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Lotz & Wrights' "Jesus Followers: Real-Life lessons for igniting faith in the next generation" (book review)

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Critical Review



Lotz, A. G. and Rachel-Ruth L. Wright. (2021). *Jesus Followers: Real-Life lessons for igniting faith in the next generation*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Multnomah. 240 pp. \$14.99. **ISBN-13** 9780525651208

Have you ever considered that parenting is like running a race, more specifically like running a relay race? In a recent book titled *Jesus Followers: Real-Life Lessons for Igniting Faith in the Next Generation*, written by Anne Graham Lotz and daughter Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wright, the authors share insights from Scripture and from their personal life experiences of the meaningful significance of passing the baton of faith on to the next generation. Indeed, this parenting book is distinctively unique. It guides readers on the necessary journey that must be taken to complete “the four-by-one-hundred-meter relay race” we are called to run in this life (p. xvii).

Here are some interesting facts about the authors. To begin, Anne Graham Lotz is the second daughter of famous evangelist Billy Graham and wife Ruth Graham. She is a mother, Bible teacher, and author of many books. One of her well-known books, written in 2000, is titled *Just Give Me Jesus*. Also, she is the founder and CEO of AnGel Ministries. Next, her daughter Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wright is a mother, writer, evangelist, and motivational speaker. Her father was Daniel Lotz, a famous UNC basketball champion and is well-known for his involvement in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Harmonizing together with her mother’s discussion of Scriptural principles, Rachel provides a strong voice in the narration of most the book.

Also, the book maintains a simple biblical premise on how to run a race with endurance (Hebrews 12:1). The authors do this by pointing out four essential strategies on how to complete a parental relay race. These key points are described in the four exclusive sections of the book. For example, in Part One, the authors explain the first leg of the race titled “Our Witness.” Next, in Part Two, the authors expound on how to run the second leg of the race. It is titled “Our Worship.” Then, in Part Three, they provide illustrations regarding the third leg of the race that is titled “Our Walk.” Last, in Part Four, the authors place heavy emphasis on how to finish the most crucial part of the race, the last leg. In this final section that is titled “Our Work,” the authors explain the benefits of winning the race for the glory of God. Altogether, the book is organized by a brief introduction, followed by twenty-eight chapters that are divided by the four subheadings mentioned above. It ends with a brief conclusion summarizing the key points of the book and a challenge for all believers.

Likewise, anyone who reads this book will be spiritually impacted in a special way. This is especially true for parents, single adults, families, Christian ministry leaders, and Christian education instructors. That is because each chapter contains a unique teaching application, supported by a scriptural emphasis that is illustrated by the shared life experiences of the authors. Some chapters in the book elicit faith and encouragement. Others chapters put forth a challenge to turn away from sin. While others chapters inspire a recommitment to walk with God in a deeper way. That is because throughout the book the authors discuss the importance of parents and spiritual leaders passing the “Baton of Truth” that leads to faith in Jesus Christ to the next generation. This is the call of all Jesus Followers. For instance, Anne Graham Lotz, with her great understanding of the Bible states, “You and I are in a race called life” (p. xvi). She compares this to running a relay race. Yet, unlike the Apostle Paul’s emphasis on the individual person running the race to win the prize for himself or herself (1 Cor. 9:24), the main spiritual leader in a child’s life is challenged to pass on their faith to them, so that successive generations can live for Christ victoriously. Most importantly, the authors points out “The Baton is Relayed Face to Face” and “The Baton is Relayed Faith to Faith” (pp. 3-4).

Besides this, the main Scriptural emphasis interwoven throughout the book is taken from passages found in Genesis 5. This significant element gives purpose to the authors’ thesis. Using these key verses, along with synthesizing others, Anne Graham Lotz explains the necessity of being Jesus Followers. Also, Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wrights discusses the importance of living a life of uncompromising obedience to God, despite the opposition of others. This ingredient is essential when desiring to help the next generation avoid the pitfalls of a fallen world. Indeed, Anne Graham Lotz explains, “In Genesis 5, we find a genealogy that lists ten generations and the passing of the Baton from one to the next. Each man listed lived in the midst of a civilization dominated by Cain’s attitude of defiance towards God” (p. xvi). Thus, she highlights four key men in the genealogy to expound on the importance of running the race (i.e., Seth, Enosh, Enoch, Noah).

Additionally, anyone who reads this book is bound to be encouraged in their faith. The content is creatively laced with short story sketches and Scripture that will cause any reader to feel spiritually fed. The surprising confessions made by the authors as they reminisce about their personal lives and families will captive readers too. Indeed, many failures and triumphs that permeated the authors’ lives in their endeavor to pass on the baton are discussed. For example, the incidents in the book that deeply touched my heart was when Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wright described the enduring legacy that was passed down to her from her maternal grandparents Billy Graham (Daddy Bill), Ruth Graham (Tai Tai), along with her paternal grandparents Danny Lotz and his wife Adeline Lotz. Likewise, the honest depiction of the high spirited behavior of Rachel-Ruth helped pulled back the illusions of what it really means to grow up in a family of a famous evangelist. The one chapter in the book titled “Do it Scared” (p. 116) conveyed an important lessons the authors

learned about going forward with God while facing fears, the unknown, and being placed in very challenging situations. To do this the authors expressed the faith and strength they gained by observing the examples of their parents and grandparents. Thanks to the legacy that was passed down to them, the authors learned how to overcome their vulnerabilities to give up in crushing situations. Instead, they shared how they persevered by pressing on through life's storms to live a life of wisdom, faith, determination, obedience, worship, and joy, as they considered their witness to others. As a result, as anyone who reads about these incidents will be deeply inspired. The heartwarming text will evoke laughter and tears. In fact, the humble testimonies of the authors can strengthen the resolve of any Jesus follower to pass on a legacy of faith to others too.

Furthermore, this book has other special features that can be useful to readers. For example, it is packed with scriptures, testimonies, inspiring maxims, and special pictures of the authors' families. This makes the book enjoyable for all age groups. Next, the book can be obtained in a hardcover edition or audiobook. The benefits of reading along while listening to the voices of Anne Graham Lotz and Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wright makes the book even more inviting. That is because one can get a sense of the authors' personalities. Likewise, the distinctive tone of their voices and candidly warm demeanors stands out in the book. Another important aspect of the book has to do with the various relevant topics it addresses for igniting the faith of the next generation. Some of the interesting topics discussed in the book include: Making the Most of Every Opportunity, Facing Fears with Faith, Running into Grace, Praising God in the Midst of Pain, Embracing Family, Having a Love for the Word, Breaking Bread & Making Memories, Hard Work, Pursuing Purity, Dealing With Alcohol, Fiddlesticks, Being a Faithful Caregiver, Facing Death, Giving Full Attention, Managing Expectations, Being Set Apart, and much more.

Most importantly, this book is pregnant with a strong theological thrust. For instance, one can sense the pastoral anointing of the authors, whose arguments are founded on Scriptural truths they have learned and walked out. The synthesis of the authors' life lessons and the discussion on the legacy of faith passed down from Seth to Noah (p. Genesis 5) connects well in this text. To be sure, these men were set apart and chosen by God. Their lives depicted a holy respect for God and love for His Word. Hence, the Bible speaks of their unquestionable legacy of faith that continues to inspire Jews and Gentiles today. In the same way, God's Word was deeply cherished by Billy Graham and his wife Ruth. In fact, their legacy of faith was passed down to their family and others. For instance, Rachel-Ruth Lotz Wright recalls, "In their home, a Bible could be found in every room so that anyone would have easy access to it. God's Word was central in their home and lives" (p. 58) The author attests, "Every meal that I had with Daddy Bill ended with devotions" (p. 58). Interestingly, like the lineage that extended from Seth to Noah, the Graham family has passed the baton on to successive generations. To be sure, regardless of their deaths, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are reaping the benefits from their

consecrated devotion to God's service, as the entire book points out. Yet, as the book points out, the authors learned to discern the "Red Flags Warnings" (p. 123). This was a pitfall that Cain sadly failed to ignore (p. xvi). It was not the case for Seth and his generation. Despite the circumstances of their time, their intimate relation with God enabled them to become ambassadors of God's righteousness. The authors encourage us to have faith to do the same.

Indeed, Anne Graham Lotz insists that the "Timing is Critical" (p. 105). Therefore, she challenges guardians of children to overcome the obstacles that hinder the baton's passage like weariness, busyness, willfulness, and pride (p. 105). To illustrate her points, she states, "Let me share with you one more facet of the four-by-one-hundred-meter-relay race: not only must the winning team run their laps the swiftest and pass the baton the smoothest, but they must also pass the baton in what is called "the passing zone" (p. 105). Failure to do this means a missed opportunity to ignite faith in the next generation which can lead to disastrous consequences (p. 106). Nonetheless, the authors remind readers to become engaged in the race while there is time, as future generations depend on us. Thus, there is encouragement for everyone too. For example, according to the authors, "If you've missed that opportunity and now your children are grown and gone, be assured that God can redeem what has been lost. He gave a wonderful promise in Joel 2:25 that He will restore "the years the locust have eaten" (p. 105).

As a result, this book deserves a score of eight out of ten. For the most part, it is a great book to add to anyone's library. Yet, there is one drawback with this book. This can be found in the conclusion of the book. Here the author gives some undo accolades to Augustine and Martin Luther (p. 200) that was based solely on conjecture. Besides this one issue, this book should be highly recommended for parents, families, pastors, Christian ministry leaders, educators, single adults, and mentors. They will find this book useful as a great resource for teaching parenting skills, for listening along online in family devotions, sharing in Bible study groups, or preaching excerpts from it for sermons. It will inspire anyone's faith through life's difficult moments as Jesus Followers too. That is because each chapter contains individual lessons on being an effective ambassador for Jesus Christ. The topics discussed in this book inspire faith that will enable parents to be the best parents they can be in their children's lives. Considering the legacy one passes down or the lack thereof is a key theme in expressed in this book. Thus, this book will challenge everyone burdened with Jesus' mandate (p. Matthew 19:14) to pass the Baton of Truth to the next generation too. The biblical principles discussed, along with the shockingly-candid confessions, humorous antidotes, and the depictions of a not-so-perfect family's life are written in a down-to-earth way. Hence, this book is worth the cost because of its relevance and practicality for intentional parents today.

Reviewer

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