

What Will Your Legacy Be?
1 Timothy 6:3-21

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In the last two weeks I had the opportunity to say goodbye to two individuals that knew the Lord. In two incredibly touching services, their lives were remembered by people who had experienced first-hand their humor, strength, and commitment. The people who spoke, shared remembrances of how the love they shared for their friends and families was demonstrated by the actions they took. And while saying farewell clearly meant many heavy hearts, what I took away was that these lives truly made an impact on the communities they lived in. When they left this world, the world was better for them having been here.

Yesterday, the Zumwalt family and his Calvary Church family said goodbye to Jim Zumwalt, a man remembered for his wit, his quiet strength and his zest for his beloved daughter, wife and countless friends and extended family.

Last week, I traveled to Lopez Island, to attend the memorial service of Jean McCauley Plummer, a relative of the McCauley's whom worship here at Calvary. Jean was remembered because after she came to know Christ as an adult and was baptized. So great was her commitment to sharing what Jesus had done for her, was the testimony that exactly one year later, 8 more family members made their declaration of faith and were baptized at Grace Episcopal Church on Lopez Island—all because of the evangelistic efforts Jean exerted. What an amazing testimony that is. To know that when she left this earth, she had played an important role in building God's kingdom.

My sermon today is part of a series on stewardship, and I chose to look beyond just material wealth and more to what it means to share our gifts, including the faith that God gives each one of us. I would invite each of us to consider the legacy that our lives will leave behind and to ask the question, "What WILL People remember you for? What will outlive you when you leave this world?"

When I was preparing this sermon and pondering on the scripture that I had chosen on stewardship I was confronted with this image. One day, after we breath our last breaths, the wealth we have accumulated, the frequent flier miles, fancy clothing, and academic degrees will all pass away. All the material things will matter no more. While you may pass on an inheritance of money or

property, I contend, what leaves an even bigger impact is what you leave that has eternal implications.

Truly I say to you, there are no u-hauls behind hearses. Naked and vulnerable we enter this world, and we all will leave it similarly. What we do in those middle years between birth and death will become the legacy that will last in the memories of those we leave behind.

Often statesman and politicians' dwell on their legacies and our American Presidents frequently become consumed with what the public will remember about them after they have left office, resumed private life, and eventually leave this world. We have had some shining examples of those who have used their time well. For example, whether you claim to be a democrat or a republican, arguably President Jimmy Carter has done much for the world since he left public office. We see images of him teaching Sunday School in Plains, GA, and with a hammer and hard hat, building houses for Habitat for Humanity. And whether you leave a sizeable fortune as your legacy and bequeath it to your Alma Mater, the choices you make will be how people remember you.

In our midst, I see people who have given of themselves both financially and in terms of their times and talents and that is what today's sermon is focusing on. I challenge each of you to consider the ways you utilize the resources God has bestowed upon you for the building of his kingdom. When one focuses one's energies and resources on loving and serving God, it cannot help but become an essential part of the legacy we each will leave behind when we leave our time on earth.

I feel so blessed by my Calvary Church family. This Sunday represents the one-year anniversary of my ordination. While I have had some personal battles and times of sadness, the totality of the year has been very blessed. And as I look around this church, I see people that also have experienced the best of times and some of the worst of times. I see mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles and friends—I see people who have invested in the lives of those in our community. They have each played a tremendous role in the faith formation of the children of Enumclaw and the life of my own child. I see put into practice exactly the guidelines that God gave to the Israelites and subsequently Christians on how the family is to do this in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Yes, you should be commended for having done things right in passing on your faith to the next generation.

In a Barna study from 2005, an interesting fact came to light: nearly 85% of people who make a decision for Christ do so between the ages of 4 and 14. For all of you that have invested time and energy in serving the youth of our community, please take away this, "What you have done matters. It has eternal implications."

The Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy is one of the most important parts of the Torah, it's called the Shema: The passage can be divided into three parts, the first is a confession of who God is (verse 4), the second a command (verse 5) and the remainder of the portion (verses 6- 9) shows us how these two things are to shape our lives. The Shema, or Jewish prayer *Shema Yisrael*, begins with the phrase: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord (is) our God, the Lord is One".

The first word of this passage in Hebrew gives the name to this famous passage, Shema, meaning to hear. This word does not mean simply the act of hearing what was to be said but has a much broader meaning that includes not just hearing but obeying.

All Israel was to hear and obey the words that were to follow. In Hebrew, the verb is in the singular form, which shows that Israel was being addressed as a collective or corporate unit. Together the confession reminds us first that God is our God, there is a personal relationship with God, He is not just out there unconnected from His creation. We are each called to be in relationship with this loving and personal God.

Secondly, the confession tells us that God is God alone, there is none beside Him, He is unique, but also, He is undivided, He is a unity of purpose and character. As we come to understand God's nature, we see the other two parts of the triune God, the son and the holy spirit. God is still one and He is still a unity that is undivided.

Verse 5: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. The confession then leads directly into the commandment. Because God is our God and that He is God alone and unique in all that He is, His people must therefore love Him. In this context love can be commanded. Love is

not just considered an emotion but rather it is a verb, an act of the will. Love encompasses obedience, loyalty and allegiance. "It is closely related to fear and reverence. It is expressed in loyalty and service. Its primary manifestation is in obedience to the demands of the law." There are a few different interpretations for what is meant by loving God with all your heart, soul and strength. In Hebrew the heart is thought to be equated with the mind, the intellect, will and intentions; Soul would encompass the emotions, desires and character and strength is an unusual translation for the Hebrew word that is more often translated as very or exceedingly so could stress a total commitment. Later Jewish thought interpreted strength as your wealth. And that's where this passage connects to the 1 Timothy 6 passage which also addresses how we are instructed by God to regard our material and spiritual blessings.

This is one of the most important parts of conservative Judaism throughout millennia. So important is this prayer that the tradition has developed to be a central part of orthodox Judaism.

The customs of the Tefillin and Mezuzah are two customs that arose quite early on in the Hebrew tradition, although the history of the tradition is not altogether clear the purpose is to literally incorporate memory of God's central importance in one's life into the very fabric of one's worship and actions.

The Tefillin are small leather boxes that contain verses from the Torah and are attached to the forehead and the left wrist during prayer times (Cairns 1992:85). This is done to literally follow the command to tie the words as symbols to your hands and bind them to your forehead in Deuteronomy 6:8. Similarly the Mezuzah are boxes, cylinders or reeds that contain parchments with verses from the Torah (especially the Shema passages) that are then attached to the right side of doorframes and gateposts (Freeman & Chadwick 1998:171). These literally fulfill the commands for the words to be written on your doorposts and gates in Deuteronomy 6:9. The question raised by these traditions is whether one should take the instructions in these two verses of Deuteronomy be literally or metaphorically? As we can see the Jews have taken it literally and have the Tefillin and Mezuzah as literal symbols of God's word on their person and their homes. The law was to be constantly before them, deep in their hearts to remind all in the community of the covenant and love commitment to God. And while perhaps modern Christians will not use the Mezuzah on our doorposts, I think it is

important to remember in the center of one's life who is the giver of all good gifts.

Jewish families recite this passage every morning and every evening. It is the first passage taught to Jewish children once they begin to talk and devout Jews aspire to say it with their dying breath. Can 21st century families take something from the Jewish traditions that have developed from this passage in Deuteronomy and develop a model for passing on the Christian faith in daily living?

Christ revealed that the One God of the Old Testament Israel is the One God of all people, Jews and Gentiles, all who would come to Him in faith. The Shema and its instructions now also govern those who come into the New Covenant.

When I looked at the new testament scripture for today from 1 Timothy, I see parallels. 1 Timothy is a letter that Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus and asked him to take care of the church there. Paul's advice in this letter primarily has to do with how Timothy should deal with false teachers. One thing that characterized these false teachers was that they thought they could get rich from their teaching. They were part of something that we call "Name it and claim it" theology, or the first-century versions of a misguided faith that told the lie to win converts by saying, "If you give me your money, the Lord will bless you with whatever you want!" This kind of teaching was appealing to people then, just like it is appealing to people now, because it is a half-truth. Sometimes God does reward us financially. But he never promises to do that all the time, because that is never the point. The point is we should be more interested in the Giver than in the gifts he gives.

Paul here wants to fight against these false teachers by telling Timothy what the right attitude toward possessions is. He tells Timothy two things

1. that greed is a trap, and
2. he tells him how to keep from falling into that trap.

It's a trap because it changes who we are and what our values become. Instead of focusing on kingdom work, we focus our energies and talents on accumulating more stuff for ourselves. It warps our desires. The text calls them "foolish and harmful" desires. Here is how it works: When we get a little money, we are able to buy things we couldn't before. That feels good. Soon we can't live without the

things we used to live without quite well. Before long, luxuries become necessities.

We may not feel greedy, but the more we have the more we'll start to feel self-sufficient. And when we feel self-sufficient, we feel like we're in control, like we can handle anything that comes along. And when we feel like we are in control of our lives, we become overconfident and we lose humility and teachability.

We think that if we only have enough money, we will be able to relax and enjoy life. But the truth is, when we have a lot of stuff, we worry more because we have more to lose. We think that just a little bit more money will make us secure, so that nothing can happen to us. This is true, within limits. For example, If I can't afford to pay rent this month, a little more money will keep me from getting kicked out. But we make the mistake of thinking that more money always equals more security.

But if we look for security in our stuff, we will never feel at ease. Even if we had all we wanted, that would not guarantee that nothing bad would ever happen to us. It's a trap.

The last reason It's a trap is because more is never enough. Greed is addictive. It's an itch that can't be scratched.

It's a desire that can never be satisfied.

How do we avoid this trap of the desire for more?

First, learn contentment from Jesus – Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, because God has said 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Note that word "because."

The reason why we can be content is because God is with us. We can be content because he will take care of us. We don't have to get while the getting's good. We don't have to look out for number one.

Paul says in Philippians 4:11 that he has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Here is a man who is writing from prison! But he had learned that godliness with contentment is great gain. The ability to be content no matter what our circumstances is real wealth.

When we look to Jesus for our security, we can begin to use the word “enough.” When we don’t have to always worry about how to get ahead, we can relax and live with simplicity. The second way we can escape the trap of greed is to Learn generosity from Jesus. Once we find our contentment and security in Jesus, we can be more generous.

We know that God knows what we need, and we can trust God for what we need, and we can give any extra resources to people who need them more than we do. But it’s hard for us to be generous on our own, because we can always find reasons to keep what we have. The way we learn generosity is to receive generosity.

Jesus told us in Matthew 6 not to worry. Why?

Because our Father takes care of the birds and the flowers, so he’s certainly going to take care of us. If we believe that God is in charge of the universe, and we believe that God has abundant resources that he freely gives to us, how can we not be generous? If we believe that Jesus didn’t have to become human, didn’t have to save us, but he did anyway, and gave his own life to do it, how can we not be generous?

The more we understand how generous God is to us, the more we can be freed up to be generous to others.

A final way we can escape the trap of greed is to put our hope where it belongs – in Jesus.

The last part of this text tells us to put our hope in God, who “richly provides us with everything we need for our enjoyment.” God cares about our enjoyment! Wealth is uncertain. Stuff is uncertain.

Underneath our desire for more there is a good desire: a desire to make our lives better. But if we spend our lives just trying to get more, eventually it will all be taken away. We need to put our hope where it belongs. Paul says we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. We eventually will lose all our stuff, either before we die or after. The legacy that will remain is in the lives you touch and the part of God’s kingdom that you are a part of building.

No, there are no u-hauls behind hearses.

There is one thing that can't be taken away from us, and that is Jesus' love and forgiveness. That's our firm foundation. Putting our hope in Jesus is how we take hold of the life that is truly life. We can't take any of our stuff with us, but that's the thing – the one thing – that we can take with us.

He is the giver of all good things, including his own life.

Doesn't it make sense for us to put our hope in that?

Benediction: Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.