

Text: [1 Corinthians 9:1-5 \(CEB\)](#)
Date: January 28, 2024
Title: “A Legacy of Grace” – Releasing God’s Blessings, week 1
Theme: We leave our legacy by modeling what it means to share God’s grace out into the world.

1

Today I want to talk about the idea of legacy
About the lessons we’ve learned, and the lessons we teach others
And in particular the examples we set for one another

I asked a question in my Friday email that asked about people’s earliest memories of giving, and who taught them about giving

And the responses had a lot of similarities to them
Over and over, and in various ways, people pointed to their parents

People remembered being in church with their Mom & Dad
And during Sunday school, being given a quarter or a dollar to put in the offering plate
With the understanding that giving was a way of participating in God’s work

I have similar memories, of watching my Mom get the envelope ready for church week by week
And have it sitting where she would see it before she left for worship
For years, I didn’t sign up for on-line giving *specifically* because of that memory

Now, the ways we give have changed a lot – I never have cash anymore
But it speaks to the idea that maybe there’s still value in doing things the “old” way

Because your kids won’t see your bank statement or your credit card statement

To know how you value giving in your life

It puts more of the onus on us to be ready to speak to why we do what we
do
To get our kids involved, say, when we do the Angel Tree at Christmas
Time
Maybe even make that special trip to the ATM to take out some money
To model some of those lessons about giving

2

We learn generosity because someone models it for us
And usually that begins at home with someone we love and respect
If the people in our lives demonstrate a fear and anxiety that there's not
enough
That we can't afford to let anything go into the hands of another
Then it's hard for us to imagine anything different

But if we see someone we admire being willing to let go & trust
Then it makes an impression

My first guitar teacher was someone I admired a whole lot
Guy from Newark, New Jersey, living in the middle of Pennsylvania
I admired him for a lot of reasons, and he taught me a lot of lessons
When I play, I still have some things I do that came right from him
That were part of his particular style

But one thing that made a big impression was the way he trusted me
This was around 1990, and I remember he got a new guitar
A custom Martin acoustic, one of the best-respected guitar makers in the
world, from Nazareth PA
And it was absolutely beautiful
I knew from talking to him when he ordered it how much it cost –
I think it was about \$3000 then
Which is like \$7000 now

The day it arrived – I'll never forget this – he was so excited
Just thrilled, because it took months to get it
And he wanted me to see it
But not just see it – he immediately put it in my hands
Like it was nothing
Now I was 16 and clumsy as could be

I mean, I once dropped my own birthday cake carrying it into the house
So there was no real reason for him to do that
I don't think I would do that

At the time, it was definitely the most expensive guitar I'd ever seen
And he asked me if I wanted to take my lesson on it
I remember strumming a chord or two
And handing it back to him as quickly as possible
I said, "Frank, I can't. I'm too nervous. I'm afraid I'll drop it."
I think he was disappointed that I couldn't receive this gift
I'm pretty sure he insisted that I at least play his old guitar that day
Which was also far nicer than my own

That experience made an impression on me
And I try my best to approach the things I own in that same open-handed
way

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That story, and its ripple effects, are all part of Frank's legacy in the world
In the same way that our parents' lessons are part of their legacy
And the things people see in us become part of ours
The question is: what kind of legacy are we leaving?

We often think about a legacy as tangible things we leave behind
Achievements, accomplishments, the accumulation of money and property
But what if the most important dimension of legacy is what we give away?

And not just the THINGS we give away
But the pieces of ourselves that we share through our example
The lessons we teach that live on in others after we're gone

This part of 2 Corinthians is perhaps the first Christian fundraising letter
Paul's intention is to raise money to help relieve the suffering of Christians
in Jerusalem
Because there was a famine affecting the region in the late 40s, early 50s
AD, and it hit the Jerusalem church hard
And so as he traveled around, he used his letters and his visits to the
churches to make this first church-wide appeal

And he appointed trusted people to make trips to collect the offerings and bring them back to Jerusalem

He pioneered something that's familiar to us today: the idea that people should be encouraged people to set a little aside each week for God's work so that it might accumulate to a more significant gift

And he also appealed to certain churches who exemplified, in his mind, the gift of generosity, holding them up as examples to follow

Corinth was a wealthy area because it was a busy seaport, and Paul had apparently already lifted up the example of Corinthian generosity as he made his appeal elsewhere, including in Macedonia

Paul is pretty blunt in the way that he speaks about this

Maybe more blunt than I would like – when he says, “I don't want to see you embarrassed,” for example

Paul could often be kind of blunt in not-always-helpful-ways

But his aim here is to remind the church at Corinth that God's people are mutually interdependent

That the grace of God was shared with the churches in Corinth and Macedonia only because of the Word that had spread from Jerusalem

And so now, when Jerusalem has need, the Church is called to respond

We receive God's grace so that we might become agents of God's grace

4

Whenever I tell the story of my time at this church

One of the themes – one of the most important legacies of this church

Is one of generosity

Because I've witnessed it over and over again

I remember how, when we were building the Family Life Center

We did a one-day campaign to outfit the kitchen – do you remember that?

I think we raised like \$40,000 over one weekend and were able to install a beautiful, fully equipped commercial kitchen

Or last fall, in the midst of a very challenging year in terms of the budget

Our United Women of Faith – with help from the whole congregation

And a number of partners beyond the congregation

Raised \$12,000 to fund the Bridge of Hope project to help people without
homes get into permanent housing
I'll be honest, I doubted
I thought that the \$12,000 goal was far beyond our reach
I couldn't see how we'd be able to do it
I should have known better

The fact that we met the goal was amazing and will change a family's life in
really significant ways
But it's not really the amount that matters

What I really care about today is the legacy
Meaning the lessons that we teach one another
And especially the generation coming behind us
About pouring the grace that we've been given out into the world
That's what it means to release God's blessings

We can talk about the importance of being able to give
Being able to hold the things we have just a little more loosely
We can testify to that
And theologize about it
But if we want the next generation to learn
The most important thing we can do is just to model it

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Over and over again, you all shared with me that that's what made a
difference in your lives
The example of your parents became the legacy
That lived on into the next generation

My mother modeled it for me
My friend Frank modeled it for me
In the simplest of ways
By handing me something very precious to him

Isn't that the essence of following Jesus?
We are given this very precious gift – the gift of life
And life eternal
And Jesus asks us to share it in service to our fellow human beings

To share something of ourselves – our time, our energy, our resources, our
story – to bless another

Our legacy is in the things we learn to let go of

In pouring out the grace that we have ourselves received

When people tell stories about us, what will our legacy be?

Amen.

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