

What Will Your Legacy Be?

How will you be remembered? Most likely you will not be remembered by many people, and not for long by most of those who do. For example,

- Several times recently I have asked someone, “Does the name Tom Skinner ring a bell?” I’ve been a little startled when they said, “No.” How could the memory of the greatest black evangelist of the 20th century so quickly pass into obscurity?
- Recently I was thinking about several of the great men who built our community—men responsible for our highways, parks, and local universities. Their contributions have long since been forgotten, as well as their names.
- A famous Bible teacher died a few years ago. I cannot, for the life of me, remember his name.
- I cannot remember the first name of my great grandfather. Can you?

And so it goes.

Given the brevity of personal notoriety, what can we invest in that will leave a lasting legacy? And what should be our realistic expectations?

A Realistic Legacy

Jim is 20 years older than me, yet we have always co-labored in ministry together. My wife and I were honored to be invited, along with about 40 other guests, to his 50th wedding anniversary.

Also in attendance were his happy wife, his children who flew in for the occasion, and his pastor who thought enough of him to comment on his life. In his case, no one from his work attended. And he was very happy.

Wouldn't it be enough to discover that a happy wife, children who still want to be around you, a pastor who would be willing to say something nice about you, and about forty friends were willing to assemble and celebrate your life?

What more can a man really want? It's a realistic and lasting legacy.

How can you and I achieve such a legacy? Here are a few ideas to consider ...

1. Decide What Is Important and Write It Down. Make a list of what you think is most important, frame it, and hang it where you will see it regularly.

More than 25 years ago, I did just that. I made a list of my ten most important philosophies, values, and beliefs. They hang on a wall in my office in plain view...

What's Important?

- To love God and His Son, Jesus Christ.
- To keep family life as our highest priority after God.
- To invest in people and relationships.
- To think and act with integrity.
- To pursue excellence in every undertaking.
- To express gratitude whenever possible.
- To lead a disciplined, prudent life.
- To acquire wisdom in humility and the fear of the Lord.
- To trust God completely and not worry about life's many cares.
- To live by setting and working toward realistic goals.

These are the standards by which I have measured my life. These are the particular ways I have articulated my understanding of the Bible.

Since a legacy is what you leave behind, for me a lasting legacy is everyone in my family loving and serving Christ.

That's first and foremost. Second, a lasting legacy is to have invited as many as possible to join us in eternal life.

A distant third might be to have someone stand at my funeral and proclaim, "He did what he said was important. He loved the Lord and his family. He invested his life into people and relationships. His life displayed the integrity, excellence, and gratitude which he prized. He led a disciplined life, pursuing wisdom and humility in faith. And he was a hard worker. And also, he was content, at peace, and joyful."

What's on your list? What are the ingredients of your lasting legacy? Try it. Make a list. You can frame and hang it, or you can put it on a piece of paper that you leave in your Bible. The more you look at it, the more impact it will have on your thinking.

2. Make Memories. Frankly, I do not remember many of the routines of my childhood. Do you? Instead, I remember the special occasions and memorable experiences. I remember crabbing off a bridge with a chicken neck on a string, being the king of my sixth grade class, surf fishing with my family at the beach, and shooting a rabbit that didn't die right away.

Spend time with your children. Love is spelled T – I – M – E. I dated my children. Every Tuesday night I took one of them out for dinner and an activity. My son liked go carts. My daughter liked the mall. They both loved being with their dad.

My adult son told me, "Dad, I want to have a job like you did because I can never remember you missing a single one of my games, and I want to do that for my kids too." Kids remember the funniest things, but they all remember that time = love.

Vacations are show-stoppers in the memory bank. That's because they break with routine. They're special memories. The brain secretes chemicals that burn special experiences into our brains—bad as well as good. Be sure to make vacations

different and special.

Another growing up memory of mine was of wanting to know God. As an altar boy, I used to pour over the prayers hoping that I would experience the presence of God. One childhood memory I definitely do not have is that of receiving Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. How different might life have been if I had responded to the gospel at an early age? Make sure to make the gospel known to your children from their youngest age. That's the one memory that will most alter their lives.

3. Practice Spiritual Disciplines

A legacy doesn't just happen; it takes diligence, forethought, planning, and execution.

One of the oldest traditions of Christian faith is the practice of spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines are how we keep our lives focused on the ingredients of a lasting legacy.

Spiritual disciplines do nothing to improve your record with God—that's what Christ did on the Cross. But they do deepen and enrich our spiritual lives. There are many lists of the disciplines, each somewhat different. My top 12 includes *creation, the Bible, prayer, worship, the Sabbath, fellowship, counsel, fasting, spiritual warfare, stewardship, service, and evangelism*. Almost any Christian virtue or duty can be turned into a discipline.

Spiritual disciplines will help get you where you want to go—to a lasting legacy. Here are four disciplines that are on my "must do" list.

- 1. Be part of a disciple-making church.** The mission is, "Go and make disciples." If you are not in a church that's focused on the mission you're in the wrong place.

- 2. Read the Bible for yourself.** The Bible is God speaking to

us. You will not grow deeply until you set aside quiet times when, without interruptions and distractions, you can tune your ears to hear the speech of God.

3. Participate in a men's small group. Couples groups are good, but there is an unparalleled bond that develops in a men's small group. In our experience, most meaningful change takes place in the context of small group relationships.

4. Pray for your wife, and, if possible, with her. Easily the number one issue facing men is that marriages are not working correctly. One of the most powerful solutions is to pray for and with your wife.

Why not give these ideas a try? A list of what's really important to you reviewed regularly, a plan to make memories with your children, and a commitment to practice spiritual disciplines.

These may not be all of the ingredients of a lasting legacy, but they seem more than adequate to assemble a wife, your children, your pastor, and 40 friends.

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