



Leaving Your Legacy

Welcome back to our final session for this group of lessons. We have covered five distinct topics related to marriage and have developed a foundation for growth. We have discussed marriage as a covenant relationship that doesn't consider divorce to be an option. We have learned about differences in men and women, and how those differences lead to fulfilling different roles in marriage. We have learned some basic communication and conflict resolution techniques and we have discussed how to increase intimacy in your marriage. Today we are going to conclude by discussing the legacy you want to leave.

Every person who lives will leave a legacy, the only question is, "What kind of legacy do you wish to leave?" In our society, that question is often answered for us. In our me-first, get-ahead-at-all-cost system, the tendency is to become a workaholic. There is nothing wrong with working hard or enjoying the benefits of your labor, but is that how you want to be remembered? When you are lying on your deathbed, do you want your family members gathered around you discussing the hours you worked and the business deals you were able to capture? That certainly paints a picture of one sort of a legacy to leave, but let's consider another alternative.

What would the discussion around that same bed look like if our priorities were aligned so God came first, then our spouse, then our children, then our work? What types of memories would your loved ones be sharing at that point? More importantly, given the two scenarios, which do you believe would lead to telling yourself, "I have had a wonderful, rich, full life. I have no regrets." The choice is yours; you have the power to choose the type of legacy you want to leave.

How we live our daily lives reveals a lot about our belief system. Do we truly treasure fellowship, that close bond of shared experiences, joys, and pain, or do we really value apartheid, or the setting apart of ourselves from others? I think most people would

automatically say, “Oh, I absolutely treasure fellowship!” But I have to wonder if that is really the case. Everything in life is based on relationships and those relationships determine the sort of legacy we leave, so we need to work at getting that part right!

I know that for a long time Peggy considered herself to be in fellowship with people from several groups - she felt aligned with her church group, part of her workplace team, and loved by her family. She was looking at things the way that she wanted to see them, through the lens of what she perceived fellowship to be. The problem is that she was confusing membership with fellowship.

She belonged to the same church from the time she was three until she was 39 - that should surely qualify her for fellowship, right? Wrong! When she left her “home” church to join my church, no one called her to ask about where she was. The bell choir that she had been a part of for as many years as she could remember went on without her, her role as a reader was filled by someone else, and even her spot as a greeter on Sunday mornings (a hard role to fill) was shifted to someone else. What she saw in hindsight was that she hadn’t developed relationships with any of the people she was around each week. Everything stayed at the surface level of “How are you?” and “Fine.” No one was allowed to know the real Peggy. If she had actually been in relationship with these people, she would have had calls to go out for coffee and some talking time, or at least inquiries about where she was and if she was okay. That realization really hurt, and kind of drives home the point that simply being a Christian doesn’t mean that we are good at relationships or even go out of our way to look out for each other. That is one of the big criticisms that non-believers have, and one that I think we need to make a pointed effort to change; however, that is another story.

Peggy thought that maybe the breakdown in relationship was because she only saw these people once a week, and then most of that time was in an organized setting - either a service where they were all sitting, standing, singing, or praying on cue, or a rehearsal that was mostly about the business of ringing the right bells at the right time. To make herself feel better, she told herself that she had real friends at work. She’d love to be able to say that she had found a safety net there, but she soon realized that to the people at work she was just the person who unloaded the buses and worked with the at-risk kids. She was actually told at one time by a very “helpful” coworker that several coworkers had discussed how socially awkward she was. This coworker went on to say that if she had problem with Peggy, she

would absolutely talk about her with other coworkers behind closed doors. So much for finding love at work.

Peggy felt that surely her family would be a place to find fellowship! They were related after all! Surely they really had to be in relationship with each other. But as she looked around her, what she found was that there was no desire to interact. It was one of those come-when-you're-needed or for the holidays scenes; it was completely devoid of real feeling and connection.

Peggy was feeling incredibly down and unloved at this point. She was ready to blame the entire world for treating her in such a rotten manner. Then she thought about some common, but often forgotten advice - "if everyone around you has the same problem or issue with you, it might be wise to look at yourself." When she stopped to consider that, she realized that what she was experiencing was real, but she also brought it upon herself. One of her elementary teachers was fond of saying that whenever you point your finger at anyone else, there are always three pointing back at you. When she got honest with herself, she realized that she hadn't done the work necessary to actually build relationships with the people in her life. She assumed they would happen on their own, but they didn't. Building and maintaining relationships takes intentional work, work that isn't always fun and easy. The work often involves tears and arguments, but that work is followed by a huge reward.

The reason we are sharing this isn't so you feel sorry for Peggy, quite the contrary! We are sharing this to show how the choices you make directly impact the legacy you leave. You see, the legacy Peggy was leaving wasn't a very powerful one. About all that anyone could say about her while giving a eulogy would have been, "She worked as a teacher at such-and-so school. She attended this church her whole life. X-many family members survive her. And she mostly kept to herself." That isn't the case anymore. When Peggy saw where her legacy was leading, she took intentional steps to change the direction she was going. If she can do that, so can you!

The first thing that needs to happen to start defining the legacy you want to leave is to decide what you want people to remember about you when you are no longer here. Then you will start to put stakes in the ground. The stakes you place are the things that you see as permanent, non-negotiable beliefs about how you want to live your life. Since you are married (and we know that means that you are no longer two individuals living life together,

but are one body), you and your spouse will have to decide on the legacy you wish to leave and where each stake is going to be placed, together. Whatever one of you does will affect the other. You can leave a Godly legacy, a work legacy, a play legacy, or a me-first legacy. The choice is yours, but choose carefully. The stakes you put in the ground to create that legacy become what anchors your support lines when the storms of life come up.

We are going to talk about how to establish a Godly legacy, because we believe that if you get that part right, the rest will fall into line. By way of example, we are going to use our marriage and the choices we have made. During the project you will begin working on developing the legacy you wish to leave by establishing long and short-term goals. That is the first step toward being intentional about the legacy you will leave.

In order to leave a Godly legacy, you have to really know who God is. The first stake we put in the ground was, “We will draw closer to God each day.” This is a non-negotiable for us. We realize this will look different as we move through various seasons of our life; however, each day we do something to move to a deeper level of knowing God. That is one reason we feel so strongly about the habit of reading the Bible and praying together each day. There is no better way to develop that relationship than to spend time together with God.

Another aspect of the legacy Peggy and I want for our life is for our marriage to be all that God intended. Because of that we put a stake in the ground that says, “We will exemplify a Godly marriage.” So, we work each day to make sure that how we are interacting with and treating each other is the way that we want to be seen interacting in front of God. We try to live each day knowing God is present in our marriage. That’s a pretty good visual when we hit a rough patch. When God is in the room with you, you tend to be a bit more careful about word choice and reactions. It means that we never stop growing; we are continually working to take our relationship to the next level.

We also feel strongly that part of having a Godly legacy includes honoring Him in all that we do. So, the next stake we put in the ground reads, “The work we do, and the rewards of it, will be honoring to God.” It is our opinion that everything we are called to do in the course of our day is the work He intended for us to accomplish. Many people look at their work as what they do to earn a living, and that is, in fact, one aspect of work; however, the work that God created for you to do goes far beyond that. Some days He wants you to work

on specific relationships, others He may want you to be service oriented to demonstrate His love in a concrete way, still other days He may want you to work by resting in Him. The point being, that everything we do should be honoring to God, but it doesn't stop there. The rewards of our work also need to honor God. It is very honoring to Him to earn an honest day's wage, but is it honoring to then use that money to purchase porn or alcohol to get drunk? How you use the resources you have shows the world a lot about where your stakes are driven.

The last thing we identified as an area we want to claim as part of our legacy is in healing relationships. This stake reads, "We will bring people closer to God and to each other." We anchor ourselves firmly to this stake and base many of the decisions we make about how we spend our time and other resources on it. For us, it looks like working to give people the tools they need to have a healthy marriage. It also means spending time with people who are hurting, to help them see God is with them in the midst of their pain.

It is important to mention that having a stake in the ground doesn't necessarily mean that you do all of the work yourself. A stake is statement about what you hold as a life goal. As the seasons of your life change, the manifestation of your stakes will change. Sometimes the way to live that out is through supporting someone else who is actually doing that work. For example, we financially support missionaries who are working in the European block. We know that we are called to bring people closer to God; however, we also know that our calling is not to be missionaries abroad (at least right now.) It is okay to do that. God knows what your unique gifts and talents are; He expects you to use them, but doesn't expect you to be the lone ranger and take on everything under the sun by yourself. He knows where you are in your current season of life, and He expects you to live appropriately for that season. Your life choices will look very different if you are a young couple, have several young children, have teenagers, are empty nesters, or are grandparents. Each phase of your life brings unique opportunities and challenges; you aren't expected to live in all the seasons at once.

God knows you. He formed you to be exactly who you are with exactly the passions that you have. He created the work for you to do to live out those passions. All He asks is that you are whom He made you to be; nothing more, and nothing less. He wants your life to be full and rich. He wants you to leave a powerful legacy that will impact generations to come.

In closing, I want to share a poem with you. It is called “The Dash.” In this clip you will see the author, Linda Ellis, reading her poem. As you listen, I challenge you to think about what you want your dash to stand for.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVLqkExH5ww> (2:12)

Please pray with me. God, thank You for who You are. Thank You for creating me as Your child and for giving me work designed specifically for me. Lead us to a deeper understanding of what we are called to do. Guide us as we work through this final project. Protect us from outside influences that would try to distract us from accomplishing what You would have us do. In Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.

Thank you for spending this time with me. In this final project you will begin working on creating long and short-term goals. These goals will help you determine the direction your life will take. Without intentionality, you will wander through life without a clear idea of where you are going or if you are on the right track. The goals will serve as your highway markers as you progress through your life’s journey.

I hope that you will join us for the next level of marriage curriculum. In it, we will return to each of the strands we discussed, but take it to a deeper, fuller understanding and application. Another resource that is available to you is our website. We have multiple resources available, including book suggestions and access to our monthly newsletter.

Have a wonderful week, and God bless your marriage!