



Legacy

It has been a lingering farewell. My mom has been in declining health. She is struggling with multiple myeloma, a disease that steadily depletes the body's ability to produce red blood cells. It appears she will soon be with Jesus. Being separated by 1,700 miles is the hardest part of this position.

My siblings and I just gathered with her, reliving moments both in photo albums and the mind's eye. As I reluctantly drove away, fully aware that any time I am with her could be the last, I took to heart a challenge I heard from Covenant pastor Art Greco. Art spoke at his father's memorial service about his dad's enduring influence. Then, asking the congregation to think about the people who had been influential in their own lives, he offered this challenge: live a life worthy of those who have lived their lives for you.

Family members, pastors, friends, youth leaders, coaches, Sunday-school teachers, camp counselors, mentors—there are people who have poured wisdom and values into our lives, shaping us into the people we are today. What does it mean to live a life worthy of them? I know what it means for me about my mom. Trust God. Cherish family. Make every one feel equally special. Be generous. Face the challenge. Honor your pastor. Be on time. Sing off-key with gusto. I'm trying. I've got the singing off-key down, but as an introvert, I rarely do so with gusto.

Now let's turn it around. What would it mean for people to live a life worthy of you? It is really the question of legacy.

A legacy lives on because of the life we live. It is borne of this biblical principle: not everything God wants to accomplish through our lives will be accomplished within our lifespan.

Think of the nation of Israel. They are called to remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their stories of trust and fidelity continuously instructed the people. Think of the woman who extravagantly poured perfume on the feet of Jesus. We are told her example will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached.

One legacy of the Covenant is the many inspiring examples of those who are no longer with us but whose faithfulness means God is still at work through their visionary actions.

I was just with leaders from our camp association. There are some twenty-one camps affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church, a remarkable number given our size, and evidence of our commitment to camp ministry. We heard how some of the very first camps came into being. The pattern for each was virtually the same: a small group of people with remarkable foresight and vision rallied a cluster of churches, pooled meager resources to purchase property, and then spent countless hours clearing land, building rough cabins and just enough other space to worship God. Now the investment of those hearty saints, most unknown to us, lives on in the thousands of children, youth, and adults every year who have hallowed places all throughout the Covenant Church to meet with God.

Similarly, the purchase of a big house in 1886 to take care of the sick on one floor, the elderly on another, and the orphaned on a third set in motion what is today Covenant Ministries of Benevolence, now comprised of two hospitals, thirteen retirement communities, seven group homes for adult handicapped individuals, and services for at-risk women and children. Together these serve thousands of people annually, and provide millions of dollars of free care.

In 1891 at a meeting in Moses Hill, Nebraska, a bold decision was made to establish a Covenant school. It was originally housed in the basement of First Covenant Church Minneapolis, and later moved to Chicago. The decision today lives on as North Park University and Theological Seminary, over the years raising up tens of thousands lay and clergy leaders for lives of significance and service all over the world.

Ask around your own congregation for stories of its founding. You will certainly be inspired by examples of those whose investment means people continue to experience the hope of Christ.

This Easter season, as we remember the one whose resurrection points us to things of eternal importance, what is your legacy going to be? When we live for ourselves, our influence ends when we do. When we invest in those things that outlive us, God works beyond our lifespan. The Covenant Church has a legacy of individual faithfulness. May it now be true of us. ■

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