

Christian Perspectives Article - Leaving a Legacy

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One of my favourite hobbies is studying my family history.

For my birthday this year, my mom bought me a one-year membership to ancestry.com. I'm often up early in the morning tracking down information on my family. It's thrilling to find clues then follow them like a detective. The goal is to get enough pieces to form a picture of an ancestor's life.

Every once in a while I come across an interesting detail, like the fact that my great-grandfather Alfred was a chemist errand boy and that my great-great-great grandfather William Reay was an early mechanic in 1891.

But, more often than not, it's difficult to track down dates for an individual's birth and death much less the details of the many events throughout their life.

So far, I have 287 family members in my tree. Every one of those people lived a life, a life with many experiences; some sad, some happy, some joyful, some tragic. How did they spend their time? What got them excited about life? What were their passions?

For the most part, I don't know. Not much of what made their lives unique has survived. What has survived, for better or for worse, is their investment in people; their investment in their friends, their children, their grandchildren.

You and I won't last forever, but we do have a legacy that will. What kind of legacy will you leave behind?

Life really is short - and truth of the matter is that we won't know how short until it's over.

None of us know exactly how much time God is giving us on earth. James 4:14 describes it this way: "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away?". Psalm 103:15-16 paints an equally bleak picture: "As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.?"

Since life is so short, and we only have one shot at it, what are we going to do with that one life given to us by God? What will we leave behind?

The dictionary defines the word legacy this way: Something handed down from an ancestor or a predecessor or from the past.

That might sound at first like an inheritance, usually material possessions handed down. And that's true, that can be a legacy as well, but not a lasting one. These material legacies just don't last.

Take Cornelius ?Commodore? Vanderbilt, for example. Vanderbilt grew up in the early to mid-1800s. It's said that he began his business with \$100 loaned to him by his mother. By the time Vanderbilt died in 1877 he was worth \$100 million, equivalent to \$185 billion today. But, just six generations later the companies he founded are no longer in the family.

CNN anchor Anderson Cooper, a sixth generation descendant, said on a radio show, "My mom made it clear to me that there's no trust fund.?" The monetary legacy of one of the richest men to have ever lived didn't last long.

Solomon, the richest and wisest man (besides Jesus) in the Bible understood the futility of the material wealth he'd accumulated. He wrote in Ecclesiastes 1:3 "What benefit do people get from all the effort which they expend on earth??", then a few verses later, "No one remembers the former events, nor will anyone remember the events that are yet to happen; they will not be remembered by the future generations.?"

So what is a lasting legacy? It's something that lives beyond the short vapour of life as

James 4 puts it. A lasting legacy comes from an intentional life of investing in others.

As a father, one of the best things I can do is invest in the lives of my children. I want them to grow up to love the Lord, trust Him, follow Him.

Someday, I want their kids to do the same.

It'll only happen with intentional investment now. Deuteronomy 6 speaks to this intentional investment in the lives of our children "you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.?"

The particulars of my life may be lost over time, but the investment of time and love into my family and friends will live on. Invest your life in what matters most - leave a legacy that matters.