
Christian Leaders Who Leave a Legacy

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Even if you are just starting out ... read on

Introduction

As a Christian leader, you are called to leave a legacy in the lives of others.

How will people summarise your work and life? How will they measure the impact of your leadership? How do you want to be remembered? How would you write your own eulogy?

Most of us are so caught up in the “now” that we rarely think about the kind of legacy we will leave behind, whether we move from one job to another (or to retirement), our children move out of home, or our lives come to an end. Far too many leaders assume legacy is something they need to think about later in life. Others do not leave a legacy at all (those who follow are left to pick up the pieces), or their work and vision quickly dissipate and they are quickly forgotten.

Good legacy building starts now.

Life “*goes on*” and all leaders ultimately disappear from the scene (see Psalm 146:3, 4). New generations come and old ones go. Great visions and passion (sometimes entire movements) lose their appeal and disappear as a result of inter-generational change.

After a couple of generations few people will know we even existed. Consider the fading names on gravestones at the local cemetery. See how much (if anything) you know about those lie there - and whether or not you care. The fact is, most of what we do will not last; things we cherish will ultimately “perish with the using” (Colossians 2:22). Unless we think seriously about the kind of legacy we are developing it is likely we will leave nothing worth inheriting.

It is time to think about what sort of impact you want to make?

Thinking about your legacy will make you a better leader straight away. It will exert a positive impact on the way you plan and lead and how you communicate and the values you hold.

Finally, Christian leadership is not “about you”. It is about glorifying Jesus Christ. Your legacy is not about celebrating your life or achievements, but maximizing the influence you can have in the lives of others so that you know your work for God is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Make your life count. Do it now.

A good legacy is an essential element of Christian discipleship.

What do we Mean by Legacy?

- a legal term: “something handed down from one person to another, eg in a will”
- something powerful that people will remember & treasure (cf God’s legacy: Psalm 143:5; 145:4-7)
- “legacies” are what we leave behind, to family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, communities; these include material possessions, our history, belief systems and values (if adopted), business practices, prejudices, name, reputation and teaching (if useful)
- “legacy” is also exemplified by what others are like as a result of being led by us
- “legacy” is not about titles or positions (these do not “make” the leader), but credibility, influence, positive role modelling, passion and integrity
- legacy is about others “buying into” our beliefs and values and following them when we are not around, because what we leave behind has true worth
- parents can leave legacies of life skills and faith examples to their children (Proverbs 1:8, 9):
 - “God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did.” (2 Timothy 1:3)
 - “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14, 15)
- Christian leaders can also leave positive legacies in the lives of others:
 - “To Timothy my true son in the faith.” (1 Timothy 1:2 = his leadership “DNA”.)
 - “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2)
- if you think about your legacy it will put what you plan and do now in a better perspective

Pass on the best of yourself to those you lead. Set an example.

Jesus' Legacy for His Disciples

- “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.” (John 17:6-8)
- Jesus' legacy was made up of His:
 - holy life (1 Peter 1:22)
 - teaching (Matthew 11:28-30)
 - love and compassion for all people (Matthew 15:32)
 - humility (Philippians 2:5-11)
 - selfless generosity (1 John 3:16)
 - forgiveness (1 Peter 1:23)
 - service (John 13:15)
 - personal relationship with God the Father (John 5:17-21)
 - obedience and dedication to God (Luke 2:52)
 - vision of world evangelism (Mark 1:16, 17)
 - sacrifice (1 Peter 1:24)
- Jesus understood God's purpose and timetable in His life. As the time of His departure drew near, He redoubled His efforts to ensure the disciples understood His mission (Matthew 16:13-21); the coming of the Holy Spirit after His ascension gave them the power to carry it out.
 - “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)
- “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19)

Jesus left you “an example, that you should follow in his steps”. (1 Peter 2:21)

Some OT Leaders Who Left Legacies

- Abel – a man of faith who pleased God in his daily life; a role model (Hebrews 11:4)
- Abraham – called the “father of faith” (in spite of his human failings); he always trusted God, regardless of external circumstances; a powerful example to Christian believers (Romans 4:16)
- Moses and Aaron – “You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (Psalm 77:20)
- David – “He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them.” (Psalm 78:70-72)
- Elijah – a powerful example to Elisha, who became his disciple and desired to share in his ministry (2 Kings 2); an example of faith in action, in the face of opposition at every level (James 5:16, 17)
- Josiah – he led the nation to repentance, but his legacy was short-lived (2 Kings 22)
- Nehemiah – he re-built Jerusalem; his example has served generations of Christian leaders - “Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.” (Nehemiah 5:19)
- Esther – she risked everything and saved her nation; a feast day commemorating her story (Feast of Purim) continues today

We can leave good legacies or poor ones. Biblical autobiographies are full of both.

Some NT Leaders Who Left Legacies

- an unnamed woman who anointed Jesus with perfume (Matthew 26:13)
- Epaphras – “You learned the good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ’s faithful servant, and is helping us on your behalf” (Colossians 1:7)
- Euodia and Synthyche – “I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:3)
- Timothy – “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” (Philippians 2:19-22)
- Timothy’s mother & grandmother – “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” (2 Timothy 1:5)
- Epaphroditus – “my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.” (Philippians 2:25)
- Paul – “We proclaim (Christ), admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. “ (Colossians 1:28, 29) ;
 - “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (2 Timothy 1:13, 14)
 - “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.” (2 Timothy 3:10)

“They will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.” (Revelation 14:13)

Factors that Kill Effective Legacies

- not knowing when to let go, hand over roles and allow others to rise
- lack of direction – if you don't know where you are going, how will you know when you arrive? and why should anyone follow you there?
- lack of real spiritual authority (Jeremiah 23:21, 22)
- self-centredness, self-interest, selfishness - “From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.” (Jeremiah 6:13)
 - no one wants to follow or be like such a leader
- lack of integrity, lack of moral courage, dishonesty and lack of ethics in leaders –
 - “I thought, 'These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God. So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God.' But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.” (Jeremiah 5:4, 5)
 - “The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?” (Jeremiah 5:31)
- defining legacy on the basis of the burdens and lessons of past experience, trials and failure/recovery alone, instead of thinking about it in advance
- allowing secular definitions of “achievement” to limit effectiveness/creativity and define success
- corporate legacies that negate personal ones (authentic legacies are left by individuals)
- leadership that seeks more followers, instead of building more leaders
- pessimism, negativity, indifference to the needs of others, favouritism, politics, lack of fairness/justice, one-upmanship, patronising attitudes that make people feel inferior
- demanding perfection in stead of striving for excellence
- leaders who are not loyal to their followers

Be honest about your flaws; this allows God's grace and strength to shine through.

Factors that Kill Effective Legacies, ctd

- trying to imitate other leaders, ie not being yourself
- your ideas may simply be dismissed (people find it hard to step outside their world views)
- perceptions that your leadership and ideas are not practical, are out of date, or are not relevant any longer
- authoritarianism, failure to serve, unwillingness to listen
- personal inconsistency, eg poor family values (cf 1 Timothy 3:5); how you treat people
- loss of personal integrity, eg moral failure, financial failure through ineptitude, not being “there” when it really counts, not understanding/reflecting what is important to others (people remember negative things; isolated incidents often outweigh the good)
- jealousy about the success of followers (some leaders are gratified when things deteriorate after they leave, as though they were indispensable)
- vision without discipline
- leadership styles that are process-rich and outcomes-poor
- relationships that are feedback-poor and consequently leave few durable deposits in others’ lives
- not allowing those who follow us to be themselves; seeing them only as versions of us
- unquestioningly adopting secular models without regard for spiritual truth
 - “... follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit” (Jude 19)
 - “We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command.” (2 Thessalonians 3:4)

A positive legacy must be developed; it doesn't just happen.

Is Your “Mission” Worth Inheriting?

- what is your life goal/calling?
 - can those you lead explain it in their own words? (If not, it is doubtful they have grasped it)
- have you hit the “target”? is your baton worth passing on to those who will run after you have come to a standstill? what influence do you really have?
 - “My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.” (Colossians 2:2, 3)
- our job as ministers of Christ is to leave a legacy of Christian leadership that emulates Him and ultimately points men and women to Him alone.
- life is short compared with eternity. - “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” (James 4:14)
- everything you stockpile in this life is left behind when you die. ““Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart” (Job 1:21)
- credible legacy is not about being “reasonable”, risk-averse, or safe, but being courageous, changing people and circumstances
- do those you lead genuinely believe in your vision and want to learn from you? will they follow you through thick and thin?
 - “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” (Hebrews 13:7)
- have you taught people to hear God for themselves, rather than relying on you?

“Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1).

Developing NextGen Leaders

- start thinking about your legacy now
 - who is in your sphere of influence?
 - who is affected by your decisions, lifestyle?
 - how will you earn the right to influence them in the long term?
 - how will you impart your legacy and know it has “stuck”?
- actively plan and train and retain leaders
- decide how you can empower people NOW? at home, work, church, in the community?
- encourage (inspire) those you lead to stretch, grow, get out of their comfort zones
- create ways for those you lead to develop their strengths and succeed at what they do
 - give them space to do so, under your prayerful guidance
- nurture innovation, strategic thinking, imagination and creativity
- teach them how to become achievers – and help position them to do so
- leave behind you those with the conviction and will to carry on your work
- teach people how to serve before they lead
- teach them (from your personal experiences) how to:
 - hear from God and walk in obedience to Him
 - model the Christian life
 - deal with setbacks and learn from mistakes
 - manage time and money
 - control their emotions/passions
 - manage praise and criticism
 - work with people and have productive relationships

Every day, in every experience & relationship, we plant seeds even if we don't realize it

Starting Out – Where You Are

- think and pray about what sort of legacy you want to leave in others, then work backwards
- consider your input in the lives of others as an “investment” in their future; pour yourself into them
- focus on your personal development and your team as much as you focus on “activity”
- establish what role you are playing
- don’t spread yourself so thin you make no difference anywhere
- work out what is temporary and what is permanent, and focus on the latter
- establish your goals and let them shape your planning
- be teachable (invite and accept input from all levels)
- be passionate about what really counts, what can “make a difference”
- be prepared to discover you may have priorities and styles that are not attractive to those around you and may ultimately be rejected or abandoned by them
- examine your inter-personal skills, emotional intelligence and ability to share your vision clearly and meaningfully
- seek to be a model of godly leadership
- acknowledge things may have happened that you cannot go back and undo
- be on the constant lookout for opportunities to teach/mentor others, in a systematic way
- look for opportunities to grow synergistically with your team
- develop a passion for learning
- be contagious (“Your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action”, 2 Corinthians 9:2)

We reflect our leaders. “The apple usually doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

More Information

For further information and contact details
check out:

www.Relevant-Christianity.com