what he’s supposed to do as king.

Earlier, when David was spiraling down after his son Absalom was killed, Joab confronted him, and David stepped up to his responsibilities as king. Now, Nathan and Bathsheba confront David, and, once again, he steps up to his responsibilities. In view of Adonijah’s self-exaltation, David promises Bathsheba not simply that he will arrange for Solomon to succeed him but that he will enthrone Solomon “this day.”

David snaps out of it. Concern for next generation—indeed, for all generations to follow—snaps him out of it.

When Solomon is anointed king, “all the people” celebrate, so much so that “the earth was split,” metaphorically speaking, in contrast to the muted celebration that followed Adonijah’s self-exaltation.

Invest in the next generation

If you’re moping around because of personal, cultural, or ecclesiastical decline, concern for the next generation can snap you out of it—not the kind of concern that complains about the next generation but the kind of concern that invests in the next generation. A vision for the next generation can get you out of bed in the morning—or, if you can’t get out of bed, a vision for the next generation can get you praying in bed in the morning. And, by the way, you don’t have to be old to invest in younger people: all you need to be is older. We have kids as young as twelve years old serving in our children’s ministry.

David rose to the occasion and did something: he called for Bathsheba. Maybe you should call for Alice Yan (children’s ministry), Rolana Smith (junior high ministry), Paco Lopez (high school ministry), Liz Cooledge (college ministry), or Dan Westman (young adults ministry). See if there’s something you can do, if only to find out how you can pray.

Speaking of prayer, Karen Grant leads a ministry that prays for, and sends care packages to, college-age individuals who have graduated from our high school ministry. It’s no secret that most people who grow up in the church discard their faith at some point after leaving high school, if not before. An easy way to invest in the next generation is to pray for people in the next generation. The group that Karen leads gathers once a month on Sundays during the second service.

David, when he remembered the next generation, did something “this day.” Perhaps, at the least, you could pray this day for some young person that you know—and resolve to pray concerning any future involvement with the next generation.

Some churches target a specific demographic. There are, for example, millennial churches, hipster churches, and so forth. Our church isn’t one of those. God, near as we can tell, has called us to be a multigenerational church. Some of the college students who are involved here have told me that one of the things they appreciate about our church is its multigenerational character. They value worshipping with all the generations on a Sunday morning.

If anyone had a right to withdraw because of cultural or ecclesiastical decline, it was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In the 1930s, the Nazis not only took over Germany, they also took over the church. In 1933, Bonhoeffer left his prestigious position as a professor at the University of Berlin to join the struggle for the soul of the church. As he faced the fury of the Third Reich, he wrote these words in a letter to his closest friends in December 1942: “The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation shall continue to live.”¹

This is the ultimate question for a responsible church to ask: how shall the coming generation continue to live? On the other hand, aging Baby Boomers in this country are desperately trying to figure out how to hold on to the vestiges of their faded youth. Marc Freeman, CEO of Encore.org, speaks to them: “Maybe we can stop trying to stay young and instead rally to help people who actually are.”²

Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute, observes:

*“I can think of no better way to change a country—any country—than through a reinvigorated church. I can think of no better way to change a church than infusing it with passionate young people. I can think of no better way to develop passionate young people than to help them understand that God’s grace, love, and mission answer their deepest heart cries.”*³

Who’s going to help them understand?

Adonijah, at least at first, doesn’t understand that Solomon has been anointed king.

Adonijah steps back

1 Kings 1:41-53:

Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, “What does this uproar in the city mean?” 42 While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, “Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news.” 43 Jonathan answered Adonijah, “No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king, 44 and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. And they had him ride on the king’s mule. 45 And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. 46 Solomon sits on the royal throne. 47 Moreover, the king’s servants came to congratulate our lord King David, saying, ‘May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne.’ And the king bowed himself on the bed. 48 And the king also said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it.’”

49 Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. 50 And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. 51 Then it was told Solomon, “Behold, Adonijah

fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’” 52 And Solomon said, “If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.” 53 So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.”

Adonijah, the would-be king, is just as clueless as David before Bathsheba and Nathan roused him to action. Joab hears the trumpet celebrating the enthronement of Solomon and wonders what it means, and when Jonathan arrives to tell Adonijah what it means, Adonijah expects to hear “good news.” Instead, Jonathan informs Adonijah that David has made Solomon king. Whereas David heard from Bathsheba in time for him to take action, Adonijah hears from Jonathan too late for him to do anything. He has been outmaneuvered.

Adonijah’s supporters, fearing reprisal, immediately abandon him. Adonijah’s only hope is to beg for mercy. Solomon promises to spare Adonijah, provided he shows himself to be a “worthy man.” Earlier, Adonijah deemed Jonathan to be a “worthy man” who bore good news, but Adonijah turned out to be wrong. The narrator is hinting that Adonijah will not turn out to be a worthy man—meaning, he will not submit to Solomon.

If you step up to be a positive influence for the next generation, you may crowd out some of the negative influences. When David stepped up, Adonijah stepped back.

David not only stepped up to enthrone Solomon, he also stepped up to commission him.

David commissions Solomon

1 Kings 2:1-4:

When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, 2 “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, 3 and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 that the LORD may establish his word that he

spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”

Having enthroned Solomon, David now commissions him with challenging words reminiscent of Moses’ commissioning of Joshua (Joshua 1). David’s commission boils down to this: Follow the Lord.

David harks back to the covenant that the Lord made with him: “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). Back then, the promise came without an expressed condition: it was not clear that the establishment of David’s throne was contingent on his sons’ faithfulness. Perhaps David is recalling a time that the Lord spoke to him that didn’t make it into 2 Samuel.

On the one hand, in that the descendants of David mostly didn’t follow the Lord and the monarchy came to an end, the Lord’s covenant was conditioned upon the kings’ obedience. On the other hand, the covenant was unconditional, inasmuch as it was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who now sits on the throne of David (Acts 2:29-36). The apostle James, channeling the prophet Amos, quotes the Lord:

**“After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that
has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
that the remnant of mankind may seek the
Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my
name,
says the Lord, who makes these things
known from of old.” (Acts 15:16-18)**

How are we to encourage the next generation to follow the Lord? We can tell our stories, can’t we, or chapters of our stories? Anyone can do it. We can tell stories of God’s faithfulness in our lives.

After commissioning Solomon, David has some instructions for the new king concerning specific individuals.

Concern for unity

1 Kings 2:5-12:

“Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. 6 Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. 7 But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother. 8 And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ 9 Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.”

10 Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. 11 And the time that David reigned over Israel was forty years. He reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 12 So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

David none too subtly advises Solomon to kill Joab and Shimei but to honor the sons of Barzillai. Is David simply settling scores at the end? No, he’s concerned for unity in the kingdom. He characterizes Joab and Shimei as southern and northern partisans, respectively. Joab, a southerner, undermined David’s efforts to unify Israel. Shimei, a northerner who was loyal to Saul, the prior king, cursed David. Both Joab and Shimei are guilty—but guilty in a way that will likely incite division in the kingdom. Barzillai, on the other hand, was loyal to neither north or south but to David, the king who wanted to unite north and south.

Earlier, David couldn't get warm. Now, it appears that Nathan and Bathsheba have lit a fire under him. David enthroned Solomon, commissioned Solomon, and instructed Solomon. Before he died, he did all he could to make sure that Solomon's kingdom would be "firmly established." David had more left in the tank after all.

It is the prerogative of the young to be passionate about any number of issues. After you've fought a few battles, though, you start to learn what is and what is not worth fighting for. One of the things that people in the church can and should become actually more passionate about is unity. On the one hand, I've mellowed somewhat on certain controversial issues. On the other hand, I'm more aware of how certain controversial issues—and partisans like Joab and Shimei—can cause division.

I don't try to talk young people out of their passions, even if I happen to think they're somewhat misplaced. I think it's good that they're passionate. I just share with them my perspective. That's one of the things that older people have to impart to younger people: perspective.

Snapping out of it

Listen to the psalmist:

**O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another
generation,
your power to all those to come.
(Psalm 71:17-18)**

After waking up depressed a few weeks ago, I drove to Santa Clara University in the afternoon to drive some of the students to Monterey for the weekend retreat. A strange thing happened as soon as the students piled into my car. I snapped out of it. I wasn't depressed anymore. I was still a little worried about relating to students in the times between the teaching sessions, but as it turned out, there was nothing to worry about. I just put myself forward, and the Lord created connections.

At the beginning of the retreat, I announced to the students that I would be at a nearby café at 7 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday mornings to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. I said the one rule is that they weren't allowed to pay for their drinks: I'd buy them whatever they wanted. I didn't know if anyone would show up, because they were up pretty late: they started playing Murder Mafia at about midnight each night. Nevertheless, four or five students made their way to the café each morning to pepper me with questions. I considered the \$40 I spent on drinks money well spent.

The students not only dispelled my depression, they invigorated me. To be around thirty-five college students who were trying to follow Jesus—and to be able to give them a helping hand along the way—was inspiring. At the end of the retreat, one of the students approached me and said, "You have way more life experience than me!" Well, I should hope so. (But did he have to use the word "way"? And did he have to emphasize that word: "You have *way* more life experience than me!")

When I was teaching this passage to our seniors at our weekly Bible study, I told them about my experience at the retreat, including the part about spending \$40 on drinks. The next week, one of the couples in the seniors group handed me an envelope. Inside was a note of appreciation for ministering to the college students. Also inside the envelope were two \$20 bills: reimbursement for the money I spent on drinks for the students. They wanted to invest in the next generation.

Endnotes

¹ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *After Ten Years*. December 1942.

² Carstensen, Laura L.. *Baby Boomers are Isolating Themselves as They Age. That's Bad for Everyone* Time. May 23, 2016. 24.

³ Powell, Kara. *Announcing Our New Project: Growing Young*. fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog. May 23, 2016.