

# LEGACY???

As I get on in years and be around others that are of my age group and older, I begin to hear a lot about the term “legacy.” I hear ministry leaders talk about the importance of making sure of “their legacy.” What they

are referring to is what will happen to “their ministry” or “their church” after they have “gone on to be with the Lord.” I need to be honest with you. When I hear such things from leadership, I have a tendency to be a little “perplexed” by this. Please, don’t get me wrong. I do not think it is a bad thing. However, I think it can be sometimes misused and abused concerning the reason, purpose and desire of a person’s “legacy” continuing on. Do we really understand what we are saying when we speak of our “so called” legacy.

If we look into the definition of the term “legacy” we find some interesting points. The term “legacy” as a noun refers to the following: “a gift of property, especially personal property, as money, by will; a bequest; anything handed down **from the past**, as from an ancestor or predecessor; it can refer to a candidate for membership in an organization (such as a school or fraternal order) who is given special status because of a family relationship to an existing member.” Its original use has been dated to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century from the Latin meaning, “an ambassador or one sent on a mission or one commissioned to an office, or function.” An interesting side note is that, as an adjective, the term legacy is used to describe “**an out dated or old** computer hardware system, software program or data information that, while yet functional, does not work well with “up to date” and newer systems.” Hmmmm...

The interesting thing that I see from the above definitions of the term “legacy” is that they all have to do with the “**past**.” They refer to things that were accomplished by those that have gone before us. As mentioned, that as an adjective, it refers to something that may be functioning, however, **it is old** and does **not work well** with those things that are in realm of “the now.” Those things may have been good for the time when they were originally brought forth and accomplished what they were meant to accomplish but they now have become “outdated.” In other words, they were successful for that “season.” Does that mean that it will continue to be successful for the next “season?” Sometimes the answer is yes. However, we must also realize that the answer may be no. This is where we must really be “in tune” with what God desires and for what God is doing in each season. Most importantly we must be “in sync” with what He desires for each individual, including those that have been chosen by a parent or leader to be the “their apparent” and the one to carry on that parent’s “legacy.”

We see this term “legacy” used many times in families concerning fathers passing on the “family business” to their children. For the father it many times becomes a driving force in their lives that their children continue to carry on the business that they may have started or a business that was passed on to them from their father. This may or may not be a good thing. I have seen many times where a father wanted so badly to make sure the business that he started would continue when he is gone, that he controlled and manipulated the lives of his children to accomplish his goal. Unfortunately, many times, it is their goal and their desire and not the child’s. There is also the unfortunate situation that the child or person “chosen” may have never been meant to be in that business or that they were never meant to “carry it on.” However, they are forced and many times “guilted” in to doing something they didn’t want or, as we said, were never meant to do. This is sometimes difficult for a father to “digest.”

Many years ago I had worked for a supermarket corporation that began as a “mom and pop” operation and grew into a fairly big chain. The father wanted to “pass it on” to his sons. However, the sons just “didn’t have it.” The father after a while realized this. However, he was so set on passing the business unto his sons that he brought in all these other wonderful business people to help the sons run the business for when that day would come when he “was not there anymore.” However, even this would not work. Finally, the

father came to the conclusion that the greatest thing he could do for his sons was just to sell the business outright. Being a good businessman he recognized, much to own his chagrin, that his sons were not him and this business was not for them. Even though he wanted his “legacy” of the family business to continue, he was wise enough to know that the business was not for his sons and really was not what they were meant to do with their lives.

I learned much from that time in my life. Actually, it was a few years prior to me entering into ministry and becoming a pastor. When I entered into ministry I had two sons. As our children grew I would think on what they would do as a vocation for their life. Was I to bring them into the life of “full time” ministry? Were they to follow in my footsteps and partner with me in the “family business” of being a pastor and/or taking over the ministry that I was in? After all, wouldn’t that be wonderful? Wouldn’t it make me look like I was a successful parent because my children would follow in my footsteps and become a pastor or the leader of the ministry I was in? Wouldn’t it affirm what a great Christian parent I was? Wouldn’t that affirm to myself and those around me concerning how good I was and make me so proud, not just of them, but of what I accomplished? After all, isn’t it important that through my children my life’s work would continue? If you catch my drift here, you will see all the “I”s in what I just wrote.

When you think about it, this mentality is a “me mentality.” It is all about the self, me and I. This mentality is really all about the self and one’s pride and ego. It really has nothing to do with the children, not others and even worse, not about God. This mentality never gives a thought to what God may want for the lives of the children or to those that they are pushing their “legacy” upon.

Unfortunately, we find this a lot in the ministry realm. Please, do not get me wrong. I have no problems with children of leadership being involved in the ministry – as long as it is what they are called to do by the Lord. Many times we, as well meaning parents, have a picture or dream of what we think our children should be and do – especially in the realm of Christian leadership. It becomes what we want for them and not necessarily what God has in mind for them. I have heard it referred to as being the “legacy” of the leader. I have seen this become a passion, almost to the point of becoming an obsession to many in Christian leadership. We have become obsessed with “my ministry,” or “my church,” etc. and it continuing on “after I am gone.” There it is again –the “me, mine and I” syndrome. Actually, as we can begin to see, this is a very carnal way of thinking.

So what do the scriptures tell us concerning this thing called “legacy?” Well, first of all, the term “legacy” is never used in the scriptures. However, the scriptures are very clear concerning what a father **is to pass on** to their children. Below are just a few:

- Psalm 78:2-4 (KJV) – *“I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”*
- Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (KJV) – *“And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”*
- Proverbs 13:22 (KJV) – *“A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.”*

- Proverbs 22:6 (KJV) – *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*

Through the above scriptures we see that the most important thing for a parent to “pass on” to their children is the Word of God and being obedient to the Word of God. The most important thing that a parent is to pass on to their children is teaching and training them up in the ways of the Lord and having an intimate relationship with their God. Yes, if at all possible they are to leave an inheritance to their children. However, no where does it say that the child, when older is to live off the “coattails” of their father. No where do we read about passing on the “family business” other than the family business of being faithful and obedient children of the most, high God.

The truth is that our children are actually God’s inheritance passed on to us. Psalm 127:3 tells us, *“Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.”* Our children are the Lord’s and He has entrusted them to us here on this earth. We as parents have been entrusted by Him to train and direct them in the ways of their God. We have been entrusted by the Lord to help lead and guide them on the path that **He has set for them.**

Now, I want to reiterate that it is not that I think that leaders of ministries can never “pass the baton” to their children. What I am saying is that the decision to do so must be in the hands of the Lord. Only He knows what the true destiny of each of us should be, and is to be, for our lives. The destiny of each of us has been known to the Lord from the very beginning of time. It was known even before we were found within our mother’s womb. The scripture tells us that our Heavenly Father knew us even prior to being conceived. (Psalm 139:13-16) In Jeremiah 1: 4-5 we read, *“Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”* Here we see that Jeremiah, even before he was conceived, was ordained by God for the task he was to perform as a prophet of God for that particular season of Israel’s history. It was God who knew what Jeremiah’s task was to be for his life. It is God who knows what the task or life’s vocation is to be for each one of His beloved creation.

The apostle Paul believed that the greatest thing he could pass on to those that he labored and was in ministry with was that they stay true to the Word of God that he preached and taught to them. He considered Timothy as a son, even though he was not his biological son. The thing that was most important to Paul was that Timothy was to continue in the Word of God and pass on that Word to other faithful men who would continue to pass the Truth on to others. (2Timothy 2:1-2) For Paul it was all about God and His Word going forth and not continuing his ministry. It was all about God Kingdom and not his own “legacy.”

Timothy and others were truly called by God, not to continue Paul’s ministry, but to continue on in Father God’s ministry. They were to continue on in whatever the Lord had called them to do and not what Paul wanted for them. Timothy was called to be an evangelist. Timothy continued being faithful in his service unto the Lord. Foxes Book of Martyrs suggests that tradition states that Timothy died in 97 A.D. “upholding the truth of the Bible.” Apparently, Timothy went on to become the chief elder (bishop) of the church of Ephesus where he was martyred when he “told a crowd of pagans that their idolatrous celebrations were ridiculous.”

For Paul and for the faithful “fathers” of the early church it was about passing on the “family business” of the Father, God – not about them and their ministry. The “family business” was about bringing people to salvation through the preaching and teaching of the Gospel message which was - Christ crucified, Christ resurrected and ascended, Christ will come again. It was all about the “DNA” of God and His Kingdom and not the “DNA” of a ministry, church or person.

Paul never looked back but was always going forward. He was called to not build on another man's labors. We read in Romans 15:20, "*Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation...*" Paul knew His call and therefore, he was successful. It is vital for each of us to know our function within the Body of Christ. Many times people are striving to be in positions where they are really not called to be by God but rather it is either what they want or they are misled by others into being something that they are not. This not only hinders the individual from reaching their highest potential but it also hinders the Body of Christ because people are in positions or trying to fulfill a function that they have no business doing and were never meant to do.

1 Corinthians 12:18 tells us "*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, **as it hath pleased him.***" What this is saying to us is that God has a specific function for each of us in the Body of Christ. It is the function that **He has specifically chosen for each individual.** If the individual is obedient and yields to what God has set for them to do they will not only be doing what God has called them to be but it will also be most beneficial to the Body of Christ and in the bringing forth of the Kingdom of God. It is imperative for each of us to yield and be obedient to our Heavenly Father rather than yield to our own desires or the desires of others, no matter who they are or what they say.

Could this be one of the reasons why the Body of Christ is not functioning to its fullest potential in Christ? I know we see churches and ministries to some extent "growing." However, we also are seeing an overall decline in church growth. Could one of the problems be that people are in their wrong place within the Body thereby hindering the work of the Lord upon the earth?

What is the "legacy" that each member in the Body of Christ should desire for themselves? It isn't about continuing the natural "family business." It isn't about continuing a church or ministry for the sake of any individual's personal "legacy." What we all need to do is put all that aside and allow God to show each of us where He desires for each of us to be within the Body of Christ. It needs to be all about Father God's "family business" – the Kingdom of God. We must be open to the fact that this may not necessarily mean "full time" ministry positions for most of our children. It could simply mean taking our place as a good spouse; a good parent; a good worker to your employer; a good citizen to your community, etc. These are just as vital in bringing forth the Kingdom of God. These functions represent God in all aspects of life giving glory and honor to Him, as well as pointing the unsaved to God through a Godly, Christ like lifestyle.

Proverbs 10:7 tells us, "*The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.*" This is what each of us should desire for our lives. This scripture is telling us that when it is that time for us to "go to be with the Lord," people's memories of you should be such that they remember you as one who exemplified the character and lifestyle of Jesus. That is what is important because that ultimately points them to the God you served and loved. As far as the aspect of "legacy" is concerned, our attitude should be, "Lord, not my will be done but your will be done;" "I must decrease and you must increase;" "Less of me and more of Thee." Remember, all things (heaven and earth, ministries, businesses, churches, etc.) will pass away but God's Word will never pass away.