

# Will Anyone Notice When I'm Gone?

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If they erect a statue in your honor it will primarily serve as a perch for pigeons within the first two weeks of its construction. If they name a building after you, chances are people passing by will wonder how much money you had to give for such a distinction. So began my conversations with leading business people a while ago. It got their attention. These symbols may indeed reflect a life of achievement or service but unless lives have been positively influenced what good are they? Many men and women have reached the pinnacle of success evidenced by awards and rewards only to find out their efforts didn't produce anticipated satisfaction. Although the world applauded their accomplishments, something deep inside told them it was a mirage of little lasting substance.

In the movie, *Meet Joe Black*, a successful businessman is visited by Death and confronted with the specter of his own demise in the not-to-distant future. He has spent his life building his business into a highly respected enterprise. An unscrupulous competitor has tendered a tempting offer. He refuses the offer. When asked by his second in command why he turned such a lucrative offer down he emotionally responds.

*"I don't want anybody buying up my life's work, turning it into something that wasn't meant to be. A man wants to leave something behind, the way he made it. He wants it to be run the way he made it, with a sense of honor and dedication to the truth."*

The circumstances might be different for many of us but we all struggle with the desire to 'leave something behind,' something that will outlive us, something of value for posterity. We spend our lives investing our energy into seemingly worthwhile endeavors, sacrificing everything to reach a perishable goal. Once there, we recognize the satisfaction is fleeting at best. It doesn't bring the joy we thought it would. So, we identify another mountain to climb much like the explorers of the past. They set their minds on the vision of what may lie behind the next mountain range only to find another mountain. Sadly, for many of us, our significant relationships pay the price of our dreams. At the end of our working life, we finally have time to share. But to our discredit, we have few to share with. The field of our relationships is strewn with broken promises, unfulfilled commitments, reshuffled priorities, and abandoned appointments.

There is nothing wrong with striving for success. But if our sense of worth is wrapped up in what we do and not who we are in Christ, we can miss the opportunity we have to model the character of Christ in our work setting, community and family.

During my daughter's senior year in high school she repeatedly asked if I could attend one of her school's basketball games. She was a varsity cheerleader. At the time, I was a general manager of a business. I remember giving perfectly legitimate and rational reasons why it was impossible to be there. To this day, I cannot remember any

of those reasons. What I remember is I wasn't there for my daughter. My primary focus was on my business sphere of influence.

A devotion to one's chosen profession or dedication to becoming successful is commendable. However, when such devotion and dedication become an excuse for neglecting our or our obligation to be light to a lost world, we sacrifice our God-given purposes, talents and potential on the altar of expediency.

Secondly, attaining success is no guarantee of attaining significance; that elusive state of being we find ourselves seeking when success does not deliver lasting satisfaction. My premise follows.

**Significance is more important than success. A life of significance is attained by living a legacy worth leaving in the lives of people God places within our sphere of influence. The only legacy worth living is a godly legacy. Centeredness and focus are the keys to a godly legacy.**

### **1. We are wired to seek significance in our lives.**

Social research indicates that we live our lives on one of three levels.

Some live on the **survival level** with a basic concern for food, clothing, shelter, and physical well-being.

Most live on the **success level**. We have food, clothing, shelter, and relative physical well-being, so we strive to achieve things in our life which will bring us satisfaction. But living on this level does not give our lives the meaning we seek. Often, we ask ourselves, "Why do I still feel unfulfilled and empty?" It is because success, in itself, never ultimately satisfies us. These first two levels give us the hope of meaning and satisfaction but always disappoint us over time.

The third level, **significance**, is knowing that my life matters. The most important question in life is, Why Am I Here? The fact is, many successful people feel insignificant and long for significance.

The bible offers clarity on this issue. Psalm 139 dispels the notion that life happens by chance, that it is unplanned, a matter of fate and circumstance. We are not here by mistake or chance but by decree and deliberate intention.

*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. **Psalms 139:13-18***

God knit us together in our mother's womb, He knew us before we ever came to be, He determined the days of our existence.

Secondly, Blasé Pascal, the 17th century philosopher, scientist and inventor, states we are born with a "God-shaped void" which compels us to ask fundamental questions about life. Ecclesiastes 3, brings this idea into biblical focus by informing us that we are born with a sense of the eternal.

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. **Ecclesiastes 3:10-11***

From this embedded sense of the eternal arises the urge to find answers to three fundamental questions about life having to do with purpose, progress and permanence. These questions, in some form, are asked in every culture and every generation.

*Why am I here? Where am I going? What is the significance of my life?*

In response, the bible insists that God does have a purpose for our lives. We are here for a reason. Our life can count for something of lasting value.

*The LORD works out everything for his own ends — even the wicked for a day of disaster. **Proverbs 16:4***

## **2. God has a prescription for significance.**

**First, we have a DESTINY to fulfill--God has plans for us! (*Jeremiah 29:11*)**

Notice the plural, plans? So many of us live in fear of the consequences of bad decisions we have made in our journey. We wonder about that promotion or relocation we accepted. We question the profession we've chosen or the decision we made about down sizing our organization. A million questionable decisions flood the mind. Did we make a mistake? Did we violate our principles? Did we bring dishonor upon God? Did we choose God's better instead of His best?

The good news is that God is not finished with us yet. He is a God of second, third, fourth --many chances. The roads we choose in any given instance simply provide a new set of opportunities to live a legacy worth leaving. We may suffer some consequences but don't be discouraged. God is merciful and full of grace.

**Second, we have a CONTRIBUTION to make--God has equipped us for His purposes! (*1 Corinthians 12:4-7*)**

God has given you and I one or more spiritual gifts to use for His glory, avenues to express those gifts and degrees of effectiveness in the exercise of our gifts - right where you are. There are other pieces to this package including talents, aptitude, skills, temperament, leadership style, maturity and availability. Together, this package can be

used to positively influence others for Christ in our jobs, our communities, our families and our church. Based on how God has wired you, what can you offer to others of lasting value?

### **Third, we have a MINISTRY to complete--Our objective is Christlikeness!**

*(Ephesians 4:11-16)*

In the movie *City Slickers*, the crusty character played by Jack Palance suggests that the solution to the complexity of our lives is focusing on “one thing”. Rick Warren, the senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church in Mission Viejo, California offers this bit of wisdom, “live for an audience of one.” So, what is your primary focus in life? Ephesians 4, verses 13 and 15, gives us our answer - Christlikeness. In other words, whatever we do, wherever we serve, we are to be about the business of producing Christlikeness first in ourselves and secondly, in others within our sphere of influence.

### **Finally, we have a LEGACY to leave--God wants us to invest in others! (1**

*Chronicles 28:8; 2 Timothy 2:2)*

Have you ever wondered why Solomon valued wisdom so highly as a young man that when given an opportunity he made it his only request? Where did Solomon learn the value of wisdom? Who instructed him about its importance? We find the answer in *Proverbs 4: 1-9*. His father, King David, instilled the importance of wisdom in the mind of Solomon while still a boy. Later in his life, when given a choice he chose wisdom.

Every one of us will leave some legacy but what kind of legacy will we leave. If God takes us home what will our employees remember about us? What will our families say regarding us? How will our communities describe us? Each of us has something of value to pass on to someone of value. Each of us has been given something of value by God to give to someone He values. When you meet the Lord face to face will He honor you for wisely investing your talents in the lives of others or will He chastise you as He did the servant who buried his talent in the ground? *(Matthew 25:14-30)*

### **3. Living and leaving a godly legacy brings significance**

#### ***Four Possible Legacies***

Live in such a way as to leave no legacy whatsoever!

Live in such a way as to leave a bad legacy!

Live in such a way as to leave a perishable legacy!

Live in such a way as to leave a godly legacy in the lives of others!

Everyone wonders what legacy they will leave. In other words, will our lives count for anything? Will we leave anything of lasting value? Will we finish the race well? Will anyone remember us when we're gone?

Legacy is the aroma left in the nostrils of those God has called us to influence long after we are gone. What legacy will you leave in the lives of others? Will the aroma leave a

stench or will it be a pleasing aroma? Will anyone know notice we're gone at all? Will we be missed or will others be relieved upon our departure? More importantly, will our lives bring honor to the Lord after we are gone?

I keep a journal for one reason; I want my family and my daughter specifically to know my heart. A note to my daughter at the beginning of my journal illustrates my priority on living and leaving a godly legacy.

*Someday this journal will be yours. In it are those things I have received from the Lord. They represent my innermost feelings and thoughts which I hold in high esteem. I leave them to you as a legacy. As you read them know they are the thoughts and beliefs of my heart B those things I believe are of utmost importance for the formation of Christ-like character and behavior. Your birth was the beginning of my life in God. I hope that my life as a whole will have been of some value to you. You always have been, are, and always will be the pride and joy of my life. May God richly bless you. May your memory of me warm your heart during the course of your life. Love, Dad!*

Close your eyes and project yourself to the end of your life. Construct a visual image of what you want to be at that moment. How do you want to be remembered? What legacy do you want to leave? What lasting contributions will you want to make? Open your eyes. Now, start making decisions, in God's power that will guarantee those outcomes.

### **The Compass or the Clock**

Steven Covey, in *First Things First*<sup>1</sup>, introduces the reader to two options, living our lives by a clock or compass. He suggests that the clock represents our commitments, appointments, schedules, goals, activities - they drive our behavior and condition our responses. The compass, on the other hand, represents our vision, values, principles, mission, direction and destiny - what we feel is important, what we believe should lead our lives. How are you living your life, by the clock or the compass?

Perhaps we are living our lives by the compass but our bearings are off. We are arriving at destinations we didn't expect or desire. Our compass needs calibration.

Over time the hull of a ship builds up magnetism as it moves through water which interferes with the ship's compass. True north is not really true north. To remove this interference a ship passes over special coils on the ocean floor. Similarly, our internal compass, in the form of our central beliefs, core values, worldview and motives, must be periodically 'demagnetized' if we are to continue our journey along accurate bearings. The system of coils, in this analogy, is the bible, God's word to us.

What do you use for direction in your life? Are you off course or on course? Are you able to find your way in the midst of the storms of life? What guides your decisions?

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<sup>1</sup>Steven R. Covey, *First Things First*, (New York: Fireside, Simon & Schuster, 115), 15-20.

What influences your strategic plans? What principles condition your interactions with others?

### **Finishing Strong**

Dr. J. Robert Clinton, professor of leadership at Fuller Seminary, has carefully studied the lives of over 900 biblical, historical and contemporary Christian leaders. His research indicates that those who finish well have the following common characteristics.

- Perspective which enabled them to focus.
- Intimacy with Christ and repeated experiences of inner renewal.
- Discipline in important areas of life.
- A positive learning attitude in their lives.
- A network of meaningful relationships including several important mentors.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. Centeredness and focus are the keys to a godly legacy.**

The tyranny of the urgent, the rapid pace of progress and the expanding obligations and commitments that result, make increasing demands on our time. The road to living and leaving a godly legacy is not found by simply eliminating conflicting priorities or simplifying our lives. These paths may be desirable but are not always practical or realistic. The road to living and leaving a godly legacy is found through the disciplines of balance and focus.

#### **How can you bring centeredness to your busy life?**

- Calibrate your internal compass (beliefs, values, worldview and motives) to God's biblical standards.
- Find out how God has wired you in terms of gifting, passion, temperament and aptitude.
- Tailor your life and work to ensure 80% of who you are overlaps 80% of what you do.
- Attend primarily to the relationships over tasks within your sphere of influence.

#### **How can you bring focus to your busy life?**

- **Allow the Bible to chisel you into Christ's image!** (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) The word of God is an accurate judge of our heart. Transformational change is cyclical beginning with teaching, reproof, correction and training.
- **Live a value-centered life!** (1 Timothy 4:7-8; Psalms 15:1-5) Godliness is a virtue to be cultivated. Integrity means that we live our lives in accordance with our values.
- **Guard your heart!** (Proverbs 4:23; Philippians 4:8) Our behavior reflects what is

stored in our hearts. Our heart needs guarding because the enemy looks for weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

- **Discipline your life!** (*1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7-8*) Life that brings glory to God and blesses those within our sphere of influence takes discipline. A crown of righteousness awaits a man or women of discipline.
- **Submit to being held accountable!** (*Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12; Colossians 3:16*) Mentors will hold us accountable if we let them. Our journey from success to significance must include others who will help us.

Maybe it's time to get to know those who work for us. Maybe it's time to get rid of activities that have no lasting impact. Maybe it's time to live the values we believe in. Maybe it's time to merge our Christian world with our business world removing the dualism of our existence.

Maybe it's time to live our lives for "an audience of One." Maybe it's time to focus more on our relationships in the workplace, in our communities and in our homes.

There are many examples of legacies we might live and leave before God calls us home. These options can be exercised in your chosen profession, church, community and family.

- *KEEP a journal to pass on to your loved ones.*
- *MENTOR someone in spiritual, professional or personal matters.*
- *INVEST intentional time in the lives of your family members.*
- *ESTABLISH a life plan that will manage your life in accordance with biblical beliefs, values, worldview and motives.*
- *LIVE out your faith by winning, enfolding, equipping or deploying faithful followers of Christ.*
- *INVEST in others by becoming actively involved in a ministry area.*
- *SERVE as a stimulus for change which betters the world.*
- *BUILD an organization or movement that can serve as a channel for God to work through.*
- *USE your profession as a vehicle to improve the lives of employees.*
- *CONTRIBUTE financial resources to further God's kingdom on earth.*
- *BE a loving, godly husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, sister or brother, grandfather or grandmother to those that should mean the most to you.*
- *LIVE your life for an audience of One!*