

# YOUR HERITAGE

BEING INTENTIONAL ABOUT THE LEGACY YOU LEAVE

J. OTIS LEDBETTER  
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## **DEDICATION**

*To Gail Ledbetter,  
who has passed on a wonderful heritage  
and models what it means to give  
an inheritance of love  
And to Olivia Bruner,  
who inspires the hope of new beginnings  
by giving even though she did not receive*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If anyone could write a book alone, God could. But He used over forty men to pen His timeless masterpiece. Even today, He depends upon others to complete His eternal Book of Life. Obviously, the creation of this book required the assistance and encouragement of many others. We'd like to express our appreciation to several of them.

To those whose silhouettes are chronicled in the book—we say thanks for allowing us to share your stories.

To Al Janssen, who pointed us in the right direction by helping us focus our creativity, and Jim Vincent, our editor, who helped to fine tune our work.

I (Otis) am grateful to my good friend and secretary, Sherry Krigbaum. How could I ever complete even a day's work without your picking up the slack and organizing my schedule? Thanks for endless hours typing and editing the manuscript.

I also wish to thank Les and Sheryl Engstrom, my Aquila and Priscilla in the ministry. Thanks also to Kathy Laughlin for her straightforward editing.

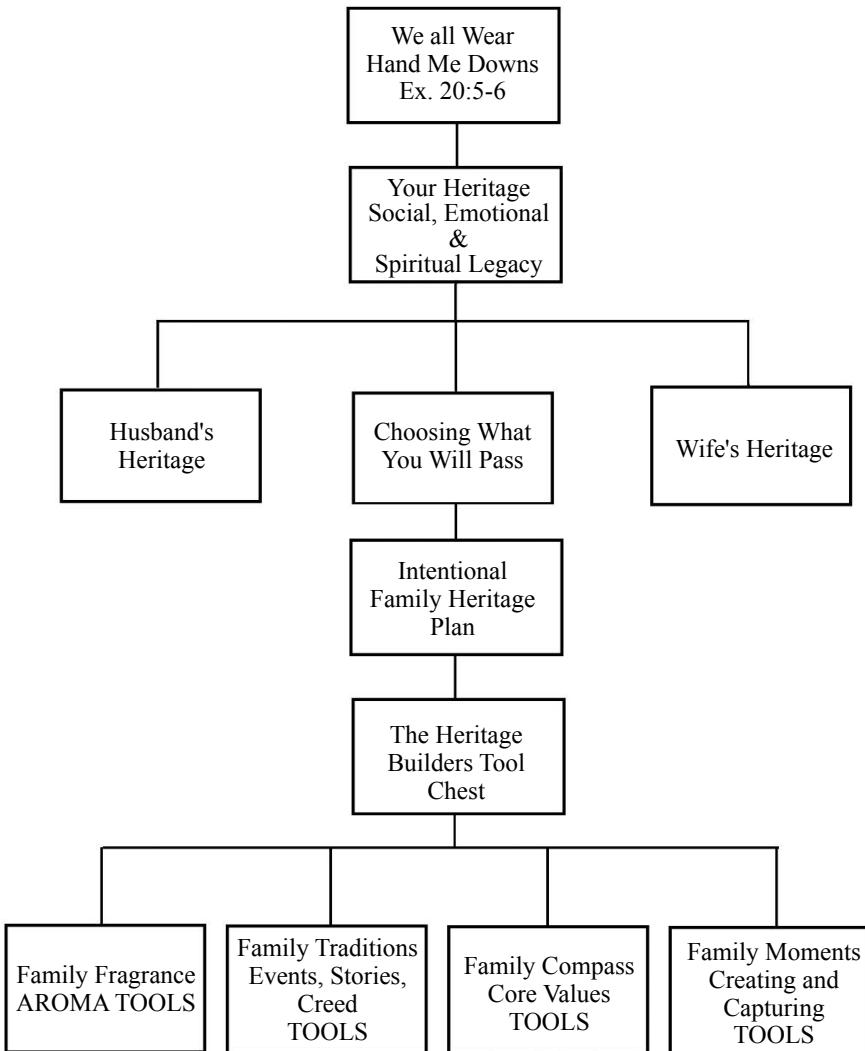
Lloyd and Mimi Ledbetter set the compass and are responsible for giving me the strong heritage that has guided me to set my life's sail properly; and Louis (Jack) and Margaret Hover have taught Gail what a heritage can and should be. I am grateful for the support and example of those two sets of parents.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## The Heritage Builders Concept



Psalm 78:1-8

## PREFACE

**A**s coauthors of this book, our relationship is much more than professional. Kurt and I (Otis) have been like family for the past thirteen years. But beyond a deep friendship, we share a passionate belief in the value of being intentional about the legacy we leave to future generations. That's the main reason we have written *Your Heritage*.

The insights and advice we will offer come from two distinct perspectives. Kurt has young children and is still in the process of building a heritage for his family. He shares as a fellow learner, drawing more from his professional experience than personal experience. Otis, on the other hand, has spent the past three decades in pastoral ministry within the local church, teaching and counseling families through the heritage-passing process. He has successfully raised two grown children, both of whom have married and started the heritage process in their own homes. Otis and Gail have one teenage daughter still in the nest.

Kurt has been helping families the past twenty years through his ministry with Focus on the Family, including eight years overseeing the Correspondence and Research department. In 2007 he accepted the call to become pastor of spiritual formation at Lake Pointe Church near Dallas where he pioneered the HomePointe strategy for creating a culture of intentional families. He continues to work closely with Lake Pointe Church serving the hundreds of churches that have customized our model. He also oversees communications for Open Doors International, a ministry serving persecuted Christians worldwide.

Meanwhile Otis and his wife, Gail, continue to lead seminars nationally on how to pass along a lasting heritage.

## YOUR HERITAGE

*Your Heritage* describes how you can pass along a loving heritage that cares for the spiritual, emotional, and social needs of your children. The first-person voice used throughout belongs to Otis, who offers many of the personal anecdotes from his ministry as a pastor and counselor. Both Kurt and I will invite you into our lives as we tell stories about our wives and children, and about the good and poor choices we made as we have tried to create a godly heritage for our families.

Join us as we share our passion for Your Heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

### WE ALL WEAR HAND-ME-DOWNS

**C**onnections. Whether it's an elderly gentleman listening to the opinionated talk radio host or a stamp collector on the Internet asking about a rare stamp, we try to stay connected with the people in our lives. Connections are why a minister announces an engagement of a young couple one Sunday evening, and why the congregation breaks into applause. Connections are one way we keep this big world smaller, simpler, and more intimate. And when it comes to our own families, connections are even more vital. In fact, when we are born, each of us enters this world with strong connections to preceding generations. You cannot escape the ties of biology and identity that tie you to your parents and their parents, going back for generations.

Your connections to preceding generations can bring the good or the bad. In turn, your connections to your children have direct impact upon future generations for good or bad. This book is about choosing the good over the bad. The impact of our ancestral links often reaches across three, four, or even five generations. Those connections may dictate many of the patterns and expectations we carry through life. Part of this process grows out of genetic inheritance. Good health or bad, physical beauty or not, chemical imbalance or stability all flow out of the biological link each of us has to those who have gone before. Our genetic makeup, handed down through a long line of ancestors, dictates part of who we are.

But our ancestral connection goes beyond physiological

characteristics to link up with a spiritual dimension. This spiritual dynamic can have far-reaching implications for one generation after another. God Himself highlighted this principle when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments; He told the nation Israel, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Deuteronomy 5:9-10).

God made clear that He allows the consequences of ancestral sin to impact several generations. On the flip side, He also allows the descendants of those who love and obey Him to reap the positive results of Grandpa’s and Grandma’s good deeds and obedience to God.

This pattern can be observed all around us. For instance, a very high percentage of abused children end up beating their own kids. Those raised by a drunk often become adult alcoholics themselves. Criminals tend to raise criminals. Dysfunction breeds dysfunction. Moral weakness fosters moral weakness. Of course, there is also a positive side. Responsible, loving parents tend to instill the same in their offspring, and they in theirs, and so on. The good is passed from generation to generation just like the bad. If we are smart, we’ll find a way to make this principle work for us rather than against us.

\* \* \* \*

My wife, Gail, is on the platform speaking to a group of women. She points to the mannequin next to her, covered in a gorgeous antique wedding gown, its exquisite ecru lace shining in the light. With its ruffles of lace over the bodice, tiny, cinched in waist, long sleeves trimmed with more lace, and long ruffled overskirt, it has caught the audience’s attention, though they still hear Gail’s every word.

“Some beautiful bride wore this elegant gown on her wedding

## WE ALL WEAR HAND-ME-DOWNS

day in the early part of this century. What do you think of the train?" Gail asks, gesturing to the sheer fabric, edged with a double ruffle of lace and spread behind the gown. Gail displays this lovely Victorian gown as a symbol of the wonderful heritage that was handed down through her parents from past generations. Though this wedding gown is not her own, it reminds her of the pure and lovely heritage she desires to give to our children.

In the course of her message, she speaks of a young lady she calls, "a trophy of God's grace. I'll call her Mary," Gail says. "Mary was a street-wise drug user. Sometimes she lived on the streets. Her body had the marks of drug abuse—the dirty hair, darkened eyes, the sometimes quick movements. She had become a prostitute, selling her body and sexuality for money. But at age thirty, Mary was sick of her way of life, the occasional hunger pangs, the cold, and the dirt. Through the outreach of a local church, she came to know Jesus Christ. Her life took a 180-degree turn. Now, when Mary speaks about her turning to Christ, people are awed that she survived the drugs and admire her courage to escape a situation that had deeply entangled her."

Interestingly, Mary and Gail are both trophies of grace. Mary, of course, has seen God's grace as she recovered an innocence lost. Gail continues to see God's grace as she preserves what was carefully handed to her from past generations and sends it on to our children: a heritage of love and wisdom that will strengthen the Ledbetter name and honor the God we love. On the platform, Gail reaches for some rags that have been hidden from the audience. The shredded clothes are soiled and threadbare. She begins to contrast them with the beautiful wedding gown.

"What were you handed?" she asks. "Were you handed rags? If so, are you content to continue wearing them? Or were you handed a Victorian gown? If so, will you continue to wear it? Believe it or not, some of us reject the gown for rags. Others, like Mary, reject the rags and begin to sew an exquisite gown for our children and

children's children.

"You can choose what you will wear. You may not have any control over what you were given, but you can choose what you will wear today."

It just doesn't seem fair, does it? Some were given a wonderful, healthy, positive heritage—a beautiful gown. Others were handed rags. Many of those who were given a solid heritage will find the process of passing on that tradition as natural as breathing. Others who received a very weak heritage will have no idea how to overcome the past, let alone create a positive future for the next generation. The good news is that both can create and give a wonderful heritage. Yes, the process of doing so will be much harder for some than others; but it can be done. It must be done. How? By reclaiming what you lost, or by learning to give what you didn't get.

What are you wearing? How have the patterns of past generations influenced your life today? Did your heritage include more negative than positive? Or, as a woman, have you been handed a beautiful gown, only to wear rags of your own making? As a man, have you received a royal robe but choose instead to wear a tattered coat? Even if you have received rags, you can now replace them with a lovely gown of feminine grace or royal robe of masculine dignity.

As you move through the pages of this book, we will introduce several key principles and practices that can help you to give an inheritance of love. We will help you better understand your own heritage with three self-evaluations of your heritage (in chapters 3–5), which will give you a clear picture of your past. We will be looking at some "Leading Legacy Indicators," which will let you measure what strong and weak legacies for your children look like.

Most of the tips we will present are not new. But because they have been proven over time as effective methods for building a strong heritage in the home, they are well worth your time. The key to success is not deep understanding or a dramatic creativity. The key is the commitment to and the discipline of continuing the

## WE ALL WEAR HAND-ME-DOWNS

process. One of our objectives is to place the tools in your hands that will make doing so as easy and effective as possible.

We have three specific goals in *Your Heritage*: (1) to help you strengthen your roots by understanding and passing the good aspects of the heritage you were given; (2) to let you break the cycle of hurt by leaving the bad behind; and (3) to assist you in charting a new course as you build a positive heritage for yourself and those you love.

You can give, and in the process receive, an inheritance of love. Join us as we explore the possibilities!

YOUR HERITAGE



## Chapter 1

# AN INHERITANCE OF LOVE

The minister pauses, the lump in his throat stalling the words he attempts to speak. He has officiated scores of wedding ceremonies before with no trouble. But this one is different . . . very different. This time he is both the minister and the father of the bride, and is giving away his firstborn daughter, Rebecca. Overjoyed and overwhelmed at the same time, he swallows hard and pushes ahead, carefully following his prepared notes to avoid eye contact with his precious little girl.

“Justin,” he says to the groom, his chin set and a determined inflection in his words, “my wife and I have prayed for you for twenty years and four months . . . petitioning God to keep you pure. We didn’t know who you were, but that nameless prayer was fervent, as I’m sure was the case with your parents for the girl you would someday marry.”

A hush seems to overwhelm the sound of birds and traffic at the outdoor ceremony, and the witnesses listen closely to the minister’s words.

“For three generations it has been the wish of the parents and the grandparents on both sides for a heritage to be passed to you for safekeeping, so . . .” his voice lowers as he calmly speaks the words, “we are handing you a heritage. Now it is your responsibility. You can throw it away; many do. But our hope and prayer is that you will

carry it on and give your own children what we have worked so hard to pass on to you.” As he speaks of the heritage she is being handed, his daughter finds her mind racing through many strong memories of her childhood.

Becky recalls the time when, as an eight-year-old, she had taken money from her mom’s jewelry box and how her parents had confronted her with the theft. That one event remains a vivid reminder of the value of trust. Her parents used the jewelry box to teach her how priceless a commodity trust is to their family. And in a flash she remembers all the Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays and even some of the ordinary evening meals of every weekday—where Mom prepared a special time free of all distractions, and where Becky learned so many of the values she now claims as her own.

*Funny . . . she thinks, as she remembers how Dad cleared his schedule for ten months and every Tuesday through Saturday drove her to and from cosmetology school. Besides their conversations in the car, there were those silly “head-banging” shenanigans during the thirty-minute drives to school. Funny, here's Dad all dressed up and formal, and there we were, the windows rolled down at a crowded intersection and Dad and I singing away to the startled pedestrians. And once we pretended to be a crabby old couple, mad at everyone else on the road. Ha! She remembers: Dad and she had laughed themselves to tears at people's reactions. And then there was the time . . .*

As Grandpa turns toward Justin and her, Becky watches as his right hand plays with something in his pocket. *I wonder what he has. Or maybe he's just nervous. No, not Grandpa . . .* Her grandfather looks at them both and speaks.

“Justin and Becky, your grandma and I have prayed for this moment. The heritage we handed to your mother and father, they now give to you.” His hand comes out from his coat pocket. He reveals four dimes and places them before the couple on the altar.

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“Here are two dimes for each of you. When troubles come, and they always do, use these dimes as a reminder to call, day or night . . . they are part of the heritage you received from us. We will always be there for you, Becky. And we will always be there for you, Justin.”

Now Justin’s father approaches the couple. Chuck is choked up, on the verge of tears. He has spent the last twenty years trying to show his son how much he loves him . . . and now, it is time to say good-bye.

For years he took Justin to a little hole-in-the-wall restaurant every couple of months, where the two would talk over breakfast. It was during such times that he tried to communicate what life may hold for his boy. It was there that Chuck held his own classroom on values and ethics. It was there he allowed his son the freedom to question—to question motives and attitudes—and to get what his dad called “some country smarts” about family living.

It was just a few months before this ceremony that Chuck fronted Justin the money to strike out on his own business venture. He trusts Justin. He trusts that the heritage passed to his son from the generations before will be in hands that will keep it safe. The hope in his heart and the anticipation is just too much. Chuck opens his mouth and utters his son’s name, but then the emotion overwhelms him. The crowd waits for him to finish his prepared comments. Chuck’s tears speak louder than words . . . Justin is very loved.

In the midst of this touching scene, Sarah1 watches from the very last row and feels the resentment building. *Well, they may care for their kids and they can thank God all they want, but I think God is unfair. He picks and chooses who will have happiness in life .And I'm not one of the chosen.*

A smirk appears on Sarah’s face. Though she came from a solid home much like the bride and groom did, Sarah considers this “heritage bunk” *a joke . . . “pie in the sky.” It's certainly not a blessing.*

Sarah has shoved the memory of her days growing up as a

teenager into the dark crevices of her mind. She wants to forget her heritage, especially the times she scoffed at her family for being so devout. That heritage, Sarah concluded, would make her miss what this life has to offer. *Hey, I'm not going to allow life to pass by without grabbing at least a couple of handfuls of happiness* she has told herself more than once.

Watching the ceremony, she is unaware of the rebellion of her past, and somehow she is able to transfer blame onto the shoulders of her parents . . . and to the God she feels passed over her. She is single, dissatisfied with her job, and angry with her parents. And there is a skeleton in her past that she cannot tell her parents about.

The smirk on her face is only a Sunday yawn compared to the hidden anger about her past. She feels abandoned . . . isolated. Yet, the irony of it all is that in the deep part of her soul, she longs for it to work for her. But the effort to carry on the heritage is too strangling to the belief system and lifestyle she finds herself buying into. So . . . she paints on the small smile to hide the tears.

As Sarah and the other witnesses observe the ceremony wind to a conclusion, only a few realize that the event symbolizes more than a union of two lives. A heritage is being passed to a next generation, and the wedding is a significant handoff during a generations-long marathon relay. The couple's parents have spent better than twenty years fighting for and guarding the treasure they were being handed. The days and months and years of training are being celebrated at the wedding. Yet even if no guests had shown, the handoff would still have taken place; the ceremony still would have been meaningful. The grandparents would still have given their blessing to Justin and Becky as a couple worthy to handle and keep this heritage.

The minister performs his legal obligation and prays a blessing upon the couple and then declares Justin and his daughter "husband and wife." The happy couple bounces away with their entourage following arm in arm.

During the next two hours, the moderating temperature cools the

## AN INHERITANCE OF LOVE

wedding crowd who gathered for this magnificent Friday evening. The cake and punch are almost gone, the sun bids farewell, and the “tiki” torches and twinkle lights begin to accept their role of lighting the romantic setting for the evening.

The three hundred chairs are empty except for one lone figure. Jim has found a seat smack in the middle of the sea of white chairs. He stares straight ahead across the small lake to the lighted, empty gazebo, where the string quartet has entertained the crowd. He isn’t a loner, he isn’t pouting, he isn’t even just resting a weary body. He is contemplating what he has just witnessed. Yet if anybody has a reason to mock what has just taken place, it is Jim.

His father had chucked it all, messing up his own life and his family’s as well. After he “fell in love” with his wife’s best friend, he left the family and soon became involved in the drug culture. Though alone, Jim’s mother tried to make a go of it—tried to give her kids some semblance of normal life. She wasn’t successful.

As a young adult, Jim was a handsome young man who got plenty of invitations to make wrong choices, to escape into the world of sensual pleasures. But he was determined not to. He didn’t want to be like Dad. Though his dad had given him a poor example of manhood in action, Jim studied diligently at the local college, resisting the school’s party environment. Though his background gave him every excuse to make the wrong choices in life, Jim intended to make the right ones.

Now seated in that chair, Jim is determining . . . resolving in his own heart that he will begin: *Jill and I need to create a heritage. Yeah, we’re going to begin to build a heritage to pass on to the child Jill is carrying.* He sits there alone for a long time, and when the resolve is registered and confirmed in his heart, he slaps his hands onto the arms of the chair and jerks to his feet as if standing at attention. He stands there a few seconds, lets out a big sigh, then joins the end of the reception line.

Exhausted from the weeks of preparation, the father and mother

of the bride begin collecting their belongings. They are numb and ready to leave this intense high this event has pushed them to. Several friends wish them well with some clichéd comments. But a few, moved by the depth of the ceremony, give their sincere thanks.

“We saw tonight an illustration of a gut-level understanding of what we know we should do with our children,” says one church member. The minister finds the comment particularly moving because it comes from a father who leads a blended family. The pastor knows that Paul is struggling yet remains committed to create a loving environment for the children that Joann and he brought into the marriage. That fragile atmosphere was strengthened tonight by virtue of what the family members had been exposed to; namely a family where three generations of commitment to a heritage brought joy and purpose to a newly wedded couple.

Among the cheering and friendly “catcalls” of their friends, the happy couple races to their car under a barrage of flying rice. As they leave for their honeymoon, the father sends a silent good-bye to his daughter and son-in-law and turns to help in the cleanup. He picks up the trash and then breaks down the large outdoor sound system. Eventually his eyes meet the weary eyes of his wife, and with a wink at each other and a smile shared in silence, they realize the years of effort were worth it all.

The couple drives away, gleaming with joy. They have little money. But they have been given an inheritance of love. They are rich indeed!

## Chapter 2

# THE HERITAGE

The scene painted in chapter 1 is authentic, not some script of a melodramatic movie. The father of the bride is actually the coauthor, Otis Ledbetter. I genuinely lived the emotions of that ceremony. For months before the bride was given to the groom I repeatedly found myself with misty eyes, even in the middle of the day with absolutely no provocation. A blubbering idiot might be a good description. The questions came.

“Why are you so emotional? Is it because she’s leaving home?”

“No, I want her to leave home.”

“Well, is it because you are losing a daughter?”

“No, we prepared her for marriage; we want her to be married.”

“Well, is it because of who she’s marrying?”

“No, we couldn’t have chosen a more perfect mate for her.”

“Then what is it?”

The emotion was overwhelming at times. Maybe it resembles the feeling deep within a mountain climber when his boot finally catches firm ground at the summit after challenging the mountain for days. Perhaps it is like the surge of emotion that rushes into a new mother when that newborn is taken from her womb and laid on her bosom. For the first time, she sees what she has labored for and bonded to for the past nine months.

More than just the joy of the wedding and the sadness of saying good-bye to an unmarried daughter, the tears were over a heritage

being passed, one that Gail and I had tried with some success to give Becky, and that Justin and she would try to continue, shaping it with their own unique style and preferences.

Like most parents, Gail and I stayed up long nights with Becky when her brow was hot with fever. We carefully doted over her when she was toddling, to keep her from a falling injury. In addition, we shared our deep values in almost every conversation; we spent thousands of dollars to educate her in a place that would uphold our values. We guided her in what to read, what and whom to listen to, how to pick her friends; we taught her what family tradition was like and how valuable the love of a family is when the outside world abandons her. We did everything in our power to protect her developing emotions.

All of this was part of giving her a heritage. At the dinner table we offered ideas for cultivating friendships, so she might build healthy relationships. Hours were spent choosing a wardrobe and learning how to maintain it. I took her on “dates” before and during the time she would “go out” with young men. During our dates, I tried to teach her social graces and how to make a man feel special; I tried to emphasize the truth that she owes nothing to any young man.

Her mother showed

her the skills a homemaker should acquire.

My emotions flowed freely because I realized a milestone was being passed. All that Gail and I had worked for over the years was near completion. The heritage was complete on our end. Now the job of caretaker of the heritage was changing hands, moving into another generation. The baton called heritage, so carefully preserved, was being passed. The responsibility would soon belong to Becky and Justin. Our job was soon to change. Though the early signs are very promising, only time will tell whether we did enough. Gail and I found certain comfort, though, knowing that we did our best.

## What Is a Heritage?

Every family has a heritage, a legacy passed from generation to generation. In truth, though, the heritage is something few parents really understand. Too many times we are not sure what it is or the impact that it has on our own lives—and on the lives of those we love. Let's begin with a definition:

*A heritage is the spiritual, emotional, and social legacy that is passed from parent to child . . . good or bad.*

Every heritage has three distinct, yet interrelated parts, like a cord with three strands: spiritual, emotional, and social. In Ecclesiastes 4:12, Solomon points to a threefold cord as a strong tie, one not easily broken, nor easily separated. The three components together are much stronger than any one or two. With a heritage cord, the rope ties one to his past, gives security in the present and hope for the future. Here is something to hold on to when life is tossing us around like a dinghy during a storm. A parent hands this golden cord to his children, who then begin their own lives apart from their parents, yet linked by the strong cord of identity and direction. The heritage cord is not unlike a three-part baton passed along the generations, complete with a family history (both the positive and the negative).

### All Part Of A Package

Although there are three aspects to a heritage, it is unwise to overemphasize one at the expense of the other two. Our emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions are part of a package; each one heavily influences the other two. Still, it is helpful to identify the unique dynamic of each. We will be exploring their impact and importance separately in the chapters which follow. Let's briefly

touch upon them here in order to understand the forest before thoroughly examining the trees.

## Spiritual

Many homes totally neglect this vital element of the threefold cord. For whatever reason, parents do not offer their children a spiritual basis for life. But we are all spiritual beings who need spiritual understanding and expression. Show us a person who had no spiritual training as a child, and we'll show you a person who was handed a weak heritage. Show us a person who has rejected the religious heritage he was given, and we'll show you a person with identity problems.

Our yearning for spiritual sustenance and spiritual purpose is a universally felt need, even if spiritual expression has been largely overwhelmed by the loud but hollow sounds of a godless worldview. C. S. Lewis, an Oxford scholar and agnostic who found purpose in a relationship with God, wrote about this need in his classic, *Mere Christianity*:

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. . . . Probably earthly pleasures were never made to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for these blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same.

Kurt and I embrace a Christian worldview; we both are trained in Christian theology and involved in Christian ministry. Yet, though we strongly advocate our own religious framework as the proper platform upon which to build a spiritual heritage, the principle of passing a spiritual legacy can be found in virtually all religious traditions. The French mathematician, inventor, and philosopher Pascal has truthfully observed that there is a God-shaped vacuum inside each of our souls, and only an authentic relationship with the true Jehovah God can fill the emptiness inside. We agree.

## Emotional

For better or for worse, the emotional culture in which we are raised has a profound impact upon our emotional well-being as adults. Those reared in an atmosphere of love and acceptance tend to be more secure than those from a critical, distant family. If you came from a home in which affection was rarely demonstrated, you may find expressing your love more difficult than those from a family of huggers. In short, each of us is an emotional reflection of the environment in which we were raised.

In *When Anger Hits Home*, Gary Oliver and Norman Wright explain how parents influenced a child's emotional legacy:

One of the most important factors is our home environment. Some of us grew up in homes [where] emotions were not modeled or discussed. The few emotions that were expressed were kept behind closed doors. . . .

Others grew up in homes where emotional expression was punished and emotional repression was reinforced. Children raised in this environment either consciously or unconsciously told themselves that it wasn't safe to feel. . . .

[With anger,] . . . some adults had a parent who was a silent sulker. Others had a parent who played the martyr.

Yet others had parents who were screamers or raging hulks. . . .No matter what the style, how you saw your parents handling their anger influenced how you handle your anger now. Your past shapes your present handling of emotions.

And while the negative can be overcome, it must first be recognized. In chapter 4, we will examine the impact of whatever emotional legacy we may have been given and the importance of surrounding our own children with love and security.

## Social

How we relate to others as adults often grows out of how social issues were handled in the home. It is from our parents that we learn how to treat (or how not to treat) a husband or a wife. It is with siblings that we practice the skills of sharing, caring, and sometimes, fighting. It is with our family that we spend our formative years eating meals together, playing games together, taking vacations together, and talking together.

Hopefully, we learn something about all levels of human relationships in the process, through both laughter and pain. Those early experiences, good and bad, have left their mark on who we are and how we interact with others.

## For Good or Bad

How important is a strong family heritage? The true stories of two different families dramatically illustrate the impact for good or bad of a family heritage.

The first family is the Edwardses, probably most notable for producing the famous eighteenth-century preacher Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan's father was a minister, and his mother the daughter of a clergyman. Among their descendants into the late twentieth century were fourteen college presidents, more than one

hundred college professors, more than one hundred lawyers, thirty judges, and sixty physicians. The family also has given us more than one hundred clergymen, missionaries, and theology professors, and about sixty authors.

Look at the above list and you'll discover almost every great American industry has benefited from the impact of this family's contributions.

Contrast the rich heritage and impact of the Edwards' line to the influence of the Jukes family. It has been estimated that this family has cost the state of New York millions of dollars over the years. Since the eighteenth century, the Jukes have produced three hundred professional paupers, sixty thieves, and one hundred thirty convicted criminals. Fifty-five descendants were victims of sexual obsession, and only twenty ever learned a trade (and ten of those learned it in a state prison). Sadly, this family produced at least seven murderers. Is there any question that prior generations can have a direct influence over our own life patterns?

## Hope for the Future

And now let's consider our own heritage, today. Some of us, like Rebecca and Justin, have been given a strong, healthy heritage. We received a solid cord, placed directly into our hands. Many more, however, have received a weakened cord. Our parents failed to protect a heritage for us, and they injured the cord during the process of life by not preparing us properly. Some of us have suffered from indifference and neglect, others from abuse, whether physical, sexual, or constant verbal assault. Many of us will identify with Jim in chapter 1, reared in a one-parent home after his father walked out. Yet his outcome reminds us that one weak strand doesn't mean the heritage cannot continue. Though he didn't receive a good heritage, he is determined to give one nonetheless. His resolve is the first step

toward restoring the damaged cord he received. The same can be true for you as well.

Understanding the impact of your heritage is vital to the process of living. It can give you a new perspective on your past, a calm confidence in the present, and a meaningful sense of vision for your future. And it all starts with an understanding of the whats, whys, and hows of giving and receiving a heritage. Whether you received a wonderful heritage and are determined to pass it along to your own children or you grew up in a home filled with anger, disharmony, or abuse, we will offer some practical tools for creating a heritage for your children, embracing the good of your past while replacing the bad, and filling the void in your soul with a healthy sense of identity.

## Breaking the Cycle

In truth, none of us were handed a perfect heritage. We have received a mix of good and bad, because our parents, learning by doing and limited by their own weaknesses, did not always offer what was needed. My children, for example, had what some would consider a fortunate break being raised in a minister's home. But they will tell you today that "life in the fishbowl" was anything but a picnic. They were constantly held to a different standard by those around them, and their mother and I often expected more than we should have. They, like all of us, received both good and bad. Even with her positive heritage, Becky had to endure a few insensitive moments and misinformed judgments from me.

Receiving a mix of the good and the bad means your heritage may include a very good emotional legacy, while the spiritual and social elements of your heritage are weak. Or you may have received a positive spiritual legacy, but your emotional and relational heritage leave much to be desired. The risk is that we will focus so heavily upon the negative that we overlook the positive. We are too quick

to reject the entire inheritance we were given due to the unpleasant parts.

In the process of closing off the pain, we can also close off our link to the past. That is not healthy. It undermines our sense of identity and stifles our ability to grow. Rejecting what we've been handed is not the solution. We should rather seek to understand it and build upon it. We must identify and keep the good, while sorting out and replacing the bad.

Here are four people who are trying to do just that. Dedicated to passing on the heritage, they are struggling because of a weakened cord passed from their parents. We will return to them throughout the book.

### Cathy's Story

Cathy, twenty-nine and married, rejected the inheritance from her parents she had been given and had no desire of building and passing a heritage to her children. Now, as the children are growing, she begins to realize that they are suffering from the fallout of her own disillusioned past.

Cathy's parents had been ministers, but they found the demands of ministry life too much; they gave up on their dream of reaching the world with the good news and resigned the commission. They had spent much time with Cathy, sharing and living their values, and the foundation for a strong heritage was in place. But the disappointment and exhaustion after they left their ministry call began to drive the husband and wife apart. Within a matter of months, they began living separate lives. They rarely spoke to each other and both struggled with the uncertainties of the future.

Watching from the sidelines, Cathy's hurt was numbing. The fragile sense of identity she had been building began to fade right in front of her. The thought plagued her mind. *Mom and Dad don't really love each other. Maybe they never really loved me either.*

Her parents finally divorced, and her brothers and sister scattered, carrying their own crop of bitterness with them. After having been handed a good heritage, Cathy watched her parents undermine what she had received. What at one time made perfect sense to her—what at one time made her comfortable—had now shaken her at her foundation. Cathy began questioning every spiritual, emotional, and social aspect of the heritage they wanted to give her.

As a result, the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other in all three areas. Before the collapse of her parents' marriage, she could handle practically any emotional strain. She had been a very strong, good-humored, level-headed young lady. Afterward, she would fly off at the slightest challenge to her opinion. She seemed always on the edge of an angry outburst or else on the verge of tears.

"Before the divorce, I enjoyed the warmth of a close-knit family and strong friendships," Cathy told me with regret in her voice. "Afterward, I went so far as to call any relative who dared to show that they cared, ordering them to stay out of my life. Having alienated them all, I began entering into unhealthy relationships." She dated abusive boyfriends and hung out with negative and irreverent girlfriends. She looked to them for acceptance, but they only served to undermine her identity further.

As we talked further, I discovered that her spiritual life went from a vital source of joy to a haunting source of bitterness. "I began to see God as a bully, a mean-spirited ruler without a real heart. A deity, yes . . . but a deity who doesn't much care about me." Yet down deep, she wanted more. She scurried from church to church, trying to find the God she needed, while rejecting the God she had known.

Can Cathy recapture the heritage she lost? She sincerely wants to, fearful that her children will also settle for an incomplete heritage. Her desire is the first step in repairing the cord and passing on a worthwhile heritage.

## Paul and Joann: The Blended Family

In chapter 1 you met Paul and Joann, who are trying to create a heritage for a blended family created from previous marriages. Paul had thanked the pastor for giving them “a gut-level understanding of what we know we should do with our children.” Creating harmony in a blended family is a major feat in itself. Many times I have met with this beautiful couple to help point them in the direction of a healthy heritage for their kids.

Paul is a tall, balding fellow with a broad vocabulary and a keen mind. Joann, approaching middle age, is an attractive woman and a bottom-line person. When talking to Joann, you sense the need to get to the point . . . cut to the chase . . . skip the gory details. Neither Paul nor Joann blame their ex-mates for the failed marriages. They are just determined to make this marriage strong, and they are committed to creating a heritage for their children.

But it isn’t easy. They each have a daughter from their first marriages and now one daughter and one son from this union. Joann’s daughter from her first marriage is now pregnant out of wedlock and has no plans to marry the father. Paul’s daughter is deeply involved in the drug culture. She lives on the streets and is a constant threat to the safety of Paul’s present family. Neither Paul nor Joann was handed a decent heritage, but they want desperately to begin one for their kids. They have questions . . .

“Is it possible?”

“Is it too late for us?”

“Are we wasting our time to even try?”

“How difficult will it be?”

“Does this heritage thing really work?”

They will learn that it is possible, it’s rarely too late, and “this heritage thing” has lasting rewards that—bottom-line—do work.

## Meet Billy

Billy is a young man of whom most would say, “He will never make it.” Let me just make a list of his experiences and let them speak for themselves:

He was born to a couple who did not want him.  
His dad was a drug user and dealer.  
His mother knew nothing but the streets.  
From childhood, he was a drug user himself.  
He used street language and manners.  
He was very angry and it showed in his fists.  
He was foul-mouthed.

When Billy finally married, his anger continued and was now directed toward his wife and children. He beat his wife and became a pathological liar. Though he started school intending to help the family and himself with a better job, he eventually dropped out of school. Later he tried to drop out of life with an overdose of amphetamines.

Billy has two children, both boys. He’s sitting in my office, with one desire, a good desire. “I want to put this marriage back together and begin building a strong heritage for my kids.” It is possible for him to do that, as it is for anyone who has suffered similar setbacks.

## Rose’s Inheritance

She came into the world because of the abuse of her father. One night a drunken Joe walked into the house and ordered his wife to the bedroom. “Get upstairs and do your wifely duty!” He proceeded to empty his passions while tears fell down her face. Rose was conceived at that moment.

Rose’s mother, devastated by the years of Joe’s abuse and neglect and now carrying a child conceived in pain, secretly asked her mother for help. She packed up the five kids and escaped from years

of abuse and disrespect. The divorce was final at about the same time Rose was born. Her mom worked hard to raise six children alone. A full-time job and night school kept her away most of the time, so Rose more or less raised herself. She had no one to advise her on right and wrong, no one to hold her when she was hurting, no one to cheer her accomplishments, no one to teach her about boys, no one to model healthy family living.

The other parents on the street didn't want their children playing with Rose or her siblings because there were ill-kept and ill-mannered. And so heartache, loneliness, and rejection became Rose's inheritance.

But that was then. Rose grew up to become Olivia Rose Bruner, wife of my coauthor and friend, Kurt. Today, Olivia is a building a wonderful heritage of love for her own family. She has broken the cycle of pain from her past and is launching a new era in her home. How did she make such a dramatic transition in life? By learning how to give and receive an inheritance of love. We will tell you more of her story later. Hers is a story of hope. Hers is a story of how a person can give what she did not receive.

Olivia's story demonstrates the powerful impact of the extended heritage, where other adults extend their heritage to children outside their own family.

Her experience serves as a model for much of what we have learned, and will share, about building a heritage. Remember our definition of the heritage: the emotional, spiritual, and social legacy that is passed from parent to child . . . good or bad.

As you evaluate your own experience and family heritage, do you like what you see? If so, have you identified a plan of action for passing that tradition to others? If not, are you ready to rise above the cycle of hurt and begin a new tradition for yourself and your family? The rest of this book will help you through that process. Let's begin by taking a closer look at what makes a heritage good or bad.

YOUR HERITAGE



## Chapter 3

# YOUR SPIRITUAL LEGACY

**L**ittle fingers suddenly knocked my glasses sideways on my face, and the baby in my arms let out a shriek of delight. A snicker went across the audience, and I continued to pray as best I could. But I admit my focus was interrupted, and I moved the infant farther from the microphone. I was just glad the kid didn't relieve himself into the microphone like another infant had done a few months earlier.

Baby dedications, pulpits, microphones, and a crowd of people hoping for a good laugh just don't mix to create a sacred mood, but the event indeed is very hallowed. Brian and Sherry had been blessed with the gift of life. They were so flushed with the excitement of the responsibility handed to them that they wanted their baby dedicated as soon as possible. So I accommodated their wish and made room in this day's service for their six-week-old son.

"Brian," I began, "you and Sherry understand that this ceremony has nothing to do with the immediate spiritual condition of your baby. It has everything to do with your commitment, and nothing to do with your child's commitment." They nodded and I continued.

"Your promise before God and these witnesses this morning is a vow you have intentionally and purposefully made. You are saying that you will give every effort . . . that you will see to it, by the best of your ability, that your child will have every opportunity to

know God as he matures into adulthood.” Again the ecstatic couple affirmed the statement with a nod.

Brian and Sherry realize that they are powerless to determine the eternal future of their little boy, yet they also are unquestionably aware of their responsibility to little Tyler.

“Your responsibility will consist of creating an environment in which the spiritual life of your child can flourish as you both instruct him in the basics of the faith.” As I paused, I could sense a keen silence. Deep truth absorbed has a way of stealing your breath for a second.

## What Is a Spiritual Legacy?

As noted in chapter 2, every heritage includes spiritual, emotional, and social components. Therefore it is critical that we clearly understand the meaning and impact of each. Once again, the three are so heavily intertwined that we hesitate to address them separately. The last thing we want to do is reinforce the notion that they can be wholly separated from one another. One heavily influences the other two, and none stands alone in the process of giving and receiving a solid heritage.

### Its Significance

Yet there is value in taking a look at the unique role of each in defining who we are and how we got that way; so let’s begin by inspecting the spiritual. Some parents tend to minimize or ignore this vital aspect of life. After all, the spiritual seems the least tangible of the three. You can feel emotions and see their results; you can act certain ways and observe the outcomes in your child’s social behavior. But spiritual progress is often more difficult to observe and measure, and its impact less obvious. Yet it is first and foremost of the three. In fact, your child’s sense of identity and purpose depends largely upon spiritual understanding and connection. We are, first

and foremost, spiritual beings. No heritage is complete, or healthy, unless it has been built upon a spiritual foundation.

## Its Definition

The goal of a strong spiritual legacy is to give the child a solid foundation for living with confidence in the unseen realities of the spiritual life. In terms of how we create such a legacy, here is a practical working definition of the spiritual legacy:

*A spiritual legacy is the process whereby parents model and reinforce the unseen realities of the spiritual life.*

In shaping the heritage for our children, this second definition is vital. It reveals several truths about what a spiritual legacy is.

Before we explore what a spiritual legacy is, notice what it is not. A spiritual legacy is not church attendance, though involvement in a local body can strengthen the cord. A spiritual legacy is not Bible reading, though scriptural principles are a vital part of spiritual perspective. A spiritual legacy is not necessarily dependent upon formal religious instruction, though the absence of such will cause a major void in one's worldview. All of these things contribute to a spiritual legacy, yet none of them defines it.

A spiritual legacy—like our emotional and social legacies—is influenced far more by the parents' actions and attitudes than by the roles and rules of institutions or by repetitious religious practices. We can see this clearly in three elements of our second definition of a spiritual legacy.

First, the word "legacy" means *something resulting from, and left behind by, an action, event, or person*, according to Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828). In other words, a legacy is more what we do than what we say. By our actions, we model the spiritual elements in our lives for our world—and our children—to see.

Second, a spiritual legacy is a process, not an event. The dedication ceremony was only a starting point in the life of that little baby. Brian and Sherry did not give him a legacy that day. They will do so through years of consistent, sacrificial, and committed effort. We do not earn the right to celebrate a legacy until we have paid the price to build one.

Third, parents model and reinforce a spiritual legacy. Spiritual realities are more caught than taught; the child observes the parents and sees the truth of the spiritual life in action. Indeed, a strong spiritual legacy is modeled, not mandated. It occurs in the routine moments of life and is transferred over dinner table conversations. A solid spiritual legacy is more about the daily grind than it is weekly worship. Our children need to observe the spiritual life as part of normal living rather than the exclusive domain of saintly grandmothers and professional theologians.

Fourth, it prepares our children to clearly recognize the unseen realities of the spiritual life. Each of us enters this world with an intuitive awareness that life is more than the external. Foundational principles govern our existence, and they are part of the spiritual life. Unfortunately, because these principles are unseen by all and uncomfortable for many, some parents neglect this vital aspect of passing a heritage to their children. We've all heard the comments:

“I'll let my children decide for themselves when they get older.”

“I don't want to be a hypocrite.”

“I hated all that church stuff growing up, so I'm not going to force it on my kids.”

Such comments highlight a fundamental misunderstanding of spiritual realities in our culture. We have compartmentalized our spirituality and extracted it from the rest of life. That is tragic and dangerous. Unseen realities influence our daily decisions.

When we fail to clarify and reinforce them for our children, we rob them of a critical element in decision making and a vital part of their heritage.

## Coming Home

Many great Christian leaders of this century can attribute their influence to a parent's example yesterday. Billy Graham, for example, was born into a home of devout Christian parents. His father, Frank Graham, was a simple, uneducated dairy farmer. But his faith in Christ was an example for others to behold. Melvin Graham, Billy's brother, said of his father, "His hands would tremble and his voice would shake a little, but people used to love to hear him pray." His mother, Morrow Graham, spent many hours teaching young Billy Bible verses as she scrubbed his back in the washtub. Fittingly, the first one she taught him was that great text of evangelism which would later become a foundation of his ministry, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (kjv). Prayer accompanied every meal, and each evening after dinner, the family gathered in the family room for further devotions. Frank and Morrow Graham demonstrated and reinforced unseen spiritual realities at home. How could they have known the impact their example would have on Billy, or on the world.<sup>1</sup>

### A Wayward Son

Godly parents will not always succeed in passing along a godly heritage. A spiritual legacy can be abandoned by offspring. As individuals, your children must choose for themselves and may ignore your example. Franklin Graham, Billy's firstborn son, spurned his father's faith as a teenager. Sent to a Christian boarding school to learn discipline, Franklin defied the rules by smoking cigarettes, even letting fellow smokers crawl out of his small room above the school's kitchen to sneak a smoke outside; then he lied about how the tobacco smell hung about him. "I got a kick about staying one step ahead of the 'law,'" he recalled. Later, he was expelled from a

Christian college after taking a coed on a weekend date and getting stranded by bad weather and staying with her overnight. He drank regularly during a summer construction project in Alaska.

Yet, he admired his dad's consistent witness and concern for him, calling his father "the man I loved and wanted to please more than anyone on earth"; he also appreciated his mother's strong yet fair discipline and her sense of humor. He credits his parents' consistent example with giving him a spiritual legacy to which he returned in his mid twenties—when sitting on a hotel bed, he "smoked a cigarette, picked up my New Testament and re-read John 3."<sup>2</sup>

That evening Franklin "had an overpowering conviction that I needed to get my life right with God."<sup>3</sup> Since then he has directed a relief agency and now is the lead evangelist for his father's ministry.

### A Doubting Daughter

Similarly, Joni Eareckson ignored her parents' faith after a diving accident as a teenager left her paralyzed from the neck down. During weeks in a hospital bed, this once playful teen watched as a nurse had to take care of her every need and as bedsores she could not feel mocked her previous active lifestyle. Joni went from fear to anger with God to depression. She asked the question why and at one point wanted nothing to do with God.

Today, Joni Eareckson Tada has become a symbol of what it means to trust God through the trials of life for an entire generation of believers. What happened? She credits a spiritual legacy from her parents. Though she did ask why God "let this happen to me," the sturdy foundation of her parents' lives caused her to seek to know God, and she was open to the message of God's love, brought to her during her depression by a young minister, Steve Estes.

Joni's parents prepared her for physical tragedy by introducing her to spiritual realities. In Joni's words, "If I were to pick out a verse that best describes the way my parents raised us, it would be

Deuteronomy 11:18-19—‘Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds. . . . Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.’ That passage underscores the fact that every family function can and should be sacred.”<sup>4</sup> John and Lindy Eareckson made an early impression on Joni, providing her with a much needed foundation for what would become a serious crisis of faith.

One never knows the impact a solid spiritual legacy may have in the lives of our children, or beyond. Your children may reject the legacy, either temporarily (as Franklin and Joni did) or completely. Your duty is only to present them with the truth and leave the results with God. You may think, *I don't consider myself a spiritual giant of the faith. I'm not sure I'm the best example.* That's OK. A strong spiritual legacy does not require uncommon piety. The key, once again, is the degree to which unseen spiritual realities are recognized and reinforced at home. You can have an impact for good on your children.

### The Power of the Unseen

The spiritual component of your child’s life is always there, but it can be diminished. When I first met Billy, the second-generation drug user and wife abuser described in the previous chapter, the spiritual part of his heritage seemed nonexistent. Intensely angry and given to cursing whatever upset him, Billy’s greatest handicap actually was his inability to see anything from a spiritual standpoint. During our first meeting, I found myself really hurting for him. I could not imagine anyone so spiritually void. His parents had made no effort to suggest there was a loving God. As a result, his image of God was disfigured and his view of Scripture deformed; he regarded all “religious” people as “weak-kneed crutch leaners.”

For Billy, the spiritual world was indeed alien territory. No wonder his life was in tremendous need of major repair. Billy

could not see the foundational *unseen* realities of life, which can be observed only by having a solid spiritual legacy. Able to see only the *seen* realities of life, he limped his way through life without even realizing he was seriously handicapped.

The power of the unseen to affect our daily lives should not be underestimated. Recently, I drove my car into a garage as the mechanic on the other side of the garage guided me onto a rack. After I vacated the vehicle, he walked over to several chrome levers in a corner and pushed down on one. At once my three-thousand-pound car rose effortlessly from the concrete; once it was suspended on a rack six feet overhead, the mechanic walked under it to inspect. What raised the car and what held it there? It was something we feel, but cannot see. Air! Compressed air had the power to lift the car. The foundational unseen reality was air!

Similarly the spiritual legacy passed on in the heritage is the foundational unseen reality of the spirit. Deep within our children is the authority and power of either a quickened spirit that will fill the “sails” of their lives, moving them in a Godward direction, or a deadened spirit that will leave their sails drooping lifelessly around the main mast. We parents cannot be the spirit for them. But we can create that spiritual environment where they are free to question and accept spiritual truths. Such an environment will free a child’s spirit to grow and mature.

### **The Unseen Reality of the Conscience**

The human conscience is one unseen reality most people Will acknowledge but few understand. The conscience is not the utterance of God in our hearts. Rather, it's the mechanism enabling us to tune His voice in or tune it out. If I held up a portable radio when our president was giving a national speech and exclaimed that what I was holding in my hand was the president, I would be entirely wrong. What I hold in my hand only gives me the power to hear his

voice. In other words, the conscience gives us an inward sensitivity to spiritual realities. Parents wanting to pass along a solid heritage recognize and shape that sensitive mechanism called conscience.

J. Oswald Sanders compares the conscience to a thermometer.<sup>5</sup> The thermometer has no inherent ability to produce needed heat or cold in the room. Its function is to measure existing conditions. The conscience is similar. It does not manufacture good or bad conduct. It rather drives feelings of guilt or innocence in response to our actions and attitudes. It measures existing conditions so that we can respond appropriately.

Though a thermometer cannot be adjusted, a thermostat can. If eighty-one degrees in the house is too warm on a humid July afternoon, you can set the thermostat to seventy degrees. The air conditioning will turn on, and the thermometer will soon start its descent toward seventy. According to the apostle Paul, the conscience also can be adjusted; it has several settings. The natural pattern moves the dial from weak, to defiled, then to evil, and finally to seared (1 Corinthians 8:7; 1 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 10:22). But on the upside, it is possible to influence the thermometer toward a good level and a pure setting. But it requires intentional diligence and an intuitive understanding of how this unseen reality works.

Some strongly disagree with the principle of depravity, but experience and revelation tell us that the human race, from birth, has a bent toward wickedness. “Man’s heart is deceitful and desperately wicked,” Jeremiah asserted. Incurably sick is what that means, outside of divine intervention. A. W Tozer compares this tendency to the cravings of a dry soil, writing:

Every farmer knows the hunger of the wilderness, that hunger which no modern farm machinery, no improved agricultural methods can ever quite destroy. No matter how well prepared the soil, how well kept the fences, how carefully painted the buildings, let the owner neglect for a while his prized and

valued acres, and they will revert again to the wild and be swallowed up by the jungle or the wasteland. The bias of nature is toward the wilderness, never toward the fruitful field.<sup>6</sup>

The spiritual thermostat in the lives of our children should be consistently inspected and adjusted toward the biblical norm. A lack of, or indifference to, the inspection and adjustments of the spiritual thermostat will result in a cold spiritual component and a weak heritage. Dr. Albert Siegel warns of the consequences of a seared conscience and a cold spirit:

When it comes to rearing children, every society is only twenty years away from barbarism. Twenty years is all we have to accomplish the task of civilizing the infants who are born into our midst each year. These savages know nothing of our language, our culture, our religion, our values, our customs of interpersonal relations. The infant is totally ignorant about communism, fascism, democracy, civil liberties, the fights of the minority as contrasted with the prerogatives of the majority, respect, decency, honesty, customs, conventions, and manners. The barbarian must be tamed if civilization is to survive.<sup>7</sup>

Siegel's warning may be harsh, yet one thing is certain. Many of our children are more than halfway between a healthy family and the line that these authors have exposed. We should be willing to constantly check the spiritual temperature of those accountable to us, particularly our children. We also must be willing to make the hard decisions that demand us to adjust spiritual thermostats Godward.

### **The Unseen Reality of Moral Absolutes**

Another unseen reality that must be reinforced is that of moral

absolutes. Just as the law of gravity, an unseen force, has a very real impact if violated, there are binding moral laws established by God Himself that must be understood and heeded. Like a compass keeping us on track by constantly pointing to true north, parents must equip a child to recognize “true north” on the journey of life. Moral character can only be developed in the context of absolute truth.

In his first book, Kurt addressed the vital importance of establishing accurate life directions based upon absolute truths. Our “life map” is only good if it is consistent with reality, pointing us in the right direction as we navigate our way toward successful living.

Few things are as frustrating as the effort to locate a new address using a less than precise map. . . . We have arrived at many social gatherings late and tense as a result of our combined mapping efforts. . . . It can be embarrassing. Just as a reliable map is essential for getting to an Unfamiliar location, our understanding of the world must be accurate if we hope to attain our objectives in life. Imagine the frustration and futility of trying to find an address in Denver using a map of Dallas. Yet, we often make important life decisions based upon a faulty worldview, and the consequences can be far worse than simple embarrassment. Each of us develops his or her life map according to various factors.<sup>8</sup>

Kurt mentioned “the instruction and example of our parents” as providing the earliest way children begin to understand their world. Later, teachers and peer relationships influence the developing map; finally, “exposure to the universe of ideas and belief patterns solidifies our worldview.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, an early, strong spiritual heritage will shape our children’s view of moral right and wrong. For an accurate view of the world, our children need us to offer them clear directions, based upon timeless truths.

## The Unseen Reality of God's Communication

The third unseen reality of the spiritual component is God's ability to communicate with our children. Parents typically are able to communicate with their children on the physical and emotional levels, but what about the spiritual? As parents, we have little difficulty understanding the physical and emotional needs of our children. From birth, the little tykes let us know in various ways what they want. From letting out an infant cry, to throwing a childish tantrum, to barking a thoughtless order, to making a polite request . . . we respond to their need even while molding their ability to communicate it. When they are hungry, we feed them. When they scratch a knee, we mend the wound. When they are smarting emotionally, we sense it and respond with loving support. Their habits might change; their appetite might be lost—or become voracious. They may isolate themselves. All of which are unspoken messages that they need us.

The physical and emotional needs of a child are readily apparent, evidenced through their outward behavior. Parents can respond to these needs in tangible ways, touching the child through the five senses, which serve as our gateway to the human soul.

When it comes to making the spiritual connection, however, only God has a direct gateway into the human heart. He has created us with the capacity and desire to relate to Him. He doesn't need the five senses to speak to us. He is able to bypass our senses and go directly to the spirit. But He is the only One who can.

### Making the Spiritual Connection

The job of a parent is to understand this dynamic, recognize It when it occurs, and reinforce the unseen connection of the spiritual life. We can encourage our children to pray, listen to their questions about God, and recognize that they may be ready to hear about and

understand spiritual matters sooner than we think.

The priest Eli understood this truth when Samuel, a young boy sent to Eli's home to learn to follow God, heard the voice of God one night (1 Samuel 3). Twice while asleep young Samuel heard his name called; twice he went to Eli's room, thinking the priest had called him. Both times the priest explained he had not called, and the sleepy boy returned to bed. When Samuel returned a third time to Eli's bedside, saying the priest this time must have called, the priest understood. He did not rebuke the boy but realized God was speaking and the boy must listen.

"Go and lie down," he instructed the boy, "and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel did. And as a result of being tuned in to His voice, Samuel met God and became the avenue through which the Lord spoke to His people.

Eli understood the unseen reality of the spiritual world and knew how to help Samuel connect with God's voice. Parents have the same responsibility when it comes to their children. We must first be sensitive to God's voice ourselves . . . know how to recognize it . . . and then create an environment which allows our children to do the same. The end result? They will know the Lord.

As Pascal has said, a "God-shaped vacuum" exists in each of us, even as children. Our children desire to fill that vacuum, and God wants to communicate through that vacuum to our very hearts. Parents sometimes accept the falsehood of a humanistic worldview that a child does not need or even want God on a normal basis, but is content with who he is. When we accept that view or do anything that hinders our passing on a spiritual heritage, we effectively weaken the heritage, and may be giving our children a legacy of spiritual darkness, aimlessly groping for the light.

The brilliant world leader Winston Churchill had great insight when he observed, "The destiny of man is not measured by material computation. When great forces are on the move in the world, we learn we are spirits—not animals."<sup>10</sup> As parents we must

acknowledge that truth: both we and our children are more spiritual beings than we are physical. The spiritual component of the heritage is a vital part we must not neglect. Take care to model and reinforce for your children the unseen realities of the spiritual life.

## Evaluating Your Own Spiritual Legacy

How strong was the spiritual legacy you received? This chapter concludes with an exercise designed to help you answer that question. First, though, let's briefly highlight some of the characteristics of a good and bad spiritual legacy.

### Traits of a Good Spiritual Legacy

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a good spiritual legacy is that it gives us *a foundation for understanding and responding to the work of God in our lives*. In contrast, a bad legacy will limit our ability to respond to this vital aspect of living.

A second characteristic is *balance*. Some people are so heavenly minded they become remote from those who need to hear spiritual truths. Others are so focused on people and goods in the material world that they lose track of what is truly important in life. A good spiritual legacy shows us a balance between these two extremes.

A third characteristic is *genuineness in our dealings*. That applies to how your parents presented the spiritual component to you. I have spoken with many individuals who grew up in homes where spiritual discussions were used as a means of manipulation in the home supporting Mom or Dad's agenda rather than reinforcing the true nature of God. Others saw the spiritual life limited to Christmas and Easter church attendance, rather than a routine part of family living. Still others lived under the heavy weight of rules and regulations which were irrelevant when it came to real life. In all three cases, the spiritual component on the part of the parents was insincere, and the children picked up on that.

That was the major problem for Jim, the young man sitting alone amid the sea of white chairs at Rebecca's wedding. Jim was not passed a spiritual legacy from his parents. They weren't atheist or agnostic, but the big family Bible resting on the coffee table was little more than a prop, something to spur their own consciences as well as their children's every once in a while. They did not use the Bible as a source of absolutely reliable truth, and Jim and his siblings quickly recognized that.

## Examining Our Legacy

Before we can effectively develop a strategy for passing a good heritage to our children, it is critical that we examine the heritage we were given. Some of us received a very positive heritage; others did not. Most of us, however, received a mixed bag—certain parts were good, while other parts were not so good. Those elements which were positive, we should keep and pass on. Those which were not, we should replace. But in order to do so, we must identify which parts of our heritage may or may not be keepers.

The "Spiritual Legacy Evaluation" that concludes this chapter, as well as the emotional and social evaluations at the end of chapters 4 and 5, let you measure the heritage you have received in these three dimensions. Complete each one and you will better understand the strength of the legacy that you received.

## The Leading Legacy Indicators

When you complete the evaluation of your spiritual legacy, You may wonder, *What can I do to pass along an even better spiritual legacy to my children?* In this book, we want to give you a preview of what you can do by giving you a list of good and bad elements for each of the three elements of the heritage—the spiritual, the emotional, and the social. We call the three previews Leading Legacy Indicators.

## Economic and Cultural Indicators

Our Leading Legacy Indicators share a kinship with the Leading Cultural Indicators developed by William Bennett and his associates. In the early 1990s Bennett, a former U.S. Secretary of Education, published a set of statistics to reflect the state of our national culture and called them the Index of Leading Cultural Indicators. Bennett included academic performance in the schools, illegitimate birth rates, juvenile crime statistics, and similar information.

His index is similar to the federal government's periodic report called the "Index of Leading Economic Indicators." That index highlights statistics that reflect the overall health of the U.S. economy, and investors and governmental leaders watch closely those economic indicators to gain a high level picture of how the economy has performed and what it may do in the months to come. Now people are considering Bennett's index as one notable way to measure the current state of America's social health: how we treat ourselves and one another.<sup>11</sup>

Neither the government's economic index nor Bennett's Cultural index is comprehensive. But as leading indicators they provide us with one measurement of our condition, whether economically or culturally. In like manner we need to be able to measure the state of the Heritage we are giving our children.

## A Practical Tool

The Leading Legacy Indicators may be less precise than the indexes of the federal government and William Bennett, yet they form an equally practical tool for measuring the state of the heritage you are giving your children. To help you evaluate the present strength of that heritage, this chapter and the next two include lists that offer measures of the legacy in the spiritual, emotional, and social realms. It's a solid way to identify the relative health of your heritage.

Below is the first list, which summarizes the Leading Legacy Indicators for the spiritual dimension of your legacy. The indicators highlight some of the key differences between a good and bad spiritual legacy. We should caution that the list states the extremes. Obviously, most of us experienced something in between the two. But it is helpful, nonetheless, as a tool for comparative evaluation.

### A Strong Spiritual Legacy . . .

- Acknowledges and reinforces spiritual realities.
- Views God as a personal, caring being who is to be both loved and respected.
- Makes spiritual activities a routine aspect of life (church attendance, prayer, Scripture reading, etc.).
- Talks about spiritual issues as a means of reinforcing spiritual commitments.
- Clarifies timeless truth, right from wrong.
- Incorporates spiritual principles into everyday living.

### A Weak Spiritual Legacy . . .

- Undermines or ignores spiritual realities.
- Represents God as an impersonal being, to be ignored or feared.
- Never or rarely participates in spiritual activities.
- Has few spiritual discussions of a constructive nature.
- Confuses absolutes and upholds relativism.
- Separates the spiritual from the “practical.”

Again, this list is by no means comprehensive. It does, however,

identify some of the key areas that affect your child's spiritual legacy. Where are you now among these indicators? At this point, is your spiritual legacy to your children more positive than negative?

Wherever you are, realize that like Jim, it's never too late to give your child a stronger legacy as you leave your own behind. Complete the "Spiritual Legacy Evaluation" below, and then turn to chapter 4 to see how you can measure your emotional legacy.

### Spiritual Legacy Evaluation

Answer each question by circling the number that best reflects the legacy you have received from your parents; then add your total score.

1. To what degree were spiritual principles incorporated into daily family life?  
1–Never  
2–Rarely  
3–Sometimes  
4–Frequently  
5–Almost always  
6–Consistently
  
2. Which word captures the tone of how you learned to view/relate to God?  
1–Absent  
2–Adversarial  
3–Fearful  
4–Casual  
5–Solemn  
6–Intimate

3. How would you summarize your family's level of participation in spiritual activities?
  - 1–Nonexistent
  - 2–Rare
  - 3–Occasional
  - 4–Regimental
  - 5–Active
  - 6–Enthusiastic
  
4. How were spiritual discussions applied in your home?
  - 1–They weren't
  - 2–To control
  - 3–To manipulate
  - 4–To teach
  - 5–To influence
  - 6–To reinforce
  
5. What was the perspective in your home with regard to moral absolutes?
  - 1–If it feels good, do it!
  - 2–There are no absolutes
  - 3–Let your heart guide you
  - 4–Dogmatic legalism
  - 5–Moderate conservatism
  - 6–Clear life boundaries

*Results*

Above 24 = Strong spiritual legacy

19-24 = Healthy legacy

14-18 = Mixed legacy—good and bad elements

10-13 = Weak spiritual legacy

Below 10 = Damaged spiritual legacy

If you scored in the upper half of this self-analysis, you are blessed by an outstanding spiritual heritage. Those who receive such a legacy are rare indeed.

If your score ended up near the bottom, don't despair. There are many who have established and passed a wonderful heritage despite falling into this category. Most of us will probably fall somewhere in the middle. As stated earlier, more likely than not, we received a mixed bag.

Whatever your specific score, the goal is the same. We hope to better understand our own heritage so that we can keep and pass on the good, and replace the bad with something better. We will discuss how later.

## Chapter 4

# YOUR EMOTIONAL LEGACY

The radio tower at Detroit's Metropolitan Airport cleared Flight 255 for departure, and Captain John R. Maus, fifty-seven, taxied the jetliner onto runway 3-Center North. Maus, a veteran pilot with twenty thousand hours of flight experience, quickly received final clearance and pushed the throttle on the MD-80 aircraft. The plane, loaded with almost twenty tons of jet fuel and six thousand pounds of luggage, hurtled down the runway but did not rise at the normal point. Instead, it continued hundreds of feet further before lifting almost fifty feet. In the cockpit, a computer-generated voice repeated the words, "Stall . . . stall," indicating that the airflow over the wings was no longer sufficient to lift the plane; the jet was falling, not flying. The plane plunged to the ground.

Traveling at about 215 miles per hour, the plane knocked a jagged piece off the roof of a rental car building and then ricocheted off the embankment of an access road to Interstate 94. Flight 255 disintegrated into chunks of fiery metal, smashing three cars and killing at least three more people, the cars' drivers.

### A Glimmer of Hope

More than one hundred passengers died that day, and the real-life tragedies reported in the media were heart-wrenching. But millions

watching television coverage found a glimmer of hope from the story of the miracle girl, Cecilia Cichan.

Rescue workers found Cecilia strapped in her seat, moaning. When they plucked her from the gnarled debris, they first assumed that four-year-old Cecilia of Tempe, Arizona, had been a passenger in a car hit by the falling plane. Said Sergeant Bruce Schneider of the Wayne County Sheriff's Department: "It's beyond comprehension how someone could survive something like this. It's a miracle. She had to be in the perfect spot."

Rescuers believe that Cecilia's mother, Paula, thirty-three, a registered nurse, may have saved her daughter's life by leaving her own plane seat and wrapping herself around Cecilia's seat to protect her child from the flames. The mother died in the crash along with Cecilia's father, Michael, and six-year-old brother David.

Cecilia suffered a concussion, a broken leg and collarbone, and third-degree burns on her arms and hands. But the hope-filled report in all the news articles contained the words: "She is expected to recover."

Don't you love those words, "expected to recover"? The scars from the burns will always be there; the horror of the flying debris, the noise of the banging metal and scraping sounds of a crashing, skidding, disintegrating plane may evidence itself in many ways, but Cecilia is "expected to recover."

Though more than one hundred died in the crash (including Kurt's best friend Don), a small child survived the crash when her mother responded by intentionally wrapping Cecilia's tiny body in the protective blanket of her own. Recognizing that she couldn't stop the tragedy from occurring, she did her best to engulf her daughter in an environment that would increase her chances for survival.

A strong emotional legacy can do much the same. It creates an environment of love and protection, increasing the odds for our children as they face the inevitable traumas of life. Tragedy will come. Painful experiences will invade our desire to protect them.

Like Cecilia's mother, we can do nothing to stop the collision. But we can help our kids survive, and even thrive through it all.

## What Is an Emotional Legacy?

Family counselors routinely encounter clients with the lasting effects of painful childhood memories. People from all walks of life struggle to overcome a negative emotional legacy, which hinders their ability to cope with the inevitable struggles of life. Sadly, a solid emotional legacy seems to have become the exception rather than the norm. But it doesn't have to be that way. Whether or not you received a strong emotional legacy, you can give one.

For those who have spent their entire lives trying to escape the past, it is difficult to comprehend the strength and stability that a positive emotional legacy can have upon future generations. If thoughts of your childhood bring fear rather than fondness, imagine what it would be like for family memories to warm your heart rather than tighten your stomach. Now imagine yourself giving such feelings to your own children. It is possible. And the first step is understanding what an emotional legacy should be, and can be.

A strong emotional legacy will give a child healthy emotions that allow him or her to deal in a positive way with the struggles of life. Here's a definition of a strong emotional legacy:

*A strong emotional legacy is that enduring sense of security and emotional stability, nurtured in an environment of safety and love.*

Let's break this definition down into bite-size morsels.

First, an emotional legacy is nurtured by parents. You cannot build a solid emotional legacy quickly, like a shed or log cabin. It takes lots of time and consistency to develop in your child a sense of emotional wholeness.

The process can be compared to planting a tree. Some trees, as

saplings, need a post to hold their small trunks against the wind. Most will need much time to deepen their roots, so that they can locate water far down when the drought eventually comes. Without protection and time, the tree is vulnerable to natural catastrophe—wind, drought, attacks by ground animals. But once time has passed, the tree is strong and stable for years to come.

The key to a tree's strength is deep, strong roots, and to grow strong, the roots of the tree must be planted in rich soil, as well as receive plenty of water and sunshine. So it is with our emotional legacy. We must create an atmosphere that surrounds a child's fragile spirit with the nourishment required for healthy growth. This gives the child security and emotional stability.

Second, an emotional legacy endures. It is not quickly forgotten; it typically lasts through the adult years. When the child turns eighteen years old, the end of his childhood experiences becomes the beginning of the emotional legacy, which will continue to influence his adult years.

As Kurt and I have observed and counseled hundreds of adults over the years, we have found that an emotional legacy, whether weak or strong, has a long-term impact. In my counseling experience, the parents' influence upon the children's emotional health has been an obstacle to be overcome rather than a blessing to be cherished. Diana, for example, still struggles with the mistrust and fear nurtured by a lying and abusive father. She works hard to keep those deep-rooted feelings from affecting her relationships today, but it is a constant battle.

Not all adults had that experience growing up. Janet, for instance, had a solid emotional legacy and today has little difficulty creating a strong emotional environment in her home. Diana and Janet demonstrate how childhood experiences leave a dramatic imprint upon us years after leaving home.

Last, a healthy emotional legacy gives security and stability cultivated in an environment of love and safety. More than any other

aspect of a heritage, the environment and tone of family life directly influences the outcome of our emotional selves. An atmosphere of love nourishes our emotional stability, the capacity to cope with failure and pain. An atmosphere of safety provides fertile soil for our sense of security to grow deep, giving us the confidence to face a harsh and often cruel world—to beat the odds and keep our identity intact. If either love or safety is missing from the environment, deep roots are unlikely.

In short, a strong heritage can protect the fragile development of a child's emotional well-being, much like Cecilia's mother in the plane crash, by wrapping the child in an environment of support. In the process, the capacity for dealing with emotional trauma can flourish.

### Like a Stabilizer Bar

Not long ago Van Noble, a general contractor in his thirties and a member of my church, invited me to go to an event in which he had begun to participate. As a stock car racer, Van loved the thrill and challenge of going fast and staying safe. Most fans, I found, love the loud engines, screeching tires, speed, and the chance for a couple of dramatic crashes every race. Very interesting at times, I must admit. *How in the world can a driver throw his car into a dangerous curve on the track, with the back end fishtailing and other cars hurling toward him at more than one hundred miles per hour?* I wondered. It doesn't seem very rational. If I wanted that kind of stress, why not just adopt a junior higher and raise him?

So I asked Van, "What keeps the car from crashing and burning at times like that?"

"My stabilizer bar," he answered.

Affixed somewhere on the sophisticated suspension of his car is a vital part called the stabilizer bar. Of course, it's not the only thing that creates stability, but it is important. It keeps the car from swaying excessively while leaning into a horseshoe turn. It keeps

the vehicle manageable as the car roars around dangerous curves with both sets of wheels firmly on the asphalt.

The emotional element of the heritage cord is like an auto's stabilizer bar; the emotions are to act as a stabilizer to the spiritual and social components. Many a relationship has been lost because of unstable emotions, which produced irrational thinking and actions. Spiritual lives crash and burn each day while trying to navigate harsh circumstances thrown at them. Why? Because as children growing up, their emotions at some point were impaired. Now as adults, without the emotional health to give stability, the other two elements are pushed to the breaking point. As a result, either their relationships or spiritual lives (often both) are abandoned.

In chapter 1 we met Sarah, who as a teenager had rejected The heritage of her home. Sarah heaped anger and blame onto her parents, who could not figure out why she was responding so hatefully to everything they tried to do for her. What they did not know was that Sarah's anger was in reaction to an "emotional crash" she had experienced outside the home.

At age eleven, Sarah had been used as the sexual toy of a much older boy. He violated her innocence, took her virginity, and awakened emotions in her that should have been left dormant for years. Then when the boy had had enough thrills, he severed the emotional bond he had created, leaving Sarah to deal with the blunt blow on her mind and soul. She couldn't share it with her parents because she would reveal her "willing" participation.

The rest is predictable. The hurt raised its ugly head in all aspects of her life, from thoughts about God to thoughts about her parents. *God is mean! He passed me by! My parents don't care.*

Put simply, our children will better cope with the inevitable pain of life if we provide them with a strong heritage. All three elements can help them endure any hit—but the stabilizing influence of a solid emotional legacy is critical.

Our emotions—and our children's—can be damaged growing

up by many things, including abuse, mistreatment or unfairness at school, even the taunting of classmates. Often the response is to give up, to trust others no more, to withdraw. As one lady, whom I'll call Sally, told me, "I have been wounded so many times that I learned to shut my emotions down." Sally actually did not shut down her emotions . . . that is virtually impossible. We are fundamentally emotional beings. What she did was begin to wrap her emotions with strands of harsh words, defensive actions, isolation, and a coolness toward anyone who might come around—friend or foe.

### Emotional Cocooning

Sally was wrapping her emotions in a tight cocoon, which effectively shut everyone out who tried to move in close. Her would-be friends were kept at arm's length, and she quickly cooled any warmth they would try to show her. It was no surprise that Sally had no close friendships.

I want you to meet Ginger. Ginger is the daughter of two Christian parents who are heavily involved with their church. Brad, her father, is a forty-year-old man who is a civilian worker for the Air Force and his wife, Anne, is a professional secretary. They both are very much in love with their two children.

As parents, we can help our children obtain an emotional Legacy of security and stability. We provide an environment Conducive for passing on this emotional element when we (1) ask them how things are going (and ask with real concern instead of a clichéd question), (2) listen to them as they talk about their feelings, and (3) model emotional honesty with them—showing our own angers and fears—as we try to handle our feelings in the right way.

Ginger's parents sought to help their daughter before the emotional cocoon wrapped too tightly around her. For them, outside help was vital; sometimes that will be necessary for you as well, as your child is unable, due to an actual or perceived threat, to talk directly to you. Initially her mother, Anne, delayed and denied

Ginger's problem. But Anne soon acknowledged the warning signs and cared enough to pursue the issue.

The counseling director noticed Ginger's abnormal behavior: violent outbursts and spitting at the students and at the teacher. At times, the seven-year-old girl would seem almost crazy with rage. Ginger also began to gain weight quickly. Her mother took her to a doctor and found nothing physically wrong. The behavior persisted even at the threat of a complete expulsion from the school she was attending.

Anne was stumped by her daughter's actions and asked advice from her pastor. When he recommended professional counseling, she delayed the appointment with a counselor, fearing what might be discovered. When she agreed, she was surprised when the counselor later pointed a finger of blame at her. *How could it be my fault?* She wondered. At the time, Anne could not realize that her unwillingness to look at the root cause had contributed to allowing the problem to persist.

Anne and Ginger showed up at my office in a desperation visit. As Anne described her daughter's behavior in detail, I realized Ginger's behavior was not consistent with a normal strong-willed child (although Ginger was definitely strong-willed). She was raised by two loving parents, whose younger son was as normal as American apple pie. As we spoke openly, it became obvious that Ginger was weaving for herself an emotional cocoon. She wanted no close friends, adult or peer. She consistently drove them away with violent behavior. Though only in the second grade, she was approaching one hundred pounds. Strong discipline did not work; it seemed she actually was begging for hard corporal punishment. When Anne would attempt to pray with her daughter, Ginger refused. She loathed church and would not participate in anything of a spiritual nature.

Later I spoke with both parents, describing an emotional cocoon and discussing how to respond to it. "Be prepared for what the

cocoon contains,” I said to Anne and Brad as they both wept. “All the symptoms point to sexual molestation as the cause.”

Ginger’s immature emotions had been severely damaged. Perverted family members sometimes lurk in unsuspecting places. In Ginger’s case it was a trusted uncle. Anne and Brad did their best to guard against it, but failed.

Ginger’s emotional cocoon was the only place for comfort. As a result of her suppressed emotions, her relationships suffered by diverted anger, her spiritual life had been dying at the young age of seven, and she was neglecting herself physically. Ginger was off balance and in need of stabilized emotions. Each strand of the heritage cord had been thinned to become brittle and close to the breaking point.

This is a dangerous posture to find yourself in. Cocoons are dark places where anything can be buried. The trauma of emotional injury seeks out dark, damp spots within the cocoon in which to hide.

In case you think Ginger’s response is unusual, realize that emotional cocooning is a normal human experience. Ginger’s was extreme, of course, but we all like to hide in cocoons to a certain extent. Protective cocoons are particularly tempting when our emotions become fragile. Spend time with any group of children and you can pick out almost immediately the ones who are wearing a protection for their emotions. They only reveal a portion of how they feel in a crowd until they can survey the intent and direction of that group of people. When they feel comfortable, then they allow more of themselves to be exposed. But any time those emotions are stepped on they will withdraw them promptly.

Inside that cocoon we will put things that we feel we must hide. For Ginger, she had within her cocoon the hurt of molestation.

She feared men. She dwelt on the harm, she dreamed of the harm, but she would not share it with anyone. So she evidenced suppression aggression: The suppression of the injury manifested itself in aggressive behavior. Accompanying the aggression

were stages of deep depression and heightened anxiety. All these foul symptoms came from within her cocoon. They manifested themselves because there just wasn't room for all of it inside, so it showed up in the strangest places.

Suppressed emotions are like an inflated beach ball being pushed under the water. Try pushing a beach ball one foot under the water in the swimming pool. It's impossible to keep the ball below the surface for very long. It will escape from under your control and resurface in another area of the pool, no matter how much pressure you exert on it from the top. When we attempt to push an emotional problem below the surface, or when spiritual or social conflict remains unresolved, those problems will slip from under your control and manifest themselves somewhere else. It is then that we will see the problem manifested.

We were witnessing this reality with Ginger. Her suppressed emotional trauma was rearing its ugly head through both spiritual and relational conflict. Fortunately, we were able to trace the symptoms to their root cause and begin working to repair her damaged stabilizer bar. How? By giving her a safe, loving environment in which to deal with her pain.

## Repairing the Stabilizer Bar

I worked with Ginger's parents to help them begin the repair process. Their daughter's emotional stabilizer bar had been weakened. We identified several action points. If your (or your child's) emotions have been suppressed and suppression aggression seems to be showing, I recommend the same action plan.

### 1. Recognize and Divert the Pain

With Ginger's emotions having been so severely damaged, it was necessary to recognize and divert the impact of her emotional pain. Notice that I did not say divert her attention from the pain,

but divert the pain itself onto the stronger elements of her heritage cord—the spiritual and relational. How? First, inject a strong sense of acceptance, demonstrated through relationship with the family.

For Ginger, her mom, dad, and brother worked to create an environment of understanding and safety. In that setting Ginger could recuperate from the trauma that her fragile emotions had endured. Her family watched for the “warning signs” and reacted in love. Whether she was tired, angry, lonely, or confused, they responded with a healthy heaping of relational support. They made every effort during those early days of healing to protect her from any unnecessary emotional traffic. In short, they created a temporary detour so that God could begin repairing the damage.

## 2. Repair the Damage

Second, repair the damage. Only God can truly repair the damage of emotional trauma; yet we can lend a hand by consistently demonstrating and reinforcing what is true. Whether it is divorce, alcoholism, or, like Ginger, sexual abuse, a child hurt by emotional trauma will be bombarded by lies that undermine the ability to see truth clearly. Lies such as:

“You deserved it because you’re a bad girl.”

“You can’t trust anybody, not even Mom or Dad.”

“The molestation (divorce, rejection by a friend, etc.) was your fault.”

“This pain will never end.”

During such accusing times we must stand eye to eye with the truth. After all, God does not heal with deceit; He only heals with truth. To pretend the incident never happened or to sugar coat the problem is not the solution. Sadly, that is exactly how most families deal with an emotional hit.

Fortunately for Ginger, she was allowed to face the truth, and healing has begun. The truths she recognized are truths that should exist in every family. Truths such as:

- She is totally and unconditionally accepted.
- Most people can be trusted, especially Mom and Dad.
- Healing will come.
- The trauma was not her fault.
- No one deserves what she went through. God does not give us such trauma to punish us.
- God does care, and hates what happened to her.

As Ginger and her parents have discovered, when the truth is spoken, lies are broken. And when lies are broken, the emotional stabilizer bar will be repaired.

This same process is vital regardless of the specific source of pain. The need to repair the damage caused by divorce, the death of a loved one, betrayal by a close friend, peer rejection, or any other such “hit” is part of what a healthy emotional legacy will provide. Remember, even if your child has not suffered a major emotional trauma, providing her (or him) with unconditional acceptance, consistent, trustworthy actions, and a proper image of a caring God can give her or him a stable emotional legacy that can sustain her or him when the emotional trauma does come.

### **3. Give Your Child a Place of Rest, Not Rescue**

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of helping our children repair their stabilizer bar is avoiding the desire to rescue them. Everything within us wants to protect them from every pain. But as Ginger’s parents discovered, that is impossible. It is also harmful.

Our natural desire is to rescue our children, protecting them from all emotional pain. But we must be careful. There are some things

that our children must struggle through to mature. Our responsibility is to give them a safe place to learn and a loving environment in which emotional maturity can grow. If we repeatedly shield them from all harm, they will remain weak. We must somehow find the balance between providing a nurturing, safe environment in which to rest from life's struggles and building a wall of protection to escape from them. The former nurtures growth. The latter can create emotional cripples.

Your child's ability to mature emotionally is like a caterpillar maturing into a butterfly. Joe, a friend of mine, took a long walk one day and spotted a cocoon attached to a tree branch. He looked closely and thought a violent confrontation was taking place inside the caterpillar's temporary home. The cocoon was twitching vigorously. Joe wondered if an intruder or a predator was stealing the cocoon for lunch. He got closer still to the cocoon and could see through the translucent covering a tightly packed butterfly struggling wildly to free itself.

Joe watched for a few minutes. Then he felt his heart go out to the poor floundering creature. So he reached out and ripped open the remaining area of the cocoon for the butterfly to be relieved of the writhing. His intentions were good. But his assistance forever crippled the butterfly.

Joe did not know that through the struggle the butterfly was strengthening its wings. As the fragile creature struggled in the difficult process of breaking free, it exercised its furled wings, pumping blood into the two appendages. The butterfly prepares for flight by his furious and wearying process of pumping its wings. Sadly, Joe's efforts had served to doom the very life he intended to save.

We must not rescue our children from their every crisis; part of growing up demands that they learn to deal with crises themselves. But we can and should help them by providing a refuge when they come to us and help if they ask. This is how our children mature into independent, strong adults.

## Leading Indicators for an Emotional Legacy

Clearly, a strong emotional legacy offers a stabilizing influence for our children. We conclude our look at what constitutes a strong legacy by looking at the leading indicators for an emotional legacy. What should we strive for, and what should we avoid in the process of creating an environment of love and security?

### A Strong Emotional Legacy . . .

- Provides a safe environment in which deep emotional roots can grow.
- Fosters confidence through stability.
- Conveys a tone of trusting support.
- Nurtures a strong sense of positive identity.
- Creates a “resting place” for the soul.
- Demonstrates unconditional love.

### A Weak Emotional Legacy . . .

- Breeds insecurity and shallow emotional development.
- Fosters fearfulness through instability.
- Conveys a tone of mistrust, criticism, or apathy.
- Undermines a healthy sense of personal worth.
- Causes inward turmoil.
- Communicates that a person doesn’t measure up.

Such a comparison is not designed to discourage those who had more weak than strong in their legacy. Nor is the intent to drive us to point an accusing finger at our parents. The past is the past and it cannot be changed. It can, however, show us how to create a strong emotional legacy for our children, and show us where we are now in passing a healthy emotional legacy on to our children.

## Evaluating Your Legacy

Were you given a strong or a weak emotional legacy? As with the spiritual legacy evaluation in the previous chapter, take a few minutes to complete the Emotional Legacy Evaluation.

As you answer the following questions, note that a strong emotional legacy is even more rare than a solid spiritual legacy for several reasons. First, there is no “User’s Manual” for parents on how to create an environment which fosters the positive characteristics we’ve identified. Second, even if there were, emotions are tricky things, and we vary from person to person in how we experience the circumstances of life. Two people who grew up in the same family might score their legacy on opposite ends of the spectrum, depending upon the personal dynamics and tendencies involved. Finally, we are all prone toward failure. Intentionally or not, most parents, including yours, will err to one extreme or the other, producing a less than balanced home environment.

The key question is not whether or not your emotional legacy was perfect, but what characteristics you would like to build into the legacy you pass to others. Even if you miss the mark in some ways, setting the right target is an important first step.

By the way, Ginger’s situation has turned around. The path her parents are taking is helping her break free from the cocoon. I am reminded of the Detroit airport plane crash and Cecilia Cichan. For Ginger, I hear once more those beautiful words: She is expected to recover!

## Emotional Legacy Evaluation

Answer each question by circling the number that best reflects the legacy you have received from your parents; then add your total score.

1. When you walked into your house, what was your feeling?

- 1—Dread
- 2—Tension
- 3—Chaos
- 4—Stability
- 5—Calm
- 6—Warmth

2. Which word best describes the tone of your home?

- 1—Hateful
- 2—Angry
- 3—Sad
- 4—Serious
- 5—Relaxed
- 6—Fun

3. What was the message of your family life?

- 1—You are worthless.
- 2—You are a burden.
- 3—You are OK.
- 4—You are respected.
- 5—You are important.
- 6—You are the greatest.

4. Which word best describes the “fragrance” of your home life?

- 1—Repulsive
- 2—Rotten
- 3—Unpleasant

- 4—Sterile
- 5—Fresh
- 6—Sweet

5. Which was most frequent in your home?

- 1—An intense fight
- 2—The silent treatment
- 3—Detached apathy
- 4—A strong disagreement
- 5—A kind word
- 6—An affectionate hug

## Results

Above 24 = Strong emotional legacy

19-24 = Healthy legacy

14-18 = Mixed legacy—good and bad elements

10-13 = Weak emotional legacy

Below 10 = Damaged emotional legacy

YOUR HERITAGE



## Chapter 5

# YOUR SOCIAL LEGACY

**A**s our children were growing up, Gail and I tried to give them the security of knowing that we were setting boundaries for them. They had limits beyond which they could not go, but within those boundaries they had much freedom. We set perimeters for almost every area of their lives. That was our responsibility. One of the most difficult challenges in that process was setting clearly defined borders on relationships. Proper relationships are important both within the family and with friends outside the home.

Your relationships during the childhood years contribute to your social legacy, and nowhere are proper social interaction and relationship demonstrated better than in the home. Here you learned and your own children will learn—lessons about respect, love, courtesy, and involvement.

For instance, when our son Matt was seven, he learned an important lesson about respect from his interactions with his mother and me. My wife is not a “wait till your father gets home” type of mom. She responds now to what is taking place and, as a result, has excellent control of the home. One day, though, Matt thought it was time to challenge “good ol’ Mom,” and Gail was having a very difficult time with his strong will. I heard him say something to his mother, and more than Matt’s words, I heard his sharp tone of disrespect. I decided to put myself in the middle of the confrontation.

“Son, she may be your mom, but she is my wife. I don’t allow anyone to talk to my wife like that, and I won’t allow you to, either.” Immediately his attitude changed. When he realized his mother and I were in this episode together, that we were on the same side—against his rotten attitude—his posture changed. As a matter of fact, he never gave his mother that kind of trouble again. He saw us unified. He realized that to defy one of us was to defy us both, an important point for kids to understand.

A few weeks later my wife and I were in our bedroom having an intense disagreement over some important issue. Each of us felt strongly about our own particular position. I explained to her in a “no uncertain” tone of voice my position. Just then, Matt stuck his head in the doorway, focused his eyes on me, and said playfully, “She may be your wife, but she is my mom and. . . .” I think he got the point—and so did I!

## What Is a Social Legacy?

Perhaps the most difficult component of the legacy cord to grab a hold of is the social. Passing on a strong social legacy is a challenge, because our social nature is a complex mixture of what we do and who we are. Part of the complexity arises from the many variables existing within family relationships; the remainder comes from the social relationships outside the family.

Here’s a definition of the social legacy:

*A social legacy is giving the child the insight and strong social skills for cultivating healthy, stable relationships.*

As they mature, children must learn to relate to family members, friends, peers, teachers, and eventually coworkers, the boss, customers, the banker, the butcher, and the baker. Like it or not, relating well to others is vital to the process of living. And for better or worse, the primary classroom of relational competence

is the home, which is why it is so critical that we understand the importance of passing a solid relational legacy to our children.

If you want to see your children run a successful business, don't just train them in finance or management. Teach them about people. If you want them to become great teachers, don't simply educate them in the three R's. Teach them about people. If you want them to rise above the odds, don't just make them tough. Teach them about people. The most significant skill you can give your child is not academic prowess or business savvy. It is the fine art of relating to people.

The guru of relational competence, Dale Carnegie, put it like this:

Dealing with people is probably the biggest problem you face, especially if you are in business. Yes, and that is also true if you are a housewife, architect or engineer. Research done a few years ago under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching uncovered a most important and significant fact—a fact later confirmed by additional studies made at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. These investigations revealed that even in such technical lines as engineering, about 15 percent of one's financial success is due to one's technical knowledge and about 85 percent is due to skill in human engineering—to personality and the ability to lead people.<sup>1</sup>

Those who learn to relate well to others have an edge in the game of life. Those who don't are doomed to mediocrity at best, and failure at worst.

Clearly, a strong social legacy is a great gift to our children. And the strength of this legacy depends, as do the spiritual and emotional components, on our modeling as parents. Consider your own

parents. If you grew up in a family that avoided conflict at all costs, you may become a doormat. If your parents tried to influence each other through shouting matches and manipulation, as an adult you may find yourself using similar approaches, driving others away. Whatever the pattern may have been, it tends to show up in present and future relationships.

Of course, as adults we can change the pattern. We have the capacity and responsibility to grow beyond the foundation we were given. Still, it is much easier to cultivate healthy relationships today if we saw them modeled yesterday. That is why it is important that we model strong relationships to our children.

## Building Blocks

Many of us never saw good relationships in our own home while growing up, and have little context for becoming a proper model today. What are some of the foundational building blocks to a solid legacy? Although many could be cited here, four factors stand out as vital. Model these before your children and you are on your way to building a solid social legacy.

### 1. Respect

As we saw in chapter 3, Billy had a weak spiritual legacy, which contributed to his anger and foul speech. But his appetite for stealing, brawling, and abusing his wife came directly from his lack of a solid social legacy. Neither his father nor his mother had any desire to build a relationship with their son. They did not respect him . . . they did not respect each other . . . they really did not even respect themselves. As a result, Billy inherited disrespect—disrespect for others, including his own wife, whom he said he loved.

Respect begins within each individual and works its way out to others. If I do not respect myself, I certainly have no reason to respect anyone else. If I do not respect my possessions, I will not respect the

possessions of others. Billy respected nothing and nobody, so his lack of respect led him to take anything belonging to anybody.

There is a reason that God told Adam to “keep and dress” the garden. We develop a healthy respect for that which we put effort into. Adam could sit back after a hard day of work in the garden and appreciate his efforts. That time of reflection created within him a deepening desire to build and not tear down. Adam established a relationship to his property that taught him to appreciate the effort someone else may put into his property.

Billy never learned that principle. He told me, “What I possessed I got without ever trying. I never needed to sit at the end of a day and reflect on what I had accomplished. In fact, I mocked and laughed at those I had duped and ripped off.”

At an early age this element in the social should be taught. A healthy respect for self will help our children to develop their own talents. Respect for property will ward off vandalism and stealing. Respect for their own bodies will help them respect the person of others. Morality moves to the forefront when our children learn their bodies are not to be instruments of pleasure and self-gratification (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

## 2. Responsibility

Respect leads to responsibility, the second factor in creating a social legacy. Respect fosters responsibility. If I respect my right to ownership, then I take on the responsibility of caring for what I own, and I realize and respect the responsibility for what others possess. Conversely, remove respect and the resulting desire to be responsible for what we have, and a different R enters the equation: We begin to scream about “rights.” When we do not treat our surroundings with a healthy respect . . . when we do not want to take on responsibility, then the easiest word to grab for is our “rights.” The breakdown of respect and responsibility has led our nation into a wasteland where everyone is yelling for his rights. We hold marches, we attend rallies,

we scan the legal system for loopholes, we all want our rights.

If anyone had a reason to claim his rights, it was Jim, the young man at Becky's wedding. His father left the family to follow after sensual pleasures while Jim was still very young. His mother reacted by turning inward, becoming consumed with her own loneliness and suffering, leaving Jim to practically raise himself. Nobody in his family would take on the responsibility of passing a heritage down to him. Jim had the "right" to continue a negative, self-centered pattern. After all, life had gypped him out of a healthy family.

Jim could have given up, made wrong choices, thrown responsibility and respect to the wind, and demanded his set of rights, but he didn't. He didn't major on rights; he majored on responsibility and respect.

Today, Jim is a model of responsible manhood for his wife, young son, and others. The cycle has been broken, all because Jim refused to claim his "rights" and accepted his responsibility. Someone accurately observed that if we have the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast, maybe we should erect a "Statue of Responsibility" on the West Coast . . . for without responsibility spanning our nation, liberty means nothing. If you have any doubt, just ask Jim.

We can impart responsibility to our children by teaching them respect for themselves and by assigning them duties within the family. Such responsibilities will give your children a chance to show themselves their value and fill a key role within the family. Duties also allow them to learn to be accountable for their actions.

Of course, such duties do not rule out your children's making wrong choices once in a while. Give them room to make mistakes. After all, it is when we are allowed to make mistakes or to fail that we are taught wisdom, values, and the stewardship of responsibility.

### **3. Love and Acceptance**

As parents, often we need to let our children suffer the consequences of inappropriate behavior. Letting our children face the

consequences can teach them both respect and responsibility. Yet this is often difficult to do because we fail to distinguish unconditional love of the person from conditional acceptance of behavior. Parents should verbalize and demonstrate love to their children with no strings attached. Such love, the kind that says “I love you no matter what,” contributes to strong, healthy Relationships with family members, friends, and coworkers.

What’s the difference between unconditional love of the person and conditional acceptance of behavior? Kurt has clarified this distinction in his book *Responsible Living in an Age of Excuses*:

I love my son unconditionally. No matter what he does throughout his lifetime, I will love him. However, there will be times when I will be unable to accept his behavior. Because I love him, I will discipline wrong actions and attitudes. Yet, my conditional acceptance of his choices will not detract from my unconditional love of his person. As long as I consistently demonstrate both, Kyle will grow up understanding that Dad loves him too much to let him do whatever he wants.<sup>2</sup>

Kurt noted that God deals with His own children in the same manner. He demonstrates unconditional love by providing salvation for all (Romans 5:8), yet He demonstrates conditional acceptance by disciplining sinful behavior (Hebrews 12:6).

Similarly, in our relationships with our children—and in every healthy relationship—we must balance unconditional love with conditional acceptance of behavior. We should expect our children to obey because it is what’s right; and because we love them so fully, we want what is right for them. When they disobey, we should not hold them back from the natural consequence of their wrongful behavior. As Kurt wrote,

Although it is impossible to prevent those we love from making foolish or sinful choices, we can allow them to suffer the consequences of their behavior. When we protect others from the consequences of foolish living, we prevent their maturation, and ensure continued folly. If they burn themselves, however, they may realize the danger of playing with matches. And we may prevent a forest fire.<sup>3</sup>

Part of giving a solid relational legacy includes making sure our kids know they are totally, unconditionally loved. But at the same time, we must be certain they realize that some behaviors will not be accepted. One way to do this is to establish and enforce rules in the context of a loving, supportive relationship.

#### 4. Borders

Setting borders is not just helpful for a strong relationship; it is essential for the social welfare of our children. A Minnesota Crime Commission report offered this assessment of children and delinquency:

Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless. This means that ALL children, not just certain children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist.<sup>4</sup>

The implication of the above finding is this: We as parents have only eighteen years to civilize our children and prepare them

to be released into society as productive citizens. We must avoid the temptation to “cop out” of our responsibilities. Some parents have settled for the instant, immediate, easy way. They shirk their responsibility and become derelict.

We must not renounce our duties as some have, claiming the challenge is too demanding. Instead we must set up social boundaries, even though social borders are not easily taught and we will face resistance. The security and stability of our children are too important.

Social borders should include how our children should relate to God, as well as to authority, their peers, their environment, and their siblings.

Drive toward the mountain range just west of Colorado Springs, and you will soon encounter Pikes Peak. This imposing mountaintop, more than 14,000 feet tall, towers over the city below, and many tourists love to reach the summit, a gateway to the Rocky Mountains.

You can get there several ways: by hiking, biking, taking a cogwheel train, even via an annual road race. Most choose to go via car, from the foothills all the way to the top. But driving Pikes Peak Highway poses one distinct problem: the narrow highway has no protective side-rail. If you accidentally swerve too far right, you are guaranteed a quick trip back to the bottom of the mountain. There is nothing to clearly mark the borders, so the trip is either avoided or undertaken with great care. It is not the most carefree of journeys.

The same applies when it comes to relational borders. Kids need to be instructed in, and have the opportunity to observe, very clear borders. The journey to adulthood is not carefree; it requires continual effort on your part, and there are ruts along the way. But the outcome—a gorgeous view at the top (to be enjoyed by both you and your children)—makes the effort to construct and maintain the borders worthwhile.

Here are some of the questions our children will need to answer on their journey to adulthood. They are excellent questions

for parents to ask their children as well as themselves. They will help you to establish proper boundaries in your home that every member can learn to respect. The right answers to the following questions will come when your spouse and you have set clear and consistent boundaries for your children (and observe them in your own relationship with each other):

- How far can I go in challenging authority before I've crossed the line into disrespect?
- How should I respond when I am treated unfairly?
- How important is my tone of voice when I talk to my parents and others?
- When, if ever, is losing my temper appropriate?
- Where do my rights end and the rights of others begin?
- Is it ever right to fight?
- How should I react when others are treated wrongly?

The list could go on and on. The home is the place such questions should be answered—where the borders should be established. Doing so gives children a protective side-rail, allowing them to enjoy the journey rather than fear every dangerous curve.

### **Rules Within Relationship**

As you set borders, keep one caution in mind. Because they are typically expressed as rules, borders are respected best when they are given with love. Jason, for example, learned right from wrong while growing up. But the moment he became old enough to make his own decisions, he rejected most of the values Mom and Dad had taught. What went wrong?

The primary reason was that rules were given in a relational vacuum. Jason's parents gave the right medicine, but it wasn't served with the spoonful of sugar, namely, strong relationship. For whatever reasons, they were distant. They loved Jason but had a hard time demonstrating it. Honest, open communication was difficult, so it rarely occurred. Jason was not given a forum in which to discuss, ask, question, or challenge Mom and Dad's "list." The inevitable result? Rebellion.

Boundaries must be set for children to grow, feel secure, and have direction. But they must come within a relationship. Rules without compassion and love become harsh taskmasters and can be misunderstood. We must show love.

Adam was given rules, including the prohibition of eating from a certain tree in the Garden, but he was not left to simply obey some cold set of mandates. They were given in the context of relationship with the rule-giver Himself. Similarly, the Israelites were given a set of rules, the Ten Commandments. They were warned about the need to keep them, but, as with Adam, they were not just left to obey some cold, unreachable rules. As God had walked and talked with Adam in the cool of the day, so He dwelt with Israel in a pillar of cloud and fire and spoke through Moses, a personal leader. The thing that God wanted from and for both Adam and the Jewish nation was a relationship. He knew how important that was to their well-being.

Today God desires a relationship with each of us. He did not just open the back window of heaven and holler out some vague instructions as to how we can live this life and prepare for eternity. He sent His Son to show us He knows our frame and is acquainted with our weaknesses, then He sent His Holy Spirit to indwell us, to bear witness with us, that the relationship will continue. We may break the rules, but we can't sever the relationship. It is that relationship with the Creator that makes us, out of love, heed the rules.

You see, rules without a relationship usually lead to rebellion.

If parents have a set of rules that are force-fed to the children, and the rules are not buffered with a family relationship, a relationship of worth where legitimate questions can be discussed, then rebellion is fostered, and rights are demanded. On the other hand, if the same family has the same set of rules that are polished by a warm, unconditional, accepting relationship, respect is fostered and responsibility is accepted.

## The Leading Indicators for a Social Legacy

Once again, a strong social legacy provides the foundation for cultivating healthy, stable relationships. We've touched upon several aspects of this process already. Let's briefly list some of the leading indicators we should be instilling in our own children before evaluating the social legacy we've inherited.

### A Strong Social Legacy . . .

- Sets clear “borders” on how to appropriately treat others.
- Teaches respect for all people.
- Instills a sense of responsibility for the feelings and property of others.
- Balances unconditional love for the person with conditional acceptance of behavior.
- Enforces rules in the context of a loving relationship.
- Models clear and sensitive communication skills.

### A Weak Social Legacy . . .

- Causes confusion regarding what is appropriate treatment and what is not.

- Treats others with disrespect.
- Follows a “survival of the fittest” perspective.
- Accepts wrong behavior in the name of love.
- Is dictatorial, enforcing rules for their own sake.
- Models poor interpersonal communication.

Which of the two extremes is closer to reality for you at this time? More important, which represents what you want to give from this day forward?

## Evaluating Your Legacy

Let’s take a look at the social legacy you were given in order to evaluate the relative strength of this element of your cord. Complete The Social Legacy Evaluation, remembering that, like the evaluations in the two previous chapters, this exercise is designed to help focus your attention on both the good and bad elements of your heritage. No one received a perfect heritage. In fact, if you score well on even one or two of the three, you beat the odds. Sadly, a strong heritage is the exception, not the norm.

Here’s a final reminder as you consider your legacy evaluation scores in chapters 3–5. If one or two of the scores are very weak, don’t give up on your ability to pass along a new, stronger heritage in place of the one you received. Some feel if part of their heritage is weak, they must reject the whole thing.

Remember Sarah? She was given a wonderful spiritual heritage, yet she rejected it. Why? Because her relational legacy was weak, driving her to rebellion. Unable to distinguish one strand of the cord from another, she rejected it all. Bad move on her part!

Frank, on the other hand, was given a terrific relational and emotional legacy, but left them behind. Why? Because his parents failed to give him a spiritual foundation. So, when he became a

Christian as a young adult, he began viewing everything his parents did as substandard. That is unfortunate. His parents did a great job on two aspects of the heritage. Frank should have kept the good and built upon it, rather than reject it all. The point is this: While it is dangerous to overly divide the spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of our heritage, it can also be helpful. It allows us to identify and replace the bad, while keeping and building upon the good. And remember, many of us received some of both.

And even if we didn't, all of us can start afresh today!

### Social Legacy Evaluation

Answer each question by circling the number that best reflects the legacy you have received from your parents; then add your total score.

1. Which words most closely resemble the social tone of your family?  
1—Cruel and abusive  
2—Cutting sarcasm  
3—Chaotic and distant  
4—Non-communicative but stable  
5—Secure with open-communication  
6—Loving and fun
  
2. What was the message of your home life with regard to relationships?  
1—”Step on others to get your way.”  
2—”Hurt them if they hurt you.”  
3—”Demand your rights.”  
4—”Mind your own business.”  
5—”Treat others with respect.”  
6—”Put others before yourself.”

3. How were rules set and enforced in your home?
  - 1–Independent of relationship
  - 2–In reaction to parental stress
  - 3–Dictatorially
  - 4–Inconsistently
  - 5–Out of concern for my well-being
  - 6–In the context of a loving relationship
  
4. Which word best characterizes the tone of communication in your home?
  - 1–Shouting
  - 2–Manipulation
  - 3–Confusing
  - 4–Clear
  - 5–Constructive
  - 6–Courteous
  
5. How did your family deal with wrong behavior?
  - 1–Subtle reinforcement
  - 2–Accepted in the name of love
  - 3–Guilt trip
  - 4–Severe punishment
  - 5–Discussion
  - 6–Loving, firm discipline

## Results

Above 24 = Strong social legacy

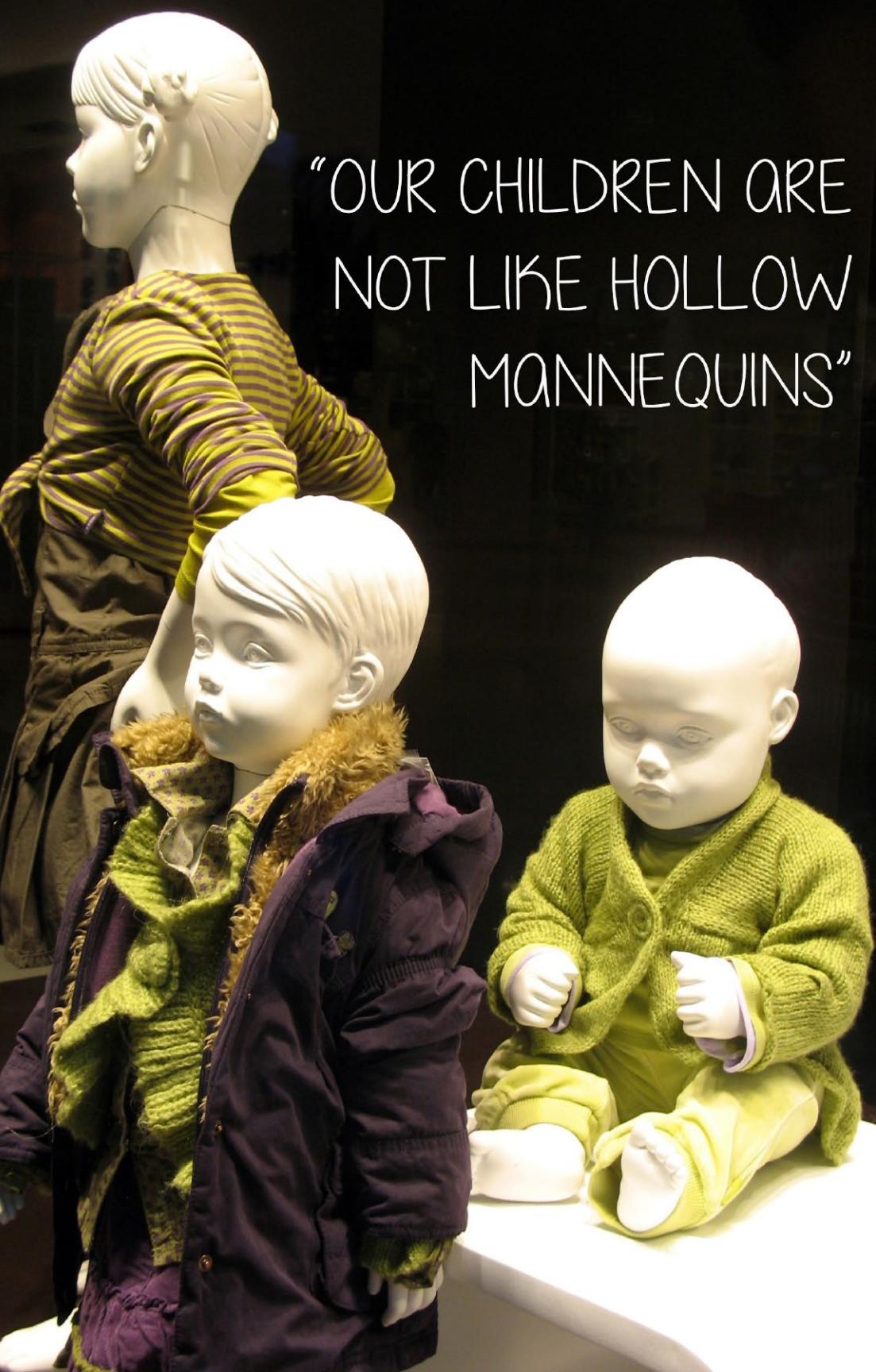
19-24 = Healthy legacy

14-18 = Mixed legacy—good and bad elements

10-13 = Weak social legacy

Below 10 = Damaged social legacy

"OUR CHILDREN ARE  
NOT LIKE HOLLOW  
MANNEQUINS"



## Chapter 6

# CHOOSING WHAT YOU WILL WEAR

Shari, a beautiful young lady in her twenties, did not like the spotlight too much, yet she could perform on stage with the most talented and contribute tons of support. I will never forget her big, beautiful dark eyes, and her toothy, white smile that could win any heart. Shari let me in on a secret one day as we worked together toward the completion of a project for a Christmas drama.

"I'm going to begin searching for my dad," she said.

"What?" I asked in disbelief. "I know your dad. I see him at church once in a while."

"He is my stepdad," Shari said, setting things straight. "My real dad is a tennis star. A very popular star in his day," she remarked, her big eyes flashing. "I'm the product of a 'one-night stand' between him and my mom . . . I have to find him."

My face wore the shock of the information as she unfolded her life in front of me. Near the end of her story, tears as big as pearls dropped from her eyes.

She did begin to search, and when she got close to the star, she was repelled, rejected just as she was at birth. Shari's mom tried to give her daughter as much as she could, but the pressures of trying

to make it on her own caused her to forsake motherhood for her own personal security. Shari suffered through it. She was handed a pile of rags to wear as her heritage. She refused to settle for rags. Instead, at a very early age, she began to sew for herself that beautiful gown. At this very moment, she and her husband are passing that heritage to their three young children.

In the introduction, my wife, Gail, contrasted some shredded rags with an elegant wedding gown and asked, “What were you handed? Were you handed rags? If so, are you content to continue to wear them?” Gail said we can “reject the rags and begin to sew an exquisite gown for our children.” Such a gown can be yours. Or, as a man, you can trade in your rags for a royal robe.

### Putting On Rags

Another option is available, though. Gail noted that we can take off the gown or robe we received from our parents and clothe ourselves in rags. That’s what Sarah did. Though handed a wonderful heritage, she chose to reject it. You may recall her reaction to the wedding ceremony described in chapter 1, mocking this “heritage bunk” as a joke—“pie in the sky.” And yet, no one could have been handed a better opportunity to handle the “passing of the heritage cord” than she. Sarah’s parents taught her truth, gave her love, kept her safe, and did all they could to give her an edge in the game of life. But she rejected it all. Her parents were too devout for her taste. Wearing that sort of “gown” was not in vogue, and she wanted no part of it. Instead she made a sad and silly choice—riches to rags.

If you are like me, Sarah’s story will disturb you. But what we parents must understand is that our children are not hollow mannequins. They are not marionettes on a string that we can pull at will. We must model a strong legacy. We must do our best. But our children are individuals—sinners like us—who are free to choose whether or not they will wear the legacy given.

We are only responsible for the process. God must work directly

## CHOOSING WHAT YOU WILL WEAR

on the child, who is responsible for the final product. Our child may leave a strong heritage behind—and many will.

### Our Choice

But before our children choose, we must. We can either choose to wear the Victorian gown (or royal robe) . . . or the rags. If you were fortunate enough to have been handed a gown or robe, then you must choose to wear it and pass it on. If you were passed rags, you can choose to discard them and begin sewing a gown. Contrary to popular opinion, none of us are complete victims of our past. All of us can break the generational cycle and launch a new day for ourselves and those we love. But how?

### How to Break the Generational Cycle

As you finish this study, it's time to combine the three legacy evaluations into a course of action that can break the generational cycle. A course of action that can change rags to robes and gowns. We recommend three steps: look back, look up, and look ahead.

#### Step One: Looking Back

An honest evaluation of the heritage you were given is the first step toward choosing what you will wear. So take a hard look at your evaluations at the conclusion of chapters 3–5. Review your scores and then complete the Personal Heritage Survey below.

#### Personal Heritage Survey

This exercise is designed to help you identify the relative strength of the heritage you were given. As you answer the following questions, try to identify the good to keep, the bad to discard, and the weak to strengthen.

1. Drawing from the earlier evaluations, rate the general strength of each component of your heritage.

*Spiritual Legacy:*

Strong Healthy Mixed Weak Damaged

*Emotional Legacy:*

Strong Healthy Mixed Weak Damaged

*Social Legacy:*

Strong Healthy Mixed Weak Damaged

2. Starting with the strongest of the three components, list several characteristics that best summarize your leading legacy indicators. (You may want to review the lists in chapters 3, 4, and 5. Although your descriptions may be different, they may give you some general direction.)

*My Spiritual Legacy Good or Bad?*

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*My Emotional Legacy Good or Bad?*

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*My Social Legacy Good or Bad?*

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3. Finally, record any additional thoughts which could describe the heritage you were given. What things do you appreciate about your home life? What things cause the most pain? What things have you taken for granted over the years? What negative issues may be impacting your attitudes and behaviors today? Take a few moments to contemplate these questions.

Now that you have spent some time looking back, you are ready to move on to step two in our process of choosing what you will wear: looking up.

### Step Two: Looking Up

The process of honest evaluation will lead many to the realization, some for the first time, that they have unresolved issues to confront. Someone to forgive. Something to release. Fears to overcome. Bitterness to confess. You may recognize painful truths you should acknowledge or personal weaknesses to admit. Whatever the issues, deal with them once and for all. Don't allow their cruel grip to keep you in bondage to your past.

You can be free. Look up. Seek the Lord for what you need. From God you can find:

- The grace to forgive and be forgiven.
- The strength to admit your weakness, and accept help where needed.

- The faith to accept what is true, even when your emotions betray reality.
- The confidence to give the Lord the reins of your life, especially during those times when you feel out of control.

Talk to the Lord about whatever is on your heritage list. Ask Him to help you deal with whatever you find there. Believe me, He is more than willing to lend a hand!

### **Step Three: Looking Ahead**

Once you have identified the reality of your past and invited the Lord to help you confront any unresolved issues, the changes can begin. It is time to create the pattern for the gown you hope to sew and the robe you plan to wear. The exercise “Designing Your Heritage” will help you to envision the heritage that you are seeking.

As you complete the exercise, remember the purpose is to identify a specific goal. The old expression is true: Those who aim for nothing are sure to hit it. But with the findings of this exercise you have a target you can really shoot for. Completing this exercise is an important step on the road to giving a positive heritage. First, you establish the target; then you envision a new future. And before long, you will be actively engaged in sewing that new garment.

### **Designing Your Heritage**

This exercise is designed to help you identify the heritage You want to give. Drawing upon your responses in the Personal Heritage Survey, list those qualities you seek to give and receive.

First, identity the characteristics of the heritage you would like to give. Don’t allow doubt or insecurity to hold you back. In the blanks below list what you want it to be, not what you think is realistic. (Again, you may find it helpful to reference the leading indicators listed in chapters 3, 4, and 5. But don’t let our suggestions limit your design.)

## CHOOSING WHAT YOU WILL WEAR

Then, next to the characteristics that you intend to give, circle the letter “K” for “keep,” because they were solid aspects of the heritage you were given. Next to those that you consider weak in your own heritage, circle the letter “S” for “strengthen.” Finally, next to those items in your heritage that you want to change in some way to improve, circle the letter “C.” This step will become important later as you build your heritage plan, helping you zero in on those areas requiring the most intentional effort.

The Spiritual Legacy I want to give: Category

K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C

The Emotional Legacy I want to give: Category

K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C

The Social Legacy I want to give: Category

K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C
K S C

## A Wayward Woman

The Jewish woman brushes the sand from her face and tries to lift herself from the ground where the men had dumped her like household garbage. She remembers being with a man who had made an offer for her services. She was suspicious, but because the amount was so substantial (that's the way she made her living) she could survive for another couple of weeks without having to sell herself again. The man is not with her now, and she slowly rubs her hands together, knocking off the final residue of sand. As she does, another wave of nausea settles in the pit of her stomach.

No longer dazed, the wayward woman recognizes that the voices of a shouting mob that had once sounded at a distance actually are close and recognizable. The men standing over her are the same men who burst through the door of her apartment while she was with the suspicious man who had offered that stash of cash. . . . They're the leaders from the local synagogue! By the questions being volleyed back and forth over her, she realizes she has been set up. Her eyes hurriedly analyze the crowd.

*That suspicious man, he isn't anywhere to be found. I'm here alone.*

## Condemnation

"This woman was caught in the very act," someone informs the crowd.

"Yeah, what should happen to her?"

"Moses' law says she should be stoned."

That statement sent chills down her back, and it hushes the crowd.

*This is it*, she says to herself. Death would be a welcome friend compared to the miserable life she had been living.

A shadow falls over her from a man kneeling in the dirt. He's drawing figures in the sand. *What is it he's making with his finger?*

## CHOOSING WHAT YOU WILL WEAR

The silence is torture . . . then with a voice as soft as she has ever heard, He orders, “Whoever is without sin . . . cast the first stone.”

She winces, waiting for the pain of the first rock to hit. The tension is breached by the crunching of sand underneath hurried sandals. She looks around in surprise. The crowd—everyone is leaving.

### Compassion

“Your accusers, lady, where are they?”

For the first time she gathers enough courage to shake off the humiliation, and after a hasty glance around, she answers.

“There are none.”

“Neither do I condemn you,” affirms Jesus. “Go away now . . . sin no more.”

### Remembering Yet Changing

Powerful words, but is it realistic to think she will sin no more? What about all the awful experiences she has that will remind her constantly about her past? When she sets foot outside her hut, the eyes of those who know who she is will be scowling, reminding her of a sordid past.

The thing we must remember is that Jesus’ words to her, “Go away . . . don’t sin anymore,” did not mention forgetting. “Go away and forget” were not His words because He knows forgetting is impossible. We will remember the losses and hurts of our past.

For this woman it may have been rape or abuse. It certainly included the shame and guilt of a one-night stand, and perhaps years of unfaithfulness or even life as a prostitute. Such memories do not quickly disappear.

### Starting Over

Though we know little about this woman,<sup>1</sup> she is not unlike

many of us who have stumbled. Part of our stumbling comes from a poor spiritual, emotional, or social inheritance, part from our own sinful choices.

Remember, this woman was someone's precious child. All her desires began as normal, but somewhere in the wreckage of the dailyness of living, they got twisted. She lost sight of what truly mattered. Perhaps she followed in the footsteps, unknowingly, of a mom who lived the same lifestyle. Maybe she saw a dad who masked himself in every situation, except at home. His "religion" meant nothing to him and resulted in meaning even less to her. Just the sight of the synagogue was repulsive . . . and those hypocrites who prayed every day on the street corner at 9 a.m., 12 p.m., and 3 p.m. propelled her even farther into her contorted attitude.

At an early age, her natural feelings of love were awakened and interlaced with the abnormal . . . so where she found herself did not really seem so wrong . . . her experiences had anesthetized her . . . and so, she was cannon fodder for the religious sect who needed a pawn to trap Jesus.

Or perhaps not. Maybe her story was completely different, the other extreme. She was born in a home thick with love. She was the delight of a mom and the blissful joy of a father who beamed. Her father worked hard in the family business, not to have an impressive home and fields, but to give his child what he could not have.

She may have been educated in a private school . . . and had the finest clothes. She was awakened early on the Sabbath because Mom and Dad were true believers. Synagogue was not just another option; it was significant.

She could have been one who had every occasion to "know God" but simply chose to reject Him and what He represents. Now, take both scenarios . . . stretch your imagination from the first extreme to the second. Where in that expanse do you find yourself?

"Nowhere," you may reply. Perhaps you say you have absolutely nothing in common with her.

Wait a second . . . yes, you do. We all do.

First, whether for good or bad, she was influenced by the heritage she was given. Past generations handed her something, and that something helped mold her life into what she became. The same is true for you and me.

Second, she had the freedom to choose. If her parents handed her rags to wear, she could have rejected them. If they handed her a wedding gown, she could wear it and pass that along. Or, like some, she could reject that gown and settle for rags. We all make choices; we have that freedom. And we can all start over.

## Give and You Will Receive

If you were given a weak heritage, how can you get a strong one? The answer is simple, but profound. You get by giving. In the process of building a solid heritage for others, you also create one for yourself.

The Scriptures, at times, seem paradoxical. It goes against all rational reasoning to give something away so one might keep it. How is it that if one will “let go” he can be kept from falling? Shouldn’t it be “hold tight” and climb as high as you can? Everybody knows that in order to get to the top and be successful one has to step on people’s heads. What is this “consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3)? That’s not sensible. Yet, when tried, it proves true.

Creating a heritage is much the same. It’s humanly logical to think that giving a heritage to your children means just to buy it and keep it in a safety deposit box until the children are at the point in their lives to accept it. But that is not the way it works.

The heritage is not free; it will cost you. But it also pays and pays and pays . . . when done right.

The value of the heritage is not in the keeping but in the giving. It’s not an entitlement, but an inheritance ready to be given away. When you are busy building, giving, and passing it on to future

generations, you may find that you yourself have received a heritage that you did not get from your parents. It is a heritage God has graced you with because of your diligence to your children and obedience to Him.