

# Passing the Baton of Faith as You Run Your Race

By Joy Greene

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)*

At the 2016 Rio Olympics, the United States women's 4X100 relay team was favored to win. In the preliminary heat, all the team had to do was get the relay baton around the track and qualify for the semifinals. Things were going smoothly until runner, Allyson Felix, tried to hand off the baton to runner English Gardiner. Felix was bumped by a Brazilian runner in the next lane and instead of passing the baton to Gardiner, Felix threw the baton in the air. It was a shocking moment as the baton hit the track. The television commentary shouted, "The United States is out!"

As the race continued for the other runners, the American team was unsure what to do; but then Felix remembered a rule that allowed a team to protest if there was contact during the race. However, there was one stipulation: the protesting team must finish the race first. So, Felix quickly picked up the baton and gave it to Gardiner, urging her to keep running. The United States completed the race with an embarrassingly slow time. They filed a protest, which was granted, giving them another chance to run the preliminary heat later that same day.

During that next race, there were no other teams on the track – only the Americans racing against the clock. They ran a strong race and qualified for the semifinals. Eventually, they made it to the final race, the most important event of their Olympic journey: the race for the gold medal.

During the warm ups before the final race, English Gardiner was frantically looking through her bags. She realized

she did not have her running shoes. Fortunately, Allyson Felix was prepared and had extra pairs of spikes in her bag. Although they were too big for Gardiner, she laced them up tightly, and despite all the difficulties this team experienced, they went on to win the gold medal!

Have you ever wondered what the baton represents in a relay race? It represents responsibility. The runner who holds the baton holds the responsibility during that leg of the race. Runners pass the responsibility off to each other during the race.

There are four things that stand out about this American women's team:

1. The baton was dropped.
2. They ran the second heat alone.
3. English Gardiner ran in shoes that did not fit.
4. They did not give up and they won!

As believers in Jesus, we carry a baton of responsibility with us, too – the baton of faith. *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth."* 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

In the book of 2 Timothy, Paul is living out his last days on earth. Inside a dark Roman prison cell, he encourages Timothy to preach the word, and to be prepared in and out of season. He explains that a time is coming when people will not want to hear sound doctrine; but instead, they will want to hear things that suit their own desires. Paul exhorts Timothy by telling him to endure the hardships and do the work of an evangelist.

Paul is passing the baton of faith to Timothy.

As believers in Jesus, we carry a baton of faith and a baton of responsibility. We carry the responsibility of knowing the Word of God, obeying the Word of God, and sharing the Word of God with others. We carry the responsibility of being bold in a culture that has turned its heart and ears away from God's truth. We are called to be a light in the darkness; however, we are human. We make mistakes and do things that are displeasing to God as our flesh overpowers our spirit. Sometimes, like Allyson Felix, we may feel like we have dropped our baton. During those times, we need to remember that God is a loving Father, and we belong to Him. He wants us to come to Him with a repentant heart, and He is eager to forgive us. With His help, we can keep running our race no matter what mistakes we make or what obstacles we encounter.

When the American team ran the preliminary race for the second time, they had no other teams on the track with them. Having other athletes on the track is essential for runners as it fuels their motivation. Sometimes being a Christian can feel lonely. We may be the only one in our workplace who believes firmly in the Word of God. We may be the only one standing up for what is right in the eyes of God. We should not let feelings of isolation or loneliness discourage us. Instead, we should be confident that God is who He claims to be, and He will help us to be strong. He is with us, and He has a good plan for our lives. Let's cling to Him and keep running our race.

As Christians, we may feel out of our comfort zone in what God is asking us to do. Like English Gardiner who ran for the gold medal in shoes that did not fit, let's choose to make the best of our circumstances and keep running our race. God does not call us to be comfortable. He does not call us to fit in. Instead, He has set us apart to do His good and perfect will and He wants us to trust in Him.

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you*

*may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* Romans 12:2 (NASB)

Friends, as you run your race, also remember the importance of passing the baton of faith to others. Look for ways to share your faith, especially with the younger generation who are surrounded by secularism. Look for opportunities to mentor and encourage others in the faith. Be intentional about sharing the Gospel wherever you are planted and speak words of life to others.

No one has an easy race to run. There are obstacles, troubles, and challenges along the way, but we can run our race with perseverance! And we can run our race with confidence because we know the finish line holds the ultimate prize – being with God forever in our heavenly home!

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* John 16:33 (NIV)



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## Compassionate Care in a Third World Context

As Christian pharmacists working in the United States, many of us have the goal of providing compassionate, God-centered patient care as a regular part of our practice. Unfortunately, many of us fall short of our goal due to several reasons. It could be institutional restrictions that make it difficult to be an outspoken light for Christ, or perhaps the sheer volume of work prevents us from having enough time to reach out to patients on a regular basis. From my previous experience working in a large American chain pharmacy, I recall that my desire to witness was often hampered by corporate statistics and demands to meet metrics. But what does giving compassionate care look like in a Third World mission hospital context? Does working at an openly Christian hospital change the frequency of opportunities with which a pharmacist can witness to patients, or are there still barriers to providing compassionate care?

I now work at a mission hospital located in a West African country. A largely

pervasive attitude in this culture is stoicism. When you are out in public, you must hold your head high, keep your shoulders back, and not show any emotion. This is true also for our patients in the hospital. They may have terrible wounds that appear to be incredibly painful, but the cultural expectation is that you must not show your pain at all, since demonstration of pain is a sign of weakness which could bring shame on your family. For example, while rounding in the surgical ward one morning, a 12-year-old boy was recovering after a debridement from necrotizing soft skin and tissue injury. We had to examine his wound and see if there was a need for more debridement. The attending surgeon and surgical resident carefully peeled back the patient's bandages in what I am sure was an incredibly painful moment for the boy. The boy tried his best not to scream, but the pain overtook him and he let out a loud cry and moan. Everyone in the ward looked in his direction. What followed was shocking to me, as his mom proceeded to hit him over the head

