



# Planning for Succession

by Arlo E. Moehlenpah

*It is in the heart of every man that his work carry on, especially in the work of God. We can learn from the successes and failures of the past. Generations come and pass, but we can plan for succession.*

*"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever"  
(Ecclesiastes 1:4).*

**I**n Ecclesiastes 1:3-7, Solomon referred to several cycles of events that happen on planet earth. The sun rises and sets; the water runs into the sea, evaporates, forms clouds and returns again to earth in the rains; the winds blow to the south and then hastily return; the rivers empty their content into the sea, but the sea is never full and the rivers are always replenished; and one generation passes away as another generation takes its place.

From a natural point of view, Solomon called the entire process vanity. He saw no obvious plan, progression, or purpose in these endless repetitive cycles of earthly activity.

In the second chapter of this book, Solomon observed that what a person labors to accomplish, achieve, and accumulate during his lifetime is left in the hands of the person following him (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19). This person may be wise or foolish.

That someone will inherit our place and goods is evident and unavoidable, but we can prepare for an orderly and wise transition of our position and possessions to the people following us. We can escape the folly, for the most part, of leaving our lifetime of labor in the hands of fools, and we can also avoid being foolish in the transfer of our labors. The generation in control is responsible for a smooth, safe, and sane transfer and transition of possessions and position to the outstretched hands of the new generation. If preparation is ignored, years of sacrificial service can be destroyed in a few months by either a complex and confused transition or by a carefree and careless person who is placed in charge.

In the business world, it has been stated that only a few small family businesses survive the second generation. The failures often occur when the founder does not designate his successor, train him, or turn the necessary authority to him when the founder has passed his peak in operating the business.

Similar situations sometimes happen in our churches. Without positive planning, some clear-cut guidelines, and a qualified successor, the transition can be marked by confusion and conflict over the matters of control and continuity. Internal strife and devastating factions can readily destroy the faithful work of a person who has devoted many years of his life.

What does the Bible say to us about this matter of succession? Can we learn from the examples, both bad and good, from the pages of God's Word? Can we find instructions for both the "passing generation" and the "coming generation"?

In an attempt to identify some biblical guidelines for succession, I have drawn from the examples of David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy,