

Introduction: The difference between a legacy & a heritage

There is not much difference between a legacy and a heritage. Both words apply to something passed down from generation to generation and usually apply to material possessions, like money or jewelry. The only difference I could find between these two words, however, is that a “heritage” is something possessed as a result of one’s natural situation or birth.

Today being “Heritage Sunday” it seems fitting to discuss our heritage and our legacy.

In regards to our Presbyterian heritage, I have to admit, I am new to the fold: Born in Seattle, Washington, to United Methodist, German/Dutch parents the closest I ever got to a Presbyterian was the sentence, “A Methodist preacher, Presbyterian pastor and a Roman Catholic priest were playing golf and....”

Natural birthday’s vs Spiritual birthday’s

By all “natural” accounts, I have little natural connection to the Presbyterian-Scottish heritage that we celebrate today. So clearly, there must be something greater that brings us together as brother and sisters than our natural birth. After all, I doubt many of our natural births connect straight to John Calvin in Geneva or John Knox in Scotland. Therefore it must be by another birth we are connected—our spiritual birth.

You see, Christians have two birthdays—our biological birthday which is listed on our birth certificates and some of us admit to—and our spiritual birthdays. This is the day we stood up out of the mire of our

sinfulness and said, “Wait a minute—there is a God, and Jesus Christ IS his son—and I want him to be Lord of my life.”

Karl Barth, the reformed theologian describes it as the moment that we “accept that we are accepted” by God.

Just as we do not remember our own biological birth and had little to do with the experience, other than being at the right place at the right time, so it is with our spiritual birth. We may not remember it and we did nothing to possess it but

God remembers it; and did the work for us.

So now we can lay claim to our spiritual heritage and create a legacy to share with other brothers and sisters in the faith.

A hand forward & a Hand Back

In order to create a legacy though, we need a hand behind and a hand in front. A hand behind links us to our heritage of the past, while a hand in front reaches out to the future.

Ed Bastion, President of Delta Airlines said in a panel discussion, that the way we thank our mentors [is by] mentoring the next generation.”

That is a hand behind and a hand in front approach to life.

A hand behind and a hand in front is the difference between a job and a calling.

A job has both hands extended one way:

Either behind, begrudgingly saying: “Fine. I will do it because it is expected of me!”

or both hands in front saying, “Gimme more to do so I can rise faster, prove I am better and get that promotion so I can be farther ahead than the next person.”

A job is based on responsibility that will get you somewhere—either out of the expectation loop or into a better situation.

A calling on the other hand, is a responsibility given to a person in which they respond out of gratitude.

Calling vs Job

In responding to a calling you are reaching back to God, through generations of spiritual leadership given to you in scripture, practice and mentoring relationships. And you use these tools not to “get a head” in your own desires, but for the betterment of your present community and future generations.

Any child can tell you the difference between a teacher that has a job or one that has a calling by the way he or she describes them.

The teacher with a job makes sure that the information they teach is understood so the child can progress to the next grade.

A teacher with a calling however invites the child into the passion of the subject—not only to understand it but to care about it. It is not just facts, figures and scribbles on a page to be digested and spit up on a test page—it is an educational experience that becomes part of our story; part of our heritage and, if we pass it along with the passion of a calling—it will become part of our legacy as well.

The author of Hebrews understood the meaning of heritage as being our legacy when he encourages the readers to “share in the heavenly calling.”

We do not go to church, teach Sunday school or participate in Circles and Men’s luncheons because it is our job! NO! We participate in them because we want to encourage others to see the value in those times of fellowship and worship.

The meaning of “Today”

“Encourage one another daily” the author writes, “as long as it is Today....” Do you know how long “today” is?

I love the answers children give to these questions because they are so very literal. Ask any literal-minded four year old what today is and he or she will probably tell you that today is “right now.” But, if you ask him or her what tomorrow is they might respond with “well, tomorrow is today, only the next day.”

Today is a present timeframe. It is like God naming Himself “Yahweh”—“I am who I am.” There is no yesterday or tomorrow in that name—it is a constant, present and active name. The God of our heritage is also the God of our legacy if we chose to pass God to the next generation of believers.

This Yahweh is the God our parents, grandparents and spiritual mentors taught us about and the same God we teach to our children and grandchildren.

Today, just like God, is always present.

Being a “Today thinker” instead of a “Tomorrow thinker”

David was a “Today” thinker. He knew he lived, worshiped and was called by a “Today” God.

One day he was looking around and he realized that he had this awesome palace of great cedar and riches while God was camped out in a tent...made of goat hair.

Being the “Today” thinker that he was, he figured he should rectify the situation and build God a temple.

When he told his plan to Nathan the prophet and his chief aid, Nathan essentially shrugged his shoulders and said, “Sounds good. Go for it!” But God had other plans.

That night in a dream God told Nathan to pass along the word that, he didn’t need a temple right now. Instead he had other plans for David to accomplish. The temple would only be built, “when your days are over and you rest with your fathers.”

The problem with “Tomorrow” thinking

See, the problem is not that we are like David—thinking about what could be done today— the problem is that we are “Tomorrow” thinkers. We sit in our comfy palaces and say “Tomorrow God will raise someone up to build the temple.”

The problem with “Tomorrow” thinking is that it assumes that “Today” has ended----- that our days are over and we are resting with our fathers.

Being “Tomorrow” thinkers does not honor the calling to fix our sights on Jesus, and encourage each other today with our gifts and talents.

Being “Tomorrow” thinkers stops us from gifting the next generation of believers with a legacy of discipleship and a heritage of faith.

You see, counter to what it sounds like, “Tomorrow thinking” is not preparing for the future—it is living in the past with the assumption that tomorrow will come and along with it someone else to fill the calling which we have been given.

The warning against hard-heartedness

To be “Tomorrow thinkers” is to fall into the trap the author of Hebrews and the Holy Spirit warn us against:

“Do not harden your hearts...” because hard hearts led to people who do nothing.

The story of the lighthouse

I once heard of a group of light house operators off the coast of Washington who exemplify “Tomorrow thinking”. They were a rag-tagged group of people who grew up in the village that surrounded this sorry-looking lighthouse. They knew, however, that the lighthouse lamp and their rescue efforts were important—the cove into port was full of rocks and dangerous debris and it was important that the captains had adequate light to find their way.

Well, this group one day decided it was time to pool their efforts and create a lighthouse that the town could be proud of. They fundraised and gathered enough money to paint the lighthouse. Well, with a new coat of paint, it looked pretty good, so they decided it was time to focus on the inside. Committee teams were formed, interior decorators were consulted....They decided, if they *did* need to send a rescue boat out, they

would bring those afloat in the sea into the lighthouse to warm up and get medical care...they wanted it to be a warm, welcoming place for the lost sailors.

So, they invested in paint for the inside, new blankets, better seating, a coffee-bar—you get the picture. Well, by now the town had caught news of what this small group of people was doing and they wanted to join in the fun so the group started to hold “gatherings” at the lighthouse. They invited people to come, relax, hang out and enjoy their lighthouse. To this day it is a great place to catch up with old friends, grab a great cup of coffee and watch the tide roll in.

The only problem is that the light has gone out of the lighthouse and a lot of sailors drown in that cove.

The only problem is that they have forgotten to be the rescue light to a cove full for dark and dangerous water.

Conclusion of hard-heartedness

Harden hearts lead to inaction...which leads to our heritage becoming our history.

History vs a Legacy

The difference between our heritage becoming our legacy or our history is a matter of progression. If our heritage is to become legacy—which is what we want—we must pass it along to the next generation, because a legacy continues—it keeps giving. A history stops in the past.

If we want to leave a legacy and not a history we need to heed the Holy Spirit’s warning. The only “exemption” of “Today thinking” is death—and God be praised—I don’t see a single dead body among us!

Opportunity vs “have to”: Calling vs Job

Dave Diller taught me an excellent word last year in PYC. The word is “opportunity.” We would use it instead of “have to”—as in “You have the opportunity to pray” not “you have to pray.”

Do you hear the difference? It’s the difference between a job—something you “have to do” and a calling, which is an “opportunity” to do something great.

Peter Drucker’s 1/3

About two weeks ago I went to a telecast of a leadership conference held at Cedarville University. One of the speakers was Jim Collins, a business writer who has penned such best-sellers as Good to Great and co-authored Built to Last. He spoke of a time early in his career when he interviewed Peter Drucker, one of the great minds in business leadership.

Considered by many to be the top management thinker of his time, Peter Drucker authored 39 books, was a regular columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, and wrote for *Harvard Business Journal*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Economist*. Being the prolific writer that he was, Jim Collins asked him, “What book, which you have authored, makes you the most proud?”

Peter Drucker looked at him, waved his hand as if to wave off the question because he had questions of his own, he replied, “The next one!” and then launched into his own questions to Jim Collins.

Years went by and in 2005 at the age of 95, Peter Drucker passed away. Jim Collins had the honor of visiting the university where Professor Drucker taught until the age of 92 and he came across a chronological ordering of Peter Drucker’s books. Thinking back to the conversation he had

had with Drucker, Collins asked the librarian which book he would have been writing about the age of 65. The librarian looked at the books and pulled one down from the shelf. It was approximately 1/3 into the literary timeline.

At 65, he was only a third of the way through his timeline of published works. Peter Drucker was writing not just books for the time, he was writing a legacy for the business community.

We have no excuse to be “tomorrow” thinkers when we are surrounded by a great cloud of “Today” witnesses.

How to be “Today thinkers”

As long as we keep encouraging one another with the truth of what God is doing in our lives and what he can do in the lives of others--also called evangelism—we can stand with the author of Hebrews at the end of our days and know that we have been faithful to our calling to leave a legacy. We will know that we came to share in Christ with our children, youth and peers. We stopped relying on tomorrow and started living for God today!

Really, it comes down to a couple of questions we need to ask ourselves:

Where are you being called to reach back and remember what it was like to have someone share their faith heritage with you?

Can you see them; can you remember how it felt?

(Pause)

Now, where are you being called to reach forward and share that with another person to create a legacy? (Pause)

At 65 Professor Drucker was only a 1/3 of the way through his legacy—where will your legacy’s 1/3 be? Amen.