

## Passing Off A Ministry

Steve Alley

Ideally, when God calls us on to the next "chapter" or "season" in our ministry, He calls those to be trained and take over what He has begun. Ideally, there is a comfortable "passing of the baton" to the new leadership, and everyone hugs and kisses! God is able to do this; but, He doesn't always design the "leaving" the same way.

I love the story, in Acts 20, of Paul leaving the work in Ephesus for the final time. He was saying "Farewell" at Miletus, and the leaders of the work in Ephesus had come there to see him off. He addresses them, and then in verse 36:



*"...he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship."*

Paul's final letter to Timothy (the one who would replace him) is a perfect example of the "ideal" way to leave a ministry: in the hands of able people! In 2 Timothy 9-22, we read him instructing those who will carry on the work under Timothy:

*"...Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments...Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all."*

These are "ideal" examples of how a ministry is passed onto others. We, as ministry leaders, have all experienced transitions that aren't so "ideal." In those situations, you have to faithfully do what God has called you to do, and trust Him to raise up those who will carry on.

Getting people to volunteer to serve sacrificially is a challenge! Does God hold you "responsible" for a lack of "servants' hearts"? Absolutely not! I don't find any scriptures that support that. What God does hold you "responsible" for is the "talent" or "gift" that He gave you.

You will do all you can, with His power and leading, to inspire others to follow in your footsteps. BUT, if they don't, you have to remember that it isn't YOUR ministry, it is God's!

The following pages contain some bits of wisdom that I have collected over the years as I have passed off ministries to others several times.



# Steps To Passing Off A Ministry

## Preparing Yourself

1. Pray for a “clear” head and heart.

Whether it was your decision to leave, or that decision was made “for you,” leaving is always complicated. No matter how you feel or what has happened, you have a responsibility to do what is best for the children, the current CM team, and for the church. Pray for God’s power to strip away your frustrations or anger and help you submit to His will and prepare to pass the ministry off.

2. “Return To Gilgal.”

Ask God to help you see what He has done through you at this ministry site. Leaving can tempt you to be disgruntled and believe that everything you have done is “wasted.” This is dangerous thinking. In Joshua 4, God tells the people of Israel to make a stack of large stones that would become a “place of remembering.” The place was called “Gilgal.” He instructed them to return to Gilgal regularly to remember all that God had done for them. As you prepare to pass off the ministry, ask God to help you remember all that He has done for and through you there. This will help you remember that it is God’s ministry and He will move people in and out of it as He wills.



## Apprentice Your Successor

1. If you have enough time (at least 3 months), and if your successor is currently serving on your CM team let the successor attend all of your meetings and share in all of your planning.
2. If you have enough time, let your successor lead meetings or direct programs with you standing by his/her side.
3. There are three purposes for this apprenticeship period:
  - a. To let your successor watch how you lead the ministry.
  - b. To let your successor become aware of the challenges associated with the ministry.
  - c. To let the CM team members become acquainted with your successor before they know that you are passing the ministry off.



## Preparing The Ministry Team

1. Celebrate Your Leaders.
  - a. Follow Jesus’ example when He was preparing His disciples for His leaving. He shared a meal with them and told them how much He appreciated their love and service. You have poured into and developed your CM leaders; they will miss you.
  - b. Gather your leaders together for a meal or dessert and tell them about your plans to pass off the ministry. They will ask many questions. Answer those questions positively. Be positive about God’s sovereignty and about the church leadership! Do or say nothing that might cause the CM leaders to become angry with the church leadership. God has strong words to say about “causing division among the brethren” in the Bible, especially in Romans 16:17. Ask God to help you inspire the CM leaders to celebrate God’s work and for the sake of the children, to look forward to serving under the next director.



- c. If you have been able to apprentice your successor from within the CM team, announce who he/she is.

## 2. Notify The CM Team

- a. About 2 months before you pass off the ministry, schedule a mandatory, all-team meeting.
- b. If possible, offer a meal or dessert during this meeting.
- c. At the meeting, announce the date for passing off the ministry, and introduce your successor. If your successor already serves on the CM team, and you have been able to apprentice him/her, announce that he/she will be leading the CM after you leave.
- d. Let the CM team ask questions. Answer those questions positively. Be positive about God's sovereignty and about the church leadership! Do or say nothing that might cause the CM team members to become angry with the church leadership. Ask God to help you inspire the CM team members to celebrate God's work and for the sake of the children, to look forward to serving under the next director.
- e. Pray for the successor. Invite the successor to sit and ask the CM team to surround him/her to pray for wisdom and blessing on his/her leadership.



### **“He/She Must Increase...”**

Follow the example of John the Baptist as he “passed off” his ministry to Jesus Himself. The people knew John and had learned from him; but John had to “decrease” as Jesus “increased.” This statement was made in John 3:30. The principle of “decreasing and increasing” is a powerful way to pass off a ministry. This process should stretch out over at least 3 months.

#### 1. Sharing In Meetings

- a. Let your successor speak or contribute during meetings. Let him/her present limited thoughts or scriptures at first, and then increase his/her participation over time.
- b. Let your successor lead discussions on topics or challenges. The others in the meeting will get to know his/her style and views.
- c. Let your successor offer either opening or closing prayers for the meetings.

#### 2. Leading Meetings

- a. With you present, let your successor lead meetings. Your presence shows your support of him/her while letting him/her lead.
- b. Let your successor present ideas for either new programs or improving existing programs.
- c. You should plan at least one meeting that is lead entirely by your successor. You may or may not be present.



#### 3. Supervision of CM During Services

- a. While you are beside him/her, let your successor walk around the CM during the service. Let him/her compliment CM team members, respond to questions/challenges, and greet adults.

- b. Let your successor lead the pre-service meetings or prayer time with the CM team members.
- c. At about 2 or 3 weeks before you officially pass off the ministry, you can let your successor fully supervise the services. You may make “cameo” appearances periodically, but he/she should be viewed as the on-site supervisor.
- d. You should plan for at least 1 service during which you don’t show up at all.



### **Farewell And Goodbye**

It is important to completely release control and leadership of the CM when your successor is officially in place. This may mean that you either don’t show yourself around the CM or be away from the ministry for a period of time that reflects your leaving.



Also, after you have officially passed the ministry on, be very careful about contacting or advising CM team members. They may want to talk with you, but you should always gracefully refer their questions or challenges back to the person who is now in charge.