



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Passing on the Faith

January 15, 2023
Series: Taking Ground
Deuteronomy 31-34

**BIG IDEA – TO PASS ON FIRST-GENERATION FAITH, WE NEED A
PLAN, A SONG, A BLESSING, & A FUNERAL**

All right, Two Cities Church. Good morning. It's a new year. We are not slowing down. We are not standing still. Last week we gave you guys a ministry plan. If you weren't here, you can grab one of those on the counter on your way out. The ministry plan was attempting to do two things: tell you where we're going and what your role is. Our plan; your part. That was last week...critical events, sermon series, big dates. We're all excited about that.

This week, you came in, and we gave you a prayer guide. So, we did planning and praying. Why? Because we believe in both. We hope you believe in both as well. We want to be very strategic ("This is where we're headed; this is where we're going") and very sensitive to the Spirit. We want to be very focused and very flexible. So, I hope you're going to take this prayer guide and take it seriously.

Now, why did we do 21 days of prayer? It's not that 21 is a biblical number. It's that we feel like three weeks is short enough to sprint and long enough to make a difference. Why would we give you a prayer guide? Because when we talk to people, we realize there are two reasons people don't pray who otherwise would like to pray. Well, there are probably more than that, but there are at least two reasons.

One reason is people don't know where to start, and the second reason is people don't know what to say, and people are tired (maybe *you're* tired) of praying about the same things in the same way. So, we figured instead of just telling you to pray more we might try to help you, so we gave you this guide. You're going to see it starts tomorrow. It's seven days a week.

It's a short amount of Scripture to read. It's some prayer prompts, and if you've been following along with us, we're going to be praying for our Hold the Rope partners. The partners we were excited about and gave to and celebrated... We're now going to be, as a church, praying for them over the next three weeks (21 days). Let me just encourage you, as well, that if you're not in a Community Group, you're not going to get all that you could, probably even not of this prayer guide.

Bring your Bible or your device and your prayer guide to Community Group and pray together for these needs. When you open up the prayer guide... Some of you got here early and combed through a little bit. You saw in there an *F* word: *fasting*. Have you ever heard of that word? Some of you go, "I could lose a few pounds." That's not what we're talking about here. *Fasting* is when you say no to your flesh to say yes to your soul. Fasting is the way you say, "God, I'm serious."

We're saying, "Could you fast one meal or one day a week and use that time to go deeper with God and pray for people and get into your Bible?" People go, "Do we have to fast food?" Well, no. Some of you have medical issues. But most people who go, "I don't want to fast food; I want to fast social media" need to fast food. The rule is you don't have to fast food unless you don't want to. Then you definitely have to.

This is our hope. We don't want to only pray. There are some people (probably not many people) who only pray, and they use prayer (these are usually very charismatic women) as an excuse not to do anything. "I prayed about it." Praying is not enough. We want to pray, and we want to plan. We want to trust God, and we want to move into the future. We believe God is sovereign and we are responsible. So let's pray, and then we're going to dive into Deuteronomy.

Lord, would you make us a people of prayer? Your house should be called a house of prayer. That's what Jesus said. Prayer is the place of intimacy. Prayer is the place of power. Prayer is the place of dependence, Lord. For some of us, maybe many of us, we don't pray nearly what we could or should or want to. I pray you would use this guide and the next 21 days to reignite a passion for prayer. We pray this in your name, amen.

All right. There are many different metaphors for life. Maybe you've heard them. "Life is a game." Have you ever met a person who thinks life is a game? "Life is a game. You've got to get on the right team. There are winners. There are losers. You've got to learn how to play the game." Other people say, "No, life is not a game. Life is an adventure. There's always another hill to climb. There's always another mountain to scale. There's always another vacation to have and see something."

Other people feel like life is a party. Have you ever met *that* person? They're normally extroverted. Everything is about knowing people and having fun and life is short.

Well, the Bible gives us one main metaphor for life, and it's a race. If you'll turn to Deuteronomy 31, we're going to see today Moses pass on the faith to Joshua and the people.

Now, here's what's interesting. When you think about the Christian life as a race... You've probably heard that before. If you've been in church, you've heard that. Well, let me tell you how to think about it wrongly first. It's not a sprint. If you ever meet a brand-new Christian, they treat the Christian faith like it's a sprint. They're like, "I'm going to read the whole Bible in a month!" You're like, "That's a lot of Bible in a month. I think you're going to get worn out."

Sprinting, you get exhausted. You get discouraged. Sprinting thinks the race is short. I know what you're thinking. "Kyle, I know what you're going to say. It's not a sprint; it's a marathon." Well, a marathon is a better way to think about it. A marathon basically says, "It's a long race. I'd better pace myself. Sometimes I'm running uphill. Sometimes I'm going downhill. Sometimes the wind is at my back. Sometimes the wind is in my face." Fair enough.

But the marathon mindset, though better than the sprint mindset, is still kind of selfish. It's still about you and your marathon that you're running. The Bible's biblical picture is that of a relay race. We are running a very long relay race where we are to pass the baton to the next generation. There's actually a race called the *Ekiden* in Japan. It's 661 miles long run by six men (or women), and they have to pass the baton.

The reason I say this is today we're going to watch Moses pass the baton, and this is so important. Some of you, your parents never passed the baton to you. You're like, "I have to learn everything myself. I don't know how to be a dad. I don't know how to be a mom. I don't know how to make money. I don't know how to save money. I don't know how to walk with God. I don't know how to do devotionals. No one ever passed me the baton."

Then you can look around our city. I love Winston-Salem so much. The history of our city is just people dropping the baton. Why is the banking industry in Charlotte? You know, Wachovia started here. Somebody dropped the baton somewhere. Why do we go into all of these churches that are massive and are like, "Someone paid millions and millions and millions of dollars for this, and there are seven people in here"?

Our city is the story (many cities are) that somebody didn't pass it or somebody didn't pick it up. This is hard. Here's what they call this in the business world. Many of you are *in* the business world. They call this *succession*. It's such a big deal that HBO has a four-season show called *Succession*. It's one of their most popular shows

ever, and it's a show about, basically, a multimedia empire and the inability of the CEO to pass it on to any of his kids.

Succession is never easy but also never optional. We're living in a time where the Baby Boomers are retiring and dying, and there is a massive redistribution of wealth, property, and possessions and a leadership vacuum. People don't know what to do. Have you seen what Disney did?

Do you know that Bob Iger...? He was an amazing CEO. He turned Disney into a multimedia empire. He postponed his retirement four times, and then he passed it off to a guy you've probably never heard of, Bob Chapek, who ruined everything. He's fired now, and Bob Iger is back in. They have to re-figure out a succession plan. We don't want to be like that.

Moses is going to show us today how to pass on the faith. Here's the big idea...*How do we pass on the faith, and how do we keep a first-generation faith?* I told you last week that what tends to happen is one generation believes, the next assumes, the next forgets, and the next forsakes. It's our job to pass on a vision and value of God to the next generation, but it has to start with us.

Let's go to chapter 31:1. We're going to cover four chapters quickly. Here's what it says. ***"So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, 'I am 120 years old today.'"*** Most of you are not going to live to be 120. It's kind of a sobering thought, but you're going to get seven or eight decades and two to four kids. That's what you get. That's what the average American gets. You're getting seven to eight decades and two to four kids. What are you going to do with it?

Moses says, ***"I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.'"*** Moses knows he's going to die. See, why is succession necessary? Succession wouldn't be necessary if no one died and if no one got old, but everybody's life and leadership ends at some point. What I love about this is Moses actually sees it.

The number-one reason succession doesn't work is that the older generation won't leave or won't let go. That's why it doesn't work. So, Moses says, "Okay, I have to get Joshua here." Verse 3: ***"The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken."***

Moses is telling us something really important. He's going to say, "Leaders change, but the ultimate leader never changes." What he's going to pass on to people... And this is what we want to pass on. What do you want to pass on to your kids? You don't

really want to pass on just practices. What you want to pass on to your kids, what you want to pass on to the next generation is a vision and values.

We're not against Sunday school. We don't do Sunday school here, but I'm just going to give you church examples because it's what I know best. You don't pass on Sunday school. You pass on a value for teaching. You pass on a value for small group teaching. You pass on a value for meaningful community. That's the value. You don't pass on vehicles, what holds the value. That's what gets confusing.

You don't pass on a hymnbook. You pass on a value for worship. You don't pass on the Four Spiritual Laws, if you've ever heard of that. A lot of people who were on college campuses in the 80s and 90s had the Four Spiritual Laws. You don't pass on Evangelism Explosion. These are all church programs. You pass on a vision and value to be used by God in the lives of other people.

We have to understand. See, bad leadership tries to just pass on the vehicle and doesn't understand we actually have to pass on something deeper: the value and the vision. But here's what people need to experience. Look at verse 4. ***"And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them."***

Basically, he's telling them *this* (this is so important): "God is going to do through you what you saw him do through other people." One of the things we want to have people experience in our church is God really working and moving, especially our middle schoolers, our high schoolers, and our college students, so they have such an experience of God at work that when they go somewhere else...they graduate and get a job or go to trade school or move somewhere else or whatever they do...they go, "I have to be a part of a church like *this*."

I'll give you *my* story. I came to Christ in public high school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, when I was 16. I was a sophomore. The cool thing is I saw about 10 other people come to faith in Christ in my high school. You think that didn't affect me? I saw 10 people who didn't know Jesus, who were not from Christian homes, learn to know and love Jesus. I saw it all happen when they were in high school. So I went to Elon going, "I think people can become Christians. I think God changes people's lives," because I experienced it.

The second thing we need to pass on is ownership. Look at verse 5. ***"And the LORD will give them over to you..."*** God works through other people, but God also works through *you*. ***"...and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."*** He calls them to personal ownership of the vision and values.

He's going to give them four things. He's going to give them a plan to execute. That's chapter 31. Chapter 31 is Moses' plan. In chapter 32, he gives them a song to sing. In chapter 33, he gives them a blessing. In chapter 34, they have a funeral. If you want to know how we pass on the faith to the next generation, we have a plan to execute, a song to sing, a blessing to give, and a funeral to have. So, let's look at all of those.

01 THE PLAN: GETTING THE WORD INTO THE PEOPLE OF GOD (DISCIPLESHIP)

Here's the plan. Verse 7: *"Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'"*

There are three parts of a plan that I want us to have. You have to have a plan. Where do you need a plan? Anywhere you want to make progress. So, you need to have a plan. There are three parts of the plan. The plan needs to involve people. The plan can't just be you and yourself and a book. The plan needs to involve other people. Moses personally selects Joshua and wants to involve his life in him.

Here's the key thing: it's all about having conversations with people we love who we want to pass the faith on to. Actually, the first thing you'll see here is that Moses values Joshua and Joshua values Moses. Do you see what's happening here? Both generations value each other.

We live in a time where the generations don't value each other. What do old people think about younger people? "They're lazy." That's what we think. "They're inexperienced." That's what I think about people who are younger than me. That's what older people think about me.

And what do young people think about old people? "They're old. What do they know? They're stuck in their ways. They don't know technology. They don't understand the modern problems. They don't understand the modern opportunities." The Bible teaches wisdom of the old with strength of the young.

This is so simple. I tell you, I have to keep things simple. I went to public high school, so things have to stay simple for me. Here's what happens. You have to have a lot of conversations with people you love and want to pass the faith on to. Too often, we think we need to have *the* conversation. Have you ever heard that?

Like, your son or your daughter is turning 10, 11, or 12, and you're like, "I need to have the conversation with you." That's awkward. That's really awkward for an 11-year-old boy to have never talked to his dad about sex, or anything like that, and then to have a long conversation about it. The truth is he has been having conversations about it with his friends for years. You need to be the one who learns how to have conversations normally and naturally about important things.

I think the best way to do this is at your dining room table. What if you started (I learned this from somebody else) by asking, "What is your high and what is your low?" We do that with our kids. When they're 5, they're like, "I didn't get dessert tonight. That's my low." It's like, "Your life is so easy. Stop it. If that's your low, then you're living a very good life."

The reason you start talking about their high and low when they're 5 or 6 is because when your daughter comes home at 16 and a boy at school called her ugly, she might tell you, because you created that type of environment in the home in which the fine china of your life can be shared. You have to figure out how to have individual, meaningful conversations with people. The second thing is *this*. Look at verse 9.

"Then Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, 'At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children..." You'll see the generational mindset there. ***"...who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."***

So, the plan has to involve people, and the plan has to be about making God's Word central in the home. Now, I'm not going to tell you how you need to do that. We're not going to get religious and legalistic. I actually was mentored for a while by a pastor, and he did morning and evening devotions with his family seven days a week. Kind of intense.

I mean, Margy and I went over there for dinner, and it was like, "All right. It's time for devotions." It was like, "Even though we're here and we're guests, we're going to do devotions? Okay. Let's do it." We just sat down, and "All right. We're in 1 Timothy, chapter 2. Everyone turn there." His 6-year-old is giving this amazing answer. I'm like, "I am a terrible human being. What am I doing with my life?"

We're all about devotions. I'm about personal devotions. I'm about family devotions, but I think the negative of family devotions is if that's the only thing you do, you might teach your kids the Bible is something we talk about for five or ten minutes a day, and then we don't talk about it ever again. There's the religious dad. "All right, guys. No more fun. Everyone get around here. We're going to do devotions. It's time to talk about the Canaanites and circumcision." It's like, "Oh, Dad. Religious Dad."

What if you found out a way to normally, naturally talk about the Bible and the ways it intersects your life? Maybe even joke with people from the Bible. Recently, my son was complaining about some of his homework. I said, "Complaining about your homework. It's hard, isn't it? Was it easy for Abraham to leave his father's house? Was it easy for Moses to walk through the wilderness?" He's like, "Dad, what are you even talking...?" I'm like, "I don't know. I'm just being silly." I just want to talk about the Bible.

Now, you have to figure out how to do this. I think the question is...*What does your home feel like?* If the Word is not at the center, something is at the center. In most homes it's screens. I've told you this before, but the coming generation, the young people, seem to not like screens as much as they're getting older because they see how much they took their parents away from them.

We have screens on our watches and screens on our phones and screens on our iPads and screens on our laptops and screens in our bedrooms and televisions everywhere. (We're not anti-television.) The screen becomes central, especially when you realize it's a great babysitter once your kids get 3 years old. If it's not screens, it's sports, club sports, the lie that if you spend \$50,000, your kid will play bad Division 3 sports.

Studies. We love studies. The good is always the enemy of the great. The good is always the enemy of the best. So, instead of having studies or screens or sports, what does it look like to have Scripture as the center? I think it has to do with the songs you sing in the home. We're not against secular music, but do you have any worship music playing? Do you have a home like that?

We have found that, actually, as our kids get older, Christian rap is awesome. The other day (this is a true story), I walk into our kitchen, and my 6-year-old is singing, "Lord, kill me if I don't preach the gospel!" It was literally shocking. I was like, "What in the...?" He does not know exactly what he's... He's singing Lecrae, and it's so intense. He's singing about martyrdom. But there's something getting into them.

The first thing is it has to be about people. It has to be about making the Word central. It's the stories you tell. What are the stories you tell from your days at work? We recently had an event where our family was at a larger family function. We were driving back in the car, and one of my kids started asking about certain family

members. "Are they a believer?" I just thought, "We're about to have a really serious conversation here that's going to have different implications, and they're going to ask even more questions."

All of a sudden, salvation becomes real, and Christian and non-Christian becomes real. We have to figure out how to do that. I've told you before the story of when we were driving and we were talking about how... You know, I live right near the hospital. This was years ago. I said, "Guys, there are not going to be any hospitals in heaven."

All of a sudden, I took something they see every day, and I talked about heaven, and I brought the two together. It's not easy to do, but we need to figure out how to do it more. We need to have a plan that's about people. We need to have a plan that makes the Word central. Look at what he says in verse 14. This is the third part about the plan.

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, the days approach when you must die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.' And Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tent of meeting. And the LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud. And the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent."

This is the only time I know of where God gathers Moses and Joshua together, the current leader and the future leader, to give them a word, and it's not an encouraging word. I want you to see what he says.

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them.'"

Your plan needs to involve people, your kids at least. Your plan needs to be about figuring out, based on your life stage, lifestyle, and personality, how to get the Word to be central in your home. The third is it needs to take human sinfulness and human weakness into account. Your kids are sinners.

What happens is... We've seen this. We were talking to some leaders in the student ministry, and they said in the student ministry there are two things parents struggle with. First, to realize their kid is really a sinner. "Well, Johnny could never." Johnny could. Johnny probably will. Johnny is a sinner. Or if Johnny does something, they're so embarrassed.

They discover their kid is looking at pornography, and they're so embarrassed. They don't know what to do. We don't want to be naïve about the temptations and struggles this current generation is going through. I'm 38 years old. The iPhone came out the year after I graduated from college. I don't know what it's like to have the iPhone as a middle schooler or high schooler or even as a college student.

Back when I was dating Margy, I had 200 texts a month. I was still on that plan. I had seven a day. I knew that. I could send four and she could send three or I could send three and she could send four. That was it. It's a different world we live in now. To look at pornography, you used to have to go to a shady store in the middle of the night and hope no one saw you or you'd have to grab a *Playboy* far away from somewhere. Today it's everywhere.

Every generation has struggled with anxiety, but every generation didn't have social media. When I used to have a bad day at school and I went home, the day was over. No one could follow me home. No one could communicate with me while I was at home, and I couldn't see what anybody was doing while they were at home. Now, with social media, everybody follows everybody home all the time.

So we shouldn't be surprised. We need to figure out what the unique temptations are. Every generation is going to struggle with lust. Every generation is going to struggle with worry and anxiety, but when you add the technology, today we need to be even more awake and aware of how to help this generation.

This is, by the way, why we're in Community Groups and why we need each other. Parents need each other, and parents need to open up about the struggles they're having. So, we need a plan. The plan needs to be about people, the plan needs to be about getting God's Word central, and it needs to understand that sin is out there and temptation is real.

02 THE SONG: SOMETHING MEMORABLE & PORTABLE

Look at what he gives them. Look at chapter 31, verse 19. ***"Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel."*** This is so interesting. First, he gives them a plan, but then he gives them a song. Why a song? What is a song? Well, music is that which is probably most memorable.

In fact, people who have Alzheimer's often can't remember their name or their kid's name or their spouse's name, but if you will remind them of a childhood song, they can sing it in its entirety. There's something about music. I think a good way to think about music is it's a portal into the past.

They say the average adult's favorite music... Just see if this isn't true for you. Your favorite music is the music you listened to between ages 16 and 22. Even to this day, that's probably your favorite music when it comes on. It tended to almost calcify your personality at that time.

For me, growing up, listening to Dave Matthews Band. I'm going to date myself just for a second. To this day, if the song "Crash Into Me" comes on... You're like, "Why are we talking about this?" If the song "Crash Into Me" comes on, literally, I'm transported back into Tim Pierce's basement, shooting pool and being in the fourth grade. I'm a fourth grader again. I can almost feel it.

If you play "Crush," I'm in middle school. I'm listening to something they called, back in the day, a *CD player*. You guys get it. If you put on "The Space Between," I'm driving in my 1996 green Saab to school. It's the first CD I ever listened to when I drove in the car by myself. We all have those moments, those songs that take us back to certain places.

This is why we normally (a little behind the scenes here) launch new songs with new series in this church. When you sing the song "Egypt," we want it to help calcify what God is doing in your life through the book of Exodus. We'll often think, "What song goes with this Scripture to help impress it?"

Here's the bigger principle. Some of you are like, "I'm not musical. What am I going to do, give my kid a song?" Here's the principle: Are you giving your kids anything worth remembering? That's the principle. Music is that which you remember. Why did we give you a ministry plan that had the camp dates and the mission trips and the retreats and the catalytic events and when Kids Week is?

Because we believe those are mile markers, milestones, mountaintops, memories that can be made in people's lives, and we need it. Life is hard, and there's a lot of temptation. There's an old saying that the Devil beckons at every fork in the road. You've seen this, right? Somebody was good in high school, and then they got into college. The Devil beckoned, and they went on a different way.

Or they were good in college, and then they got that job in the big city, and they were away from everybody. Or they met somebody, and they weren't a Christian, but at least they believed in God. You can see at different times, multiple times in your life, you're going to be tempted to go in a different direction, and you're going to need to remember things from the past, commitments you made, beliefs you have.

03 THE BLESSING: SPEAKING THE FUTURE INTO THE PRESENT

So, first, he gives them a plan, second a song, and third a blessing. Look at chapter 33. The song was in chapter 32. The blessing is in chapter 33. ***"This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death."*** What does *that* mean? When is the only time we bless people? When they sneeze. That has something to do with, back in the day...a long, long, long time ago...when people would sneeze, it usually meant they were getting sick, so they would pray over them. That has kind of been left over.

The only other time I thought of where we use this idea of blessing is usually if a young man... This is not really in the world. This is more in the church. If a young man would like to marry a woman and he's about to pop the question, he will normally want to meet with or at least get a phone call with her father and ask for his blessing. That's really more what this is talking about. *Blessing* means "I want good for you." That's what you're speaking when you speak a blessing over somebody.

It's interesting. This is how Moses is thinking: "I'm about to die, and I want to bless somebody." He's not the first. If you know Genesis 27, if you're familiar with the story of Isaac... Isaac is getting old, and he can't see. One of the things he wants to do before he dies is he wants to bless Jacob and Esau. That's a huge part... That's actually the very center of the book of Genesis, and it sets the direction for both of their lives going forward, the blessing.

That's in chapter 27. Then in chapter 48 of Genesis, Joseph gets word that his dad, Jacob, is dying. I don't know what *you* would think if you found out your dad was dying. The first thing he thinks is, "I have to get my kids to their grandfather so he can say a final blessing over them." Mom and Dad, sometimes there's a certain blessing only *you* can say. Grandma and Grandpa, sometimes there's a certain blessing only *you* can say.

A couple of weeks ago, I had an opportunity. An older couple in our church who are grandparents came up to me and said, "Pastor Kyle, do you have a few minutes? I'd like you to pray over some Bibles after the service." I said, "Of course. Let's do it." I didn't know all it was going to entail. We go over there, and there are eight Bibles for each one of their eight grandkids with their notes in the Bible from areas they have read and that God spoke to them.

They were saying, "My one grandkid is *this* age, and the other granddaughter is *this* age. One is really young, and one is really old. We're not sure where they all are spiritually." You want to talk about a generational blessing, you want to talk about a marker, you want to talk about a song to remember... There it was. Now, here's what's interesting. Moses blesses (I don't have time to get into it; you can look in chapter 33) each one of the tribes differently.

He doesn't do a generic blessing. He doesn't do, like, "All tribes, may these five things happen for you." He takes each one and blesses them. I think it's a picture that we need to bless people individually and especially bless our kids personally. What does he do? You have to study this to see it all. He blesses them based on who they are, the struggles in their past, and the opportunities in their future.

When I pray for my kids, a lot of times I'll just say to them, "Get over here. I'm going to bless you." I will bless them based on their personality and their gift set. Elon, my youngest, who's 6... When Elon turned 3, my dad said, "I think he's going to play rugby." I was like, "I don't even think there's rugby in Winston. I don't even think I want him playing rugby, but okay."

He's just a go-getter. He's tough. So I always pray that God would use his strength for good and not evil. William is my oldest son, my middle child. He's very sensitive, so I always pray that he would be sensitive to the right things and that he would be careful with people and that the way he loves people would really affect who they are.

My daughter is my oldest. She's a natural leader. She came home from school one day and said, "Dad, I started a bake club." I was like, "You did what?" She said, "Yeah. Now every week I get to eat cookies for free." I'm like, "Genius! And other people are going to bake them for you. This is unbelievable." So I pray over her that her leadership would be used for good.

It's all about how we bless our kids. Most homes are not filled with blessing; they're filled with cursing. I don't mean four-letter words. That's a very shallow, superficial way to think about cursing. Cursing normally takes the form of, like, "You're just like your father. You're like every other person. You're a loser." "You always..." and "You never..." That's the language of cursing.

Blessing is more than wishing well. In some way, it's calling forth life and opportunity. What would it look like if your home was a place of blessing, if tonight you went upstairs, no matter how old your kid is... I had one guy after the 9:00 service who said, "I have two adult children I need to call and bless this week."

You bless with your lips, and you bless with your life. There are tangible blessings. When you bless tangibly, you do it by either lifting a burden or giving a gift. You have a mom, and she has two young kids. "Could I take the kids for an hour or two?" What are you going to hear from her? "That would be a blessing." Because you're taking a burden. Or giving gifts.

For our twelfth anniversary, Margy and I went to this three-night really cool resort. We were kind of pushing ourselves whether we could afford it or not. It was like, "But

we're going to do it." It was an anniversary trip, so we even got the anniversary discount. Anyway, the whole point is it was a big deal for us. I get there, and I'm up reading my Bible one morning, and this older guy is also up reading his Bible. "Oh, what are you doing here?"

"I'm here for an anniversary trip."

"Oh, I'm glad you're prioritizing your marriage. This is great."

So we talk. Later that night or the next night, we're in the lobby, and there's live music. I meet his wife, and he meets my wife. We hang out one other time. We just kind of saw them around the resort. Well, I get up the final morning to pay the bill. I go downstairs to pay the bill. They say, "Sorry, sir. Someone has already paid it for you." I thought, "What a blessing."

We were close enough that I got his number, so I texted him. "What in the world, man? Thank you so much." Because everything was on there...food and other things. Everything went back to the room. He said, "I'm encouraged that you're prioritizing your marriage. I just wanted to be a blessing."

You can be a blessing with your presence. Your kid is playing a game. He looks up. Mom and Dad are there. Just their presence is a blessing. How many times does something not get passed on to the next generation because we were unwilling to bless them, we were unwilling to make room for them, we were unwilling to encourage the gifts we saw in them?

04 THE FUNERAL: SAYING GOODBYE & LETTING THINGS DIE

Finally, we need a funeral. You need a plan, you need a song, you need a blessing, and you need a funeral. Look at what happens here. Turn with me to chapter 34. ***"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan..."*** Verse 4: ***"And the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.'"***

By the way, we see that this took 400 years for God's promise to come into fruition. It was given to Abraham, but it's not going to get to be experienced until Joshua. This is generational thinking. Here's what it says here: ***"I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."***

Verse 5: ***"So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD..."*** It's interesting. His life ends the same way his

ministry began: God and him alone on a mountain. **"...and he [the Lord] buried him [Moses] in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day."**

The funeral represents two things. If you're Moses, it means sometimes you need to leave. If you're the people, sometimes you need to let go and move on. Both of those are hard. Again, all I know is the church world, but how many churches are not doing well because that pastor should have retired years ago?

We know why pastors don't retire: because they don't have enough money; because their identity is wrapped up in being a pastor; because they don't know what they would do if they didn't. How many people, more likely, in churches... All they do is talk about what God used to do in the past, usually through a person who's now dead.

Have you ever been in that church? You walk in, and there's a massive oil painting of a guy who lived 100 years ago. They're like, "Oh, when Dr. So-and-So was here, that's when we built the building. That's when we built the school. That's when we did the addition." What happens in churches and businesses... I'll give you a church example.

You normally have men and women, and those men and women start ministries, and those ministries get momentum, and that momentum turns into a movement. That's where I think we are. What can happen, though, is if the baton doesn't get passed and everybody gets on autopilot and starts coasting and everybody starts thinking everybody else is going to do everything, then it becomes a machine, and the whole church goes on autopilot.

Churches can be on autopilot for decades. You can walk into a church, and you're like, "This church is on autopilot." Then once it goes from a machine, it goes to a monument, and then it goes to a museum where you talk about what God *used* to do. This is very, very, very, very common.

So, I want you to see what happens here. This is what I think has to happen. Look at verse 7. **"Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended."**

What needs to happen is you need to grieve the loss of a person, usually, and you need to move on. Do you see both in that passage? It says the people grieved for Moses for 30 days. That's longer than most of us grieve for something. I don't know that Americans are very good at grieving and moving on from things.

We're really good... If you have a baby nowadays... In these big companies, it's like, "Three months off for you." It's like, "Wow!" Or six months off, I've heard, for some

companies. Wow! But if your dad dies... "See you at work next week." What's more significant? What affects you more? I don't know. They're both life changing, life and death are.

There seems to need to be a process. This is for some of you. For some of you, Dad is gone. For some of you, a small number of you, it's a child you lost. For some of you, it's a grandparent. You're going to have to figure out... And we want to help you if we need to. We want to help you grieve and walk through that grief and remember and never forget but move on in a healthy way.

This is what you would want. Unless you're unbelievably narcissistic, this is what you would want. As far as I know, I'm healthy. If I were to die tomorrow, I would want my family to be sad...*really* sad, hopefully. But I thought about this. My kids are 10, 8, and 6. I'd want them to be really sad, but if my son who is 8 is still grieving this when he's in high school, if I died tomorrow, something is not right.

If he's sad occasionally and wishes I was there and there are certain moments and milestones that aren't the same, fair enough, and rightly so. My fear is that certain people, and maybe some of you, get stuck in the past. There's a part of you that's back there. You need to figure out how to have the heart funeral. It says, "Thirty days." That's a long time. Some of you haven't grieved hard enough. You need to cry harder. You need to get angry. You need to go through all of the stages of grief.

What's interesting is what God gives them is Joshua. Now look. Joshua is not the same as Moses. I was talking to someone recently who lost their dad. I was asking, "What helped you get over losing your dad?" She said, "This is going to sound weird, but when I had my first son." Obviously, her son is not her dad, but it was a milestone. It was a marker.

You're going to see this. God is going to say, "Moses is gone, and Moses was so unique." Every generation has unique people. There's not going to be another Billy Graham ever. I don't think so. He was a once-in-a-century (or multiple centuries) kind of person. That doesn't mean we're not all called to do evangelism. That doesn't mean every other evangelist should feel bad that he's not going to fill stadiums. Billy was unique, and he's dead. He wants us to move on.

So, we have to figure out what to let go of and what to move on from. I'll show you this. ***"And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses..."*** He was unique.

"...whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel." Then we're done talking about Moses and we move into the land.

The book ends, like many books of the Bible do, with a funeral and with Moses dying. People go, "Why wasn't Moses able to get into the land?" There are two reasons for that. The first reason is the reason you've heard: because he struck the rock and didn't speak to it. That's true. By the way, this is a warning about anger. Moses struggled with anger his whole life.

Remember? He kills an Egyptian when he's back in Egypt, and then he breaks the Ten Commandments the first time God gives them. Then when the people are worshiping the golden calf, he makes them drink that water. Then he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. So, in one sense, be encouraged, because even Moses struggled with anger his whole life. Also, be warned, because it seems like the consequences for his sin get greater over the course of his life. He's not able to go into the land.

It's symbolic too. What does Moses represent? Moses represents the law. What does God want to tell us? The law will never get you into the land. The law can bring you up to it, the law can let you see it, but only Jesus can bring you into it. Here we're told Moses is buried. We're told we don't even know where Moses is buried because it's not important and we're not going to build a monument to him.

If we get to the New Testament, all of a sudden, we see Moses, in Mark, chapter 9... Moses is in the Promised Land. At the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses gets into the Promised Land, but it's not by the law; it's by grace, and it's with Jesus. So, this is our great hope. Our great hope, if we're saying, "Have a plan and sing a song and be a blessing and have the funeral," is Jesus did it all first for us.

Salvation was a plan. It was God's plan. "I'm going to live the life you can't live. I'm going to die the death you deserve to die. I'm going to rise on your behalf. I'm going to do it for you." Then the Bible says our spiritual state... The book of Ephesians says our spiritual state in Christ is called *blessed*. That's a state of being now because of what Christ has done for us.

Then Jesus had a funeral. Right? We also don't know where *he* was buried. I told you when I was in Israel, they don't know. They're like, "It could be *this* tomb. It could be *this* area. It could be *this* area." No one knows where he was buried because it's not about his burial; it's about his resurrection.

Jesus, in a strange way, even told us... He said, "I have to leave." Even Jesus had to leave. I know he's with us always (Matthew 28), but Jesus says in John 14, "I need to leave. It's better that I leave, because then the Spirit will come, and the Spirit will work through the church, and the church will have an impact on the whole world."

Here's my question to you: What is your plan? Do you have a plan? It's okay. It's better to have an okay plan, because then you can correct it, and you can make mistakes, and you can move forward, and you can stumble and fumble and mumble and rewrite your plan, but you need to have a plan.

What's your plan for your family walking with God? What's your plan for financial stewardship? What's your plan for spiritual growth? Then what would it look like for you to be a blessing? What if you just said, "From now on, this car is going to be a blessing. When I get into this car, I'm going to speak good words. I'm going to call people. I'm going to encourage them."

Some of you need to say, "Tonight..." I don't care how old your kids are. "I'm going upstairs, and it's going to be awkward, and I'm going to bless them. I'm going to say some things." For some of you, your compliments are just too expensive. Dads are a lot like that. It's like, "We don't know what you're thinking. We don't know how you feel about us, and we need some encouragement."

I'm convinced that most people who run off to Asheville to live some kind of alternative lifestyle are looking for their parents' blessing. They're looking for the blessing. It's at home. Somehow, someone wasn't able to give it to you. It's time to give it.

For some of you, it's time to have the heart funeral. When I pray, some of you may want to be like... I do this oftentimes. I just do *this* to the Lord. It does something to my soul to do this with my hands. "Lord, I'm giving this to you. It's time. I need to move on. I need to let go. I need to say goodbye and still remember and honor."

Let's do that, and then we're going to sing the song "The Blessing." We're going to sing it over you to begin with, and then we're going to join you to sing it. "The Blessing" is a song that came out the week before the pandemic. It's the most viral worship song of the last decade, and I think it's because it speaks the scriptural heart of God. It is singing good over you.

We're going to sing good and grace over you, and then we're going to invite you to sing. I want you to think who you are singing for. Are you singing for your kids? Are you singing for your nieces and nephews? Are you singing for our church? Are you singing for our city? Let's sing together.

Lord, would you give us the ability to have a plan? That's why you gave us a mind and a heart and the ability to have vision and see the future. It's so that we would have a plan. Lord, would you give especially dads in here just the grace to put together an okay plan that you'll bless.

Lord, would you just put somebody on our hearts who we need to bless? Maybe it's someone we've cursed. Maybe, for some of us, we need to bless our parents and just tell them how grateful we are for them. Some of us just need to bless our brother or our sister, our siblings. Lord, I feel in a room this size that some of us just have to have the heart funeral.

Dad is gone. He was great. He was unique. He was one of a kind. It's not going to be the same without him, but we have to move into the land. It does not honor him. He would not want us thinking this way. For some of them it's Mom. Lord, would you give us grace? Would you give us community? Would you teach us what it means to grieve, but to grieve as those who have hope? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.