

**BE A BLESSING, NOT A BURDEN  
GALATIANS 5:22-23; COLOSSIANS 3:18-21; 2 TIMOTHY 1:5-7**

Social media has made it possible to make insulting other people a kind of art form. My research this week revealed these zingers. They're relatively mild and just a sample of what's out there: "I'd give you a nasty look but you've already got one... Scientists say the universe is made up of neutrons, protons and electrons. They forgot to mention morons.... Why is it acceptable for you to be an idiot but not for me to point it out?... You are proof that evolution can go in reverse... You're about as useful as a screen door on a submarine.... I was hoping for a battle of wits but it would be wrong to attack someone who's totally unarmed." Isn't it great how you can get all this useful information at church for free? Seriously, I think you know about the growing dark side of social media when it comes to how we treat other people. When you don't see the person you're insulting, it's just easier to say the most hurtful things imaginable. There's growing evidence that teenagers are struggling with higher rates of depression and even suicide because of how we now treat and relate to one another via social media. Right now in our culture the emphasis is on being a burden, not a blessing, to others.

Finishing well. What you leave behind is your legacy. A legacy is something of value you hand down to the generations of people that come after you. It usually means something that will bless or benefit them. That's what we're exploring together for a few weeks: how to finish your life and my life well; how to leave a godly legacy to those who follow us or come behind us generationally. Regardless of your age, the beginning of a new year is an excellent time to reflect on the end of your life. Last week we reflected on the fact that if you're going to finish well, it will be because you made a decision to be a disciple of Jesus, not just a believer in Jesus. Today, I want us to recognize another aspect of finishing well. It's all about our relationships with other people. It's all about being a blessing, not a burden to other people. I will leave a godly legacy when...

**I DEMONSTRATE OTHER PEOPLE'S INTRINSIC VALUE.**

What does "intrinsic" mean again? It means something you're born with. You didn't achieve it, earn it, deserve it, or merit it. It was simply a given from day one. The Bible teaches every human being by nature possesses intrinsic value and worth to God. So, how on earth do you then demonstrate another person's intrinsic value? It's how you relate to or interact with him or her. Here's a general application. Whenever you decide to treat another person as if he or she is made in the image of God (because he or she is) and as if he or she is someone for whom Jesus died on the cross (because He did), you demonstrate their intrinsic value and worth. You don't treat them on the basis of how they treat you, or what they've done or left undone, or whether they've been deserving or not. When you relate to people like that, you will be a blessing.

Let's look at our first Scripture passage. So, there we have the fruit of the Spirit. These are specific examples of what your life and mine will look like if you're filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus is Lord of your life. Have you ever realized what a powerful list of relational qualities the fruit of the Spirit happen to be? Each of them have a powerful

relational dimension to them. If every person on the planet had these nine qualities controlling his or her life, wars, crime, terrorism, divorce, abuse of any kind, racism, or poverty would be things of the past. You'd have Heaven on Earth! It would be a profound blessing to live on this Earth instead of the burden it so often is.

Let's take a quick snapshot of each fruit so we can understand better how they can be such a profound blessing. Love. It's the greatest fruit of all nine. It's true that the other eight qualities are really just different aspects of love. In other words, love is joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. When it comes to other people, love means to benefit them even if you don't like or approve of their behavior. A well-known Christian was found drunk and passed out on the sidewalk. It was an embarrassing situation that threatened to ruin this man's reputation. Once he heard of it, another Christian who happened to be very well off sent his chauffeured limousine to pick the man up while his wife prepared the best room in their beautiful home. The child of this gracious couple watched with wide-eyed amazement as his mother turned down the covers on the exquisite, antique four poster bed. "But, Mom, he's drunk. He might get sick and throw up all over everything." Mom said, "I know. But his man has slipped and fallen. When he comes to, he'll be so ashamed. He will need all the loving encouragement we can give him." Love always blesses people.

Joy. This is the Spirit-given ability to look at life with godly positivity. It's not the result of everything going well for you. Instead, it's the result of a conscious, real relationship with Jesus that fills you with constant gratitude. Believe me, if you have Spirit-filled joy, you will be a blessing to others, not a burden. Other people will enjoy being around and with you. Peace. Relationally, it means you're a peaceful person to be around. No sharp edges. You aren't all about demanding your rights at every turn. You're not an argument waiting to happen. What a blessing to live and be around a peaceful person! Patience. The Greek word used there described the Roman army on occasion. It meant the ability to persist, endure, and conquer your enemy ultimately. In Scripture, it often refers to how we should treat difficult people in our lives. Who is God using in your life today to teach you patience? That person's face just came to mind! Patience is the ability to bear with, endure, and even show grace and kindness to that person. Can you appreciate how living like that will make you a blessing, not a burden?

Kindness and goodness are closely related. Goodness is all about doing what's right in the right way. You find ways to do good things and act in good ways. It means you have integrity even in the small things. One day a corporate executive took one of his employees to lunch so he could offer him a major promotion. But as they were going down the cafeteria line, the executive noticed his young friend hid a pad of butter under his plate so he wouldn't have to pay for it. The two of them had an enjoyable lunch, but the promotion was never offered. The executive concluded that if he couldn't trust this man's integrity in a small matter, he couldn't trust him with a major part of the corporation. Kindness is attitudes and actions that make you attractive and approachable to others. The same word in the Greek language was used to describe a fine, mature wine: sweet, mellow wine. When the Holy Spirit gets a hold of you, you become mellow and sweet, too. This kind of person always finds a way to be merciful

and compassionate. Faith or faithfulness. Other people find you to be reliable and dependable. You follow through and do what you say you will do. If you treat other people with kindness, goodness, and faithfulness, you'll be a blessing, not a burden.

Gentleness. It literally means power and strength under control. With other people, it's demonstrated in a considerate, courteous spirit at all times. These are the people you want correcting you when you need it because they know how to rebuke and get you straightened out very carefully and thoughtfully. Self-control. It means the Holy Spirit has mastery or control over all of your actions and attitudes so much so that you live a balanced life. When you eat, it's in moderation. If you drink alcohol, you stay sober. Sex only happens within the context of marriage. When you get angry, you don't blow people up. When it comes to what you wear, it's modest. Can you appreciate how gentleness and self-control will make you a blessing, not a burden to others?

C.S. Lewis has left us with many quotable observations. Here's one of my favorites. "It is a serious thing... to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." What a great legacy you will leave if you treat other people according to their intrinsic value! Leaving a legacy always brings us back to those closest to us, however. It's always on those people that we have the greatest impact. With that in mind, I will leave a godly legacy when...

## **I DO FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS GOD'S WAY.**

Let's look at our next Bible passage together. In Paul's day, women were second class citizens, to say the least. All the privileges and rights belonged to the husband; all wives had were duties. Paul had the audacity to suggest that Christian husbands and wives had mutual privileges and obligations. What he wrote here sounds pretty tame and obvious to us twenty centuries later, but it sounded like radical feminism in his own day and time.

What kind of a legacy is a Christian husband supposed to leave? "Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly." (Col. 3:19 NLT) Love your wife with God's kind of love. It takes the initiative. It doesn't wait to feel loving before it expresses itself. It's never harsh, rude, or arrogant. It's like Jesus' love for the Church. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. He came as an example, being humble, never threatening, or lording it over us. He came sacrificially, even dying on the cross for the object of His love. Husband, understand your primary calling is to serve not to dominate or control your wife. Your role is all about providing for your wife not exerting power over her. Your job is to provide the atmosphere and conditions where your wife can discover and grow into the person Jesus has shaped her to be. You're not threatened by her

achievements, you rejoice in her successes, and you bear with her weaknesses. Did you notice that little warning against being harsh? Husband, God keeps a tender, approachable, open heart toward you at all times. Offer that to your wife every minute of every day. Is that how you love your wife? If so, you will be a blessing to her, not a burden. That will be a big part of your legacy.

Now, what about wives? “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.” (Col 3:18 NLT) I realize that word “submit” there tends to raise the blood pressure of some in our rights-demanding and power-seeking culture. May I suggest, however, if a husband loves his wife God’s way, his wife will have little trouble practicing biblical submission. Why? Biblical submission has nothing to do with some kind of demeaning, humiliating, mindless groveling in the mud mentality. Biblical submission simply recognizes that in some human relationships God has established a kind of hierarchy that’s intended to benefit everyone involved.

The word for “submit” here meant “to arrange under rank” in the Greek language. Think of the military. A general isn’t intrinsically better than a colonel. He (or she) just has a higher level of responsibility. As I read the Bible, God lays at the feet of the husband and the father in a Christian home the ultimate responsibility for the spiritual, emotional, financial, relational, and physical welfare of the wife and the children. Wives, God has established a pattern in marriage and for marriage that you need to respect and follow just like husbands are called to do. Why resist something God never set up to be unfair or demeaning to you? When submission is done God’s way, everyone wins, everyone prospers, everyone benefits. If you relate to your husband God’s way, you will be a blessing to him, not a burden. That will be a big part of your legacy.

Even when both people are committed followers of Jesus, marriage can demand lots of hard work over many years. When both a husband and a wife are first submitting to Jesus in their personal lives, it will be far easier to submit to and serve one another. But when that most fundamental submission is missing – submission to the Lordship of Jesus – conflict and division is going to be prevalent. A man was driving down a country road when he came to a very narrow bridge. In front of the bridge, a sign was posted: YIELD. Nobody else was approaching the bridge from the other direction, so he continued over it and on to his destination. On the way back later that day, he came to the same one lane bridge, but now from the other direction. To his surprise, he saw another YIELD sign posted on that side of the bridge. Yield signs had been placed at both ends of the bridge. Drivers from both directions were requested to give the other the right of way. It was a reasonable way to prevent a head-on collision. If husbands and wives can learn to do marriage God’s way - yielding to one another - they will be a blessing to each other, not a burden. That will be a big part of your legacy.

What kind of a legacy are parents supposed to leave behind them? “Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.” (Col. 3:21 NLT) Children were regarded very differently in Paul’s culture than in our own. All the rights and privileges belonged to fathers. So, once again, Paul’s words sound pretty mundane and obvious to us. But in his day, to suggest that children had rights and that both fathers

and children had mutual obligations to one another were radical concepts. No, I don't believe Paul was overlooking mothers here. It's just that, culturally, fathers were the dominant parent at that time. It's fair to say Paul's words now today apply equally to mothers and fathers. At the same time, remember God expects fathers then and now to be fully on board as parents. Our culture tends to see mothers as the primary parent. The Bible doesn't support such a view. At the very least, dads should be just as involved in the parenting task as moms.

So what aggravates, angers, or embitters a child? What discourages him or her for no good reason? Inconsistency is something that will drive your kids nuts. They never know what kind of mom or dad is going to show up. Or when you make a habit of being critical, you end up with frustrated kids. Or when you refuse to control your own emotions and end up being irritable and grouchy a lot of the time. Harshness can embitter a child. Every child ought to have stamped on his or her body, "Fragile: Handle with Care." Sure, sometimes a very "in your face" rebuke needs to be given, but a godly rebuke builds up a child and doesn't tear him or her down. Parents are to be servant leaders in the home: being present physically and emotionally, meeting needs, being alert to a child's tendency to mess up and giving appropriate correction. What does it say about the dad whose son said to him? "Dad, let's play darts. I'll throw them and you say, 'Wonderful!'" That dad understood the value of affirming his son in a competitive, win-lose world that attacks rather than builds a healthy self-confidence. Above all and in all, godly parenting means always praying with and for your kids.

Sometimes, frustration can happen because your parenting style is needlessly negative. I appreciated an insight from pastor and author, Chuck Swindoll. When his kids were small, one of them asked him, "Can we sleep outside tonight?" Normally, Chuck would have just said no automatically. There were issues with mosquitoes, accessing the bathroom, or the possibility of rain. Chuck just decided to say, "Yes!" instead. Sleeping outside became fine and dandy at the Swindoll home. Chuck got to the place that he preferred the kids being out there! Another request was, "Can we sleep in our clothes?" Well, why not? As his wife observed, once you get four children into bed, you're so grateful they're in bed that you could care less what they're wearing! "Can we have a party?" Sure! "How about a two-day party?" Have at it! The kids were taught, of course, that the privilege of having a party included the responsibility of cleaning up after it which the kids did. He said gradually the atmosphere in his home became more and more fun. Isn't that what family living is all about: having fun in a positive, God-honoring way? Mom and Dad, if you do home and family relationships like that, you will be a blessing to your kids, not a burden. What a legacy! Let's finish well by being a blessing, not a burden to other people. But perhaps the greatest legacy of all is when...

### **I PASS ON AUTHENTIC FAITH IN JESUS.**

Let's consider a final Scripture passage together. Paul wrote this letter to his young associate and friend in ministry, Timothy. Verse 5 there is a great tribute to the legacy of Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. Apparently they were the first members of Timothy's family to become followers of Jesus. Paul reminded his young

friend of the godly heritage he'd received from his family of origin. His mother and grandmother gave Timothy the gift of an authentic faith. "I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you." (2 Tim. 1:5 NLT) There we have underlined what the Bible teaches and what 2,000 years of Christian history has proved beyond a shadow of any doubt. Godly parents are the most effective evangelists and disciplers their children will ever encounter. The role of this church is to help you, Mom and Dad, but never to take your place as your child's first, primary, and most important spiritual guides. Don't ever shove off onto any church what is your responsibility and potentially your greatest legacy. God will not hold this church or me accountable for your children's faith. He will hold you accountable, Mom and Dad, for at least making every effort to pass it on to your kids.

A genuine, sincere, authentic faith. Lois and Eunice did more than just believe certain things about Jesus. They were disciples of Jesus, not just believers. They possessed a daily relationship with Jesus that was real and observable. They modeled that in front of Timothy as he grew up. And then somehow in a way only the Holy Spirit knows exactly how to do, their modeling of an authentic faith became a gift of authentic faith to Timothy. Whatever they had, he got it. Whatever was true of them spiritually became true for him, too. This church, a church school class, a youth group, Christian friends can deposit much of spiritual value into your child's heart and mind. But, Mom and Dad, they can't model or live out authentic living in Jesus day in and day out in your home. That may well be the greatest legacy you can leave your kids.

Of course, you can't impose your faith on your children. Of course, you can't force them to become devoted followers of Jesus. There are godly parents out there who did everything right when it came to their kids, and the kids still ended up rejecting Jesus. Sadly, it happens. But what every godly parent can do is pass on to your kids an authentic faith. It's like passing the baton in a relay race. You pass the baton of an authentic faith on to your children. If they drop the baton, it's on them. But you need to pass the baton! Do you read the Bible with your kids? Do you pray with your kids? Do you help your kids look at any and all life situations from God's perspective? Do they see you following biblical values in your everyday life? Do you demonstrate the importance and value of the church by your own personal involvement and commitment? Are you a disciple of Jesus, or just a believer in Jesus? Pass the baton!

I've got to tell you, over the years, I've been saddened by some Christian parents' tendency to let their kids decide if they want to go to church school classes, or be involved in youth ministry, or even come to the worship service. Apparently, the worst thing possible is "forcing religion on your kids." Nonsense! The best thing you can ever do is everything possible to shape your kids biblically and spiritually. I wonder, do you allow going to school to be optional for them? Is forcing education on your kids abusive? So what's more important eternally – an education or knowing who God is and how to relate to Him? I wish we had more Christian parents today who were willing to stand up and say like Joshua, "But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD." (Jos. 24:15 NLT) Case closed. No discussion. If you want a paraphrase of that

Scripture for today, it might sound like this, “Kids, as long as you live under our roof, eat our food, and depend on us for just about everything, you will be fully involved in every spiritual activity we deem beneficial for you including church. If that offends you, get over it! As long as you’re in this family, we will serve the Lord whether you like it or not.” Sure, your kids might argue, moan, groan and throw a fit today, but your resolve to pass on your authentic faith will be the greatest legacy you can leave them. You will have provided them the greatest blessing one human being can give to another.

Os Guinness is a Christian author and leader. He grew up in a China that had been exploited by other nations, then by World War II, and then a brutal civil war. He lived in Nanjing, which was then China’s capital. There were few good schools to attend, so at the age of five he was sent by his parents to a boarding school in Shanghai. It was the first time in his life he’d been away from his parents and on his own. So, to give him a constant reminder of the Christian faith at the center of his family’s life, Guinness’ father found two small, smooth, flat stones and painted on them his life motto and that of his wife. For many years those two little stones stayed in the pockets of Guinness’ gray flannel shorts which were the uniform of most English schoolboys in those days. In his right-hand pocket was his father’s motto, “Found Faithful,” and in his left-hand pocket was his mother’s, “Please Him.” Many years have passed since then, and both of those little painted stones were lost in the chaos of escaping from China when Mao Zedong and the People’s Army eventually took over the country. But Guinness has never forgotten the lesson of the little stones. Followers of Jesus are called to be “found faithful” and to “please Him,” always, everywhere and in spite of everyone and everything.

In my home growing up, it was a framed picture on the wall with a statement I still recall, “Only one life ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” My mom and dad passed the baton of an authentic faith to my sister and me. They’re both in Heaven now, but rarely a day goes by that I don’t thank God for them. Finish well. Leave a godly legacy. Be a blessing, not a burden.