What are we passing on

When I was growing up there was one holiday that I really looked forward to every year. Without fail it was one of the best days of my year because it was surrounded by friends and family and especially some wonderful food. Down the block from where we lived there was a grocery store that also happened to sell chicken wings by the bucket, and I love chicken wings and we would order what amounted to like 100 or so wings. I would wait around my dad in hopes that he would remember to order the wings ahead of time if not I would give him a nice nudge in the direction because we had to pre order them.

With each passing hour the intense feeling in my stomach would get greater and greater as the main attraction got closer and closer. Until finally it would happen the two teams would meet at midfield and shake hands and the referee would start off the festivities with the coin toss and the Superbowl would be underway. This was the best day because I got to really enjoy something while sitting next to my dad.

My passion for sports can be traced right back to the days I would spend by my dads side watching his beloved yankees either in person or on the television, and watching Sunday football with my dad. The passion for sports that he passed down led me to play baseball until high school where I picked up track and field and football which carried through to college. This passion can still be seen on full display when the superbowl comes around and I make or order my own wings and when the Michigan Wolverines play on Saturday.

One way or another there are things that a parent or mentor passes along to their child or understudy in hopes that whatever gets passed along is something that is beneficial and helps them become the best version of themselves possible.

In first kings chapter nineteen we see the beginning of a relationship. Elijah is up in the mountains as he has fled for his life and God appears to him and tells him to anoint the new kings of Aram and Israel and then to anoint his successor who would be Elisha. And so Elijah leaves and finds Elisha son of Shaphat and he is plowing in the field and places his mantle over him naming Elisha his successor and this marks the beginning of a relationship where Elijah prepares Elisha for his role as prophet just as a parent prepares their child for their role in society and adulthood.

During there time together Elisha would have heard many stories from Elijah. He would tell Elisha about how when he asked God to kill him, god instead provided for him and told him to flee and how he was fed by ravens by day and night. How when he proclaimed a drought over the land, there was no rainfall so much so that the wadi river ran dry. How when the widow showed up she fed him and the lord provided meal throughout the drought and when her son died he was able to bring her back to life. He would have told Elisha about the time he did battle with he prophets of Baal and won. He would have told him about how god would use him to proclaim the word of the Lord to the leaders of Israel.

But not only stories would he be told, Elisha would witness first hand the power of god on behalf of Elijah when leaders sent fifty men after Elijah and he was sitting atop a hill, and I wonder if Elisha is there with him, and they came to arrest him and instead of harm coming to him, the Lord reigned down fire on the company of men.

In all, Elisha would hear stories and witness a God who remained faithful to his servant no matter what was thrown his way. That no matter what God asked of Elijah, God would provide, freeing the prophet to live into his calling. He would also witness someone who had a heart for God, someone who was without a doubt indwelled with the Spirit of God. And so when he is with Elijah before he ascends to heaven and Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him before he ascends, I am not surprised to hear Elisha ask for a double portion of Elijahs Spirit.

You see, Elijah did not just pass down knowledge and stories to Elisha, what he passed down was much more important. He passed down a desire to serve God, a desire to follow in elijahs footsteps, Elijah, considered the greatest prophet, Elijah the man who with Moses appears at the Transfiguration. Elijah, one of two people not named Jesus to ascend into heaven along with Enoch. Elisha could have asked for anything, and he chose a double portion of elijahs spirit because he will need that Spirit to be prophet over Israel, to be who God called him to be..

Why passing on this spirit and desire is important can be seen right in our Gospel reading. When thinking about the chronology of the Gospel accounts it is a good practice to think of Jesus ministry in two parts. His journey around the area and finally up the mountain then the transfiguration, and then his descent down the mountain to Jerusalem where he is crucified and resurrected.

Once Jesus comes down from the mountain which is where our gospel picks up he is transfixed upon Jerusalem because Jerusalem has been his destiny all along. He came here to die on the cross and he is set on accomplishing that which the Father has put in motion for him. He is set on serving God above all else, and nothing is going to stop him from achieving his goal of redeeming us by his blood. A spirit to serve God is one of the best things we can have, and it is one of the best things that we can try to pass on to those that come after us.

We pass on our passions and our characteristics not just to our kids, but to our grandkids, till this day I still crunch my cornflakes before I eat them as my grandfather did, we pass them onto family members, we pass them down to students, coworkers, really anyone that is in our sphere of influence we can pass down that which makes us who we are too.

Therefore, I want to ask us all the question, what are we passing along to those around us? Is it a desire to serve the Lord, is it a loving heart, is it the ability to speak life into situations, is it the ability to be empathetic, is it a strong work ethic, is it determination, is it care for the other? What is it that we are passing on. Because it is our job to pass on positive traits and attributes and passions to those who are coming after us in hopes of preparing them for what God is calling them to, in hopes of making their lives a little easier, in hopes of shaping them into productive members of society, in hopes of shaping someone who loves as God loves.

There are several ways that we can do this, and it all starts with spending quality time. It is hard to pass along something to someone if we do not spend quality time with them.

It takes quality time to be able to communicate with younger folks, and create an environment in which open and honest communication is encouraged. Remember, when people grow up, they encounter situations that are tough the hope is that they will hear your voice in their subconscious.

It takes quality time in order to make yourself available and not to just be present. When people are ready to talk, we must be there to listen to let them know that we care because gifts are not a substitute for caring.

It takes quality time in order to set an example for others to follow. We must show and not just tell and live into the person we want our kids and young ones to be. As Robert Fulghum, the author, said, “Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.”

It takes time to stand for something and share your beliefs and values in a consistent manner reinforced in many ways. Leave nothing to the imagination of those who look up to you.

It takes time to cultivate our own skills and to work to pass them down to others as we teach them and it takes time to treat every experience as a learning opportunity in which feedback is welcomed, mistakes are tolerated, and failures are viewed as hurdles rather than as roadblocks.

Elijah passed his mantle onto Elisha and Jesus passed his to the church where we now look at what Jesus said and did and try to emulate them. Let us continue this biblical tradition and intentionally work to pass along that which was helpful for us to those that come after us.