

## The Legacy We're Building

We probably don't often think about the legacy we're building. But if legacy is about learning from the past, living in the present, and building for the future, then what we leave behind, whether God moves us to another location or removes us from this earth, should matter. Who we are and what we do will have eternal impact, whether positive or negative, whether we intend it to or not.

One of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-11) features a highly relational responsibility that will yield a highly relational blessing and legacy. Matthew 5:9 says, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons [and daughters] of God.*" When our total well-being (shalom—peace) comes from our dependence on God alone, we have the capacity to reflect His character in all of life's relational issues, which not only builds a positive legacy, but results in our ultimate reward: being called His sons and daughters.

There are three powerful relational dynamics of peacemaking: making peace with God, making peace with ourselves, and making peace with others. Each relational dynamic creates an amazing foundation for the next. All will contribute every day toward the legacy we leave.

### *Making Peace with God—F.E.A.R. Him*

**F—ear God.** This "fear" doesn't mean to be afraid of God, but to be in "reverent awe" of and grateful to the One who's had you in mind since before time began; the One who knows you so well that He numbers every hair on your head at any given moment in time (Matthew 10:30); the One who is always *for* you and will neither leave you nor forsake you (Romans 8:31, Hebrews 13:5); the One who loves you so lavishly and perfectly that nothing you do could make Him love you more, and nothing you will do could make Him love you less (1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:18)? Love like this inspires us to honor Him and to walk in His ways. And when we fear God in this way, there are amazing peacemaking blessings no matter what our circumstances:

Security – the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him (Psalm 33:18)

Protection – His angel encamps around those who fear Him (Psalm 34:7)

Mercy – His lovingkindness is everlasting for those who fear Him (Psalm 103:17)

Discernment – Divine wisdom is given to those who fear Him (Psalm 111:10)

Provision – Less is more for those who fear Him (Proverbs 15:16)

Peace – Life and sound sleep come to those who fear Him (Proverbs 19:23)

What a legacy we leave when we choose to fear God with reverent awe and gratitude!

**E—valuate Eternity.** Do you know where you'll go when you breathe your last? It's a sobering question if taken seriously. I took it seriously at age 33. I knew a Great Exchange had taken place when I received Jesus' forgiveness for my sin. I knew that I had a new beginning that would never end. The writer of the book of Hebrews urges in chapter 3, verses 7-8: "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...*" Can you hear His voice in your soul right now saying, "Today is the day. You are Mine!" If you haven't already, will you yield to His voice and give Him your heart?

Receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior is the only way to make peace with God, and leaves the ultimate legacy!

**A—acquaint yourselves with God.** Do you *know* God? Have you done an inventory of His attributes (which would take an eternity!)? A.W. Tozer said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He *is*; what He is *like*; and what we as moral beings must *do* about Him.” John 17:3 (AMP) says, “<sup>3</sup> *Now this is eternal life: that they know [to perceive, recognize, become acquainted with, and understand] You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.*”

What are some ways to know God and Jesus more deeply? First, desire to know them! Jesus said, “*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). Read God’s ultimate love letter, The Bible, alongside a daily devotional. (I love the *Our Daily Bread* app). We can also read the Bible to our children. (The Jesus Storybook Bible is superb!) We can attend a Bible study with others who know Him. We can find a church that proclaims Him unabashedly. And when we live out what we learn, He reveals Himself to us all the more—we *experience* Him (John 14:21, 23)! That’s the stuff of intimate knowledge.

To end with Tozer: “The Christian is strong or weak depending upon how closely he has cultivated the knowledge of God.” Carefully and deliberately cultivate your knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. He is where our peace is. In Him is where our legacy rests.

**R—epent.** This is a vanishing word in Christendom, and yet repentance is the *only road to making and keeping peace* with God. Repentance doesn’t just happen when we receive Christ as Savior. If He is Lord of our lives, we will need to repent on a regular basis, since it’s so...*human*...to blow it on a regular basis. And yet, 1 John 1:9 assures us that “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” No sin is so heinous that Christ will not forgive us. Jesus stands as our High Priest who “*understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most*” (Hebrews 4:15-16). Ah-h-h-h, peace!

When we “F.-E.-A.-R.” God, we will always be in a state of peace with Him. That’s a legacy worth leaving behind.

### ***Making Peace with Ourselves—B.E.L.I.E.V.E. GOD***

**B—elieve God.** In the original Greek, to “believe” is *pisteuo*, which means “to trust in, to cleave to, to rely upon, to depend upon.” The word and its meaning is used 99 times in the book of John alone. Why is what we believe so important? Because we are what we believe. And as it relates to the Word of God—the Bible—we can’t pick and choose what we believe. Either all of it’s true or none of it’s true.

Have you ever considered that unbelief is at the core of every crisis in faith? Here are some common crises of belief:

**God's promises are for everyone else but me. Truth:** 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, *"For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ Jesus]!"* George Muller once put it, "Many times when I could have gone insane from worry, I was at peace because my soul believed the truth of God's promises." (from D. Jeremiah's *Turning Points with God*, September 3.) Are you at a place where you can choose between going insane from worry and believing God's promises for you? What and who will you choose to believe?

**God can never forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_.** **Truth:** 1 John 1:9 counters, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* Psalm 103:12 agrees, *"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west."* Hebrews 10:17 affirms: *"I will remember them no more."* What and who will you choose to believe?

**I can't forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_:** **Truth:** There is no Scripture that says we must forgive ourselves of any sin. Scripture says we *must repent of sin and God does the forgiving.* Isn't that freeing? And if we know that God has forgiven our offense and yet we won't forgive ourselves, then we're saying that what our Savior did on the Cross was not payment enough for what we've confessed. Receiving God's forgiveness is saying, "I agree that I'm forgiven." When Jesus said on the cross, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30), that's exactly what He meant. Therefore, when we do business with God over a sin—no matter how big or horrendous—it is finished, over, never to be used by Him against us. Any counter in your head to this Truth is from the Accuser. What and who will you choose to believe?

**I can't do this; this is too hard! Truth:** If you're going it alone, you're right! It will be too hard. But...Jesus said you can *"do all things through Christ who gives you strength"* (Philippians 4:13), that *"apart from me you can do nothing!"* (John 15:5). If you're facing every hard thing with Him, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). I offer this simple mantra which works every time I feel overwhelmed: *"Lord, You know/knew. How would you have me respond?"* He is eager to be drawn into your circumstance and just as eager to guide your response to it. What and who will you choose to believe?

**I am all alone in this! Truth:** You're not alone! Just as with Joshua, God assures us: *"I will not fail you or abandon you...This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:5, 9). Jesus Himself promised, *"I will never leave you or forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5). What and who will you choose to believe?

**E—xperience His Holy Spirit!** How? Know that the moment we received Christ, He gave us His Gift—the promised Holy Spirit who resides in our hearts. He is our Helper, Counselor, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengtheners, Comforter (John 14:26). He is our

Reformer and Transformer. We can't live life (in Christ!) without Him! We must acknowledge His presence in us every day and anticipate His working in us, through us, and in our circumstances. Why is this important? Because forgetting, misunderstanding, or ignoring the Holy Spirit in our lives is like having all the conveniences in our homes—heat, telephone, water, electricity—and not using them, then wondering why we're cold, lonely, thirsty, dirty, and sitting in the dark." We can't benefit from Holy Spirit power if we won't draw from Him, especially when He exists in our lives for that very purpose! Ephesians 3:20 tells us that "*God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine through His power that is a work in us!*" What and who will you choose to believe?

**L—ive like you believe!** 2 Timothy 2:11 tells us quite clearly, "*If we have died with [Christ] we will also live with [Christ].*" But what does that look like? This is Holy-Spirit stuff again! Since I am no longer my own, but purchased by the blood of Christ, then "*In Him we live, and move, and have our being*" (Acts 17:29). John 5:5 explains: *I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives [abides, dwells, remains] in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit.*" Well what will that fruit look like? It looks like "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22-23). It's not about having more love or joy or peace. Or getting more patience or kindness or goodness. It's about giving it away. This fruit is produced in us by the Holy Spirit for the sake of others. And the more we give away, the more is produced. What and who will you choose to believe?

**I—ncrease by decreasing.** Wanting more for ourselves, even as Christians, is human nature. But more isn't better; it's just more. In God's economy the opposite is required of believers, because we're supposed to have a new nature—the nature of Christ! In Matthew 20:26-27 when James and John, two of Jesus' disciples wanted positions of honor in His kingdom, Jesus responded with: "*Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave*". His point is clear: The increase is in the decrease. When it truly sinks in that Christ paid with His blood the sin-debt that we owed, we are compelled to relinquish our right to ourselves; to stop vying for more—more attention, more leadership, more "my way", more power, more authority, more stuff. And when we decrease, we will be at peace with God. And when we are at peace with God, we will be at peace with ourselves. What and who will you choose to believe?

**E—mbrace Everything that comes your way!** The apostle Paul built and left a legacy that is still powerful and purposeful today. It's as if he said to himself and to those with him: Lord, You knew our hardships were coming; and You were faithful in showing us how to respond. Listen to him in 2 Corinthians 6:1-10: "*In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. We prove ourselves [how?] by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love. We faithfully preach the truth. God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack*

*and the left hand for defense. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. We are ignored, even though we are well known. **We live close to death, but we are still alive.** We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. **Our hearts ache, but we always have joy.** We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. **We own nothing, and yet we have everything.**”When we embrace everything that comes our way as God’s sovereign opportunities, we will be at peace with God. What and who will you choose to believe?*

**V-value victory (rather than victimhood) when crisis comes.** Oswald Chambers said that “crises will always reveal true character” and we want our crises to reveal the character of Christ. We should desire to glorify God even in our most painful places. How is this possible? Our most challenging belief when we face agonizing trials and disappointments is that God is in control—that He has either ordained or permitted circumstances for our good and growth—or for that of another—but always for His glory!

When we believe that God is sovereign in our lives—that nothing happens to us that doesn’t pass before him first—we will live in the secure state of victory. It’s the place of the overcomer—the one who perceives hardship as an “opportunity” from the Lord. This attitude fuels perseverance.

However, the opposite is true: if we *won’t* believe that God is sovereign in our lives, then we will live in the insecure state of defeat. And that is a place of the victim—the one who perceives hardship as an undeserved punishment. This attitude fuels petulance, blame, self-pity—victimhood!

Take some time to read about the following victors who faced incredible odds:

Joseph: Genesis 37-50:20

Moses: Exodus 3-15

Joshua: Joshua 1

David: 1 Samuel 16 (Goliath Ch. 17)-2 Samuel 7

Jehoshaphat: 2 Chronicles 20

And then there’s Jesus in John 11. His dear friend, Lazarus was dead. The circumstances surrounding this event were painful. Mary and Martha were heartbroken: “Lord, If only you had been here my brother would not have died”, to which Jesus responded, “*Didn’t I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?* Just as Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Jehoshaphat saw God’s victory in their circumstances, so Martha, Mary, and Lazarus saw Jesus’ victory in their circumstances. Therefore, our legacy in Christ must be about His victory through us—His victory in our battles, temptations, trials, and tragedies, even though His plan and purpose may be inconceivable to us at the time. In our painful places, Jesus will pose the same question to us that He posed to Martha in verse 26: “*Do you believe this, \_\_\_\_\_?*” The events surrounding Lazarus were under Jesus’ control the entire time—since before time began! And so are ours, so that we, too, will see the glory of God *if we believe.*

So...how do we know if we're living as victims or victors while in a painful place? Victims remain *focused inward* and on the problem, consumed with Why's? and When's and "If only's"? These questions are legitimate, but victims camp out there. Victims fight believing God's sovereignty and blame God instead. Victim also take from others (time, resources, ears to hear her daily saga, complaints or grouching), believing that the more they receive from others, the better they'll feel about themselves and the more inner peace they'll have. But just the opposite is true. Victims sabotage their peace with God and therefore, peace with themselves.

Victors stay *focused upward* on the Problem Solver. Instead of why, when, and if only, they are consumed with "What would You have me do, LORD?" and "How would You have me do it?" They are focused on **waiting on God**, believing He is sovereign in their circumstances. They are also pouring out for God, knowing that the more they pour out, the more they will be filled. And they are at peace both with God and with themselves.

In our trials, testings, sufferings, we, too, will see the glory of God if we believe that we have the capacity to submit to His sovereign will in any and all circumstances. Second Peter 1:3 promises, "*By His divine power I have everything I need for life and godliness through my knowledge of Him who called me by His own glory and goodness*"; if we believe that God always has your best interest in mind; if we believe that He is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine through His power that is at work *in us* (Ephesians 3:20); if we believe that He will be glorified by our response to our trials. Believing is the foundation for peace within, and it is a victor's powerful legacy.

**E— xpress hope in God.** Hope in God springs from believing God. God placed the prophet Ezekiel in the midst of a valley of dry bones and asked him, "*Son of man, can these bones live?*" And [Ezekiel] *answered, "O Lord GOD, You know"* (Ezekiel 37:3). Ezekiel deferred to the sovereignty of God because he really didn't know the answer, but he did know His God! When in the midst of our own seemingly hopeless valley of dry bones, do we hear the question, "Daughter of Mine, can these bones live?" Would we answer, "Oh, Lord God, You know"? And when we know *He* knows, then the entire outcome changes! Peace!

Listen to the rest of the story: "<sup>4</sup> *Again [God] said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"*

What will we prophesy over the dry bones of our circumstance? Will it be their coming alive so that we and others will know that God is God—watching Him slowly and deliberately put sinews on a dead relationship? Or make flesh grow back on a reputation destroyed? Or cover with skin the stolen joy wrought by anxiety or

depression? Will we watch in awe as He puts breath in all of them so that they may come alive?

Ecclesiastes 9:4 says, “*Anyone who is among the living has hope.*” Our hope in God is only as great as our belief in who He is and what He is capable of. Hope is confident expectation in the only One who can breathe new life into a valley of dry bones. It is anticipating that from the resurrection of our dry bones, we will know that He is the LORD. There is always hope.

***When we B.E.L.I.E.V.E. God, we will be at peace with God, and when we’re at peace with God, we will be at peace with ourselves.***

What a legacy!

### ***Making Peace with Others: L.I. V.E. CHRIST!***

Relationships—whether with believers or unbelievers—would be a piece of cake if it weren’t for all the people. So let’s see what it means to make peace with others when we ***L.I.V.E. Christ*** to that end:

**L—ove as Jesus loves us!** Only then can we make peace with others. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*”, two of which are the most important: “...you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength (Mark 12:30); and His new commandment, “as I have loved you, you also are to love [agape] one another” (John 13:34). This love refers to “goodwill toward others, the love of our neighbor, brotherly affection, which the Lord Jesus commands and inspires.” It is *agape*—a decision of the will not of the emotions.

We have the *capacity* to love others the way we are loved by Jesus. 1 John 4:19 says, “*We love because he first loved us.*” Romans 5:5: “*The Holy Spirit has shed His love abroad in our hearts.*” Galatians 5:22 reveals that the first component of Holy-Spirit fruit is *agape*, and it is in us!

So how does Jesus love us? Unconditionally, sacrificially, with purposeful intention and with pure motives. He pursues us toward repentance (forgiveness), reconciliation, and restoration. And where necessary, He applies “tough love”. All with the purpose of making peace with Himself and the Father.

And loving a difficult other requires no less from us, because Jesus knows that when we love a difficult other the way He loves us, we’ll want God’s best outcome for that person and not just for ourselves, and we’ll want God glorified in our encounters and not in ourselves—even when the encounter hurts us, fatigues us, costs us—just like Jesus.

When we love others like Jesus loves us, we are making peace with them—even if they don’t know it.

**I-lluminate Christ!** The Old Testament reports that the very first thing God did in the beginning was separate the light from the darkness. Another beginning was written about

in the New Testament. John 1:1, 4-5 reports, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”* Luke 1:78-79 (NLT): *“Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven [the Messiah] is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.”* If we belong to Christ, we are now the “light of the world”, whose job is to *“let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in Heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). And some of those “others” may be a problem in our lives.

Oswald Chambers writes, “Beware of living according to your natural affections in your spiritual life. Everyone has natural affections— some people we like and others we don’t like. Yet we must never let those likes and dislikes rule our Christian life. *‘If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another’* (1 John 1:7), even those toward whom we have no affection.”

When there is someone with whom we must make peace, **pride** is usually at center stage, and it’s not always just the other person’s pride. **James 4:6:** *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* “Opposes” means “to form an army in array against.” Be assured, God isn’t out to wound your pride; He’s out to kill it! Therefore, we must illuminate carefully, in truth, with humility, with the right motives, with authenticity, with love. And if we’ve played a role in any division—we illuminate with repentance, so that those who watch us (and we will be watched!) will witness *“our good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven.”*

We may not always achieve peace with others, but we’re called to illumine Christ credibly for others, whether they perceive it or not, whether they receive it or not. Will our shining light always please others? Not always, but it will please Jesus.

**V-alue—forgiveness! Matthew 6:12-14 (AMP)** is straightforward about what kind of sins God requires us to forgive: *“...if you forgive people their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses.”* Reckless sins are unintentional sins. Willful sins are intentional, deliberate, purposeful sins. And yet, Jesus issued the command to forgive. Why? Because He knows how forgiveness will benefit the one called to forgive.

Let me explain. The Greeks have a great analogy to unforgiveness: the one who won’t forgive ropes the one unforgiven to his back. So who carries the burden? Who is really held captive? The one who refuses to forgive! The offender may not live in the same town—or may even be dead! But he is still roped to the back of the one who won’t forgive. Is it any wonder that Jesus commands forgiveness?

We can choose unforgiveness based on a gamut of negative emotions that we permit to trump the command of God. Or, out of obedience to Christ, we can decide or *choose* to forgive. And because of Christ, we don't have to wait for the right feelings to carry out this command. He didn't. We must trust God to work with us in our pain so that we *will* forgive, since unforgiveness is its own prison of anger, resentment, bitterness, that lead to depression and despair. When we choose to forgive, we consciously and continually refuse to re-rope that person to our backs. Over time, God's peace will follow.

Corrie ten Boom said, "Those who were able to forgive their enemies were able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids [victims!]. It was as simple and as horrible as that" (brackets mine).

Another reason to forgive as commanded is because to practice (to live in) unforgiveness is sin. Jesus knows that forgiveness maintains and preserves our fellowship with the Father.

Forgiveness frees us and releases our offender to God. Only He has the prerogative to even whatever score must be settled—and He won't let any unsettled offense get by Him.

Is there someone whom you haven't yet "truly forgiven"? Someone still tethered to you, keeping you down and burdened?

**E-VERYONE!** To clarify, **Romans 13:18** says, "*If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*" Note the two qualifiers: The first is "*If possible*". And the other is "*as far as it depends on you...*" Nothing lets us off God's hook when He calls us to make peace with another. And yet, that other may reject our efforts. But, "as far as it depends on you" implies that we make every effort, so that we are blameless. The rest is up to God

FEARing God, BELIEVing God, and LIVing Christ not only build our legacy, they become our legacy!