

Funeral : Writing Legacy Letters

The ultimate statistic is that 1 out of 1 dies! Nothing gets our attention like death! Coming face to face with your death puts life into proper perspective. Suddenly, the things that once clamored for your attention evaporate and the vital priorities of life rise to the surface. God is calling you to walk with Him on both sides of the grave. **A MAN IS SINCERELY READY TO LIVE WHEN HE IS TRULY PREPARED TO DIE.** Only when a man is ready to die (unresponsive to his greeds) will he ever live to serve the needs of others. That is why Jesus so boldly announced, *“Truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* (John 12:24) *“I have come to give life and to give it abundantly.”* (John 10:10)



God is moving men to get their eyes off of their transient *positions*, temporary *possessions*, fleeting *pleasures*, and diminishing *productivity* in order to focus on an eternal **PERSON**. Everyday the Lord seeks to get your attention away from the temporary and onto the eternal. This move is so vitally strategic and so eternally significant that if you do not ask the following question and apply the answer you will never become all that God intended you to be. **How much of your life savings would you use to decorate your room at Motel 6?** (Jesus is the only one who really WILL ‘keep the light on’ for you!) Why will the answer to this question determine the focus of your life and how you will live this year? How much of your God given resources (time, treasures, talents) are you using to decorate and fix up your motel room? It is our sincere hope that this life assignment will help you invest more of your life resources in eternal relationships and responsibilities which will outlast you, rather than spending your life on temporal things.

*Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.
You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then
vanishes away.* James 4:14

*...be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise,
making the most of your time...* Ephesians 5:15,16

Death and life are in the power of the tongue...
Proverbs 18:21

*Pleasant word are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and
healing to the bones.* Proverbs 16:24

The scriptures are very clear that our time on this earth is short in comparison with eternity. Not only has God ordained both the beginning and end of our days, but He longs to walk with us through the “dash” that represents this life! Navigating this life with a view towards our death inspires us to live well this short life God has given us.

“He has also set eternity in their heart...” Eccl 3:11

One practical way to begin with the end in mind is to write a “legacy letter” to our immediate family members (i.e. spouse, children, siblings, parents, etc.) to be opened upon our death.



Some of the advantages of this exercise are:

1. It provides an opportunity to express “life words” even after your death that will continue to impact the people you love long after you are gone. (Prov 18:21)
2. It provides a focused way to think about the people God has placed in your life. Since you are not dead yet, you will gain a new appreciation for each of these people. Perhaps God will light in you to let Him transform some of the ways you relate before it is too late!
3. It brings some specific things to mind that you may want to communicate to these individuals NOW! **J** (If you want to do this formally, see the life assignment entitled, *Family – Giving a Blessing* at www.focusedliving.com)

What should I Communicate?

Prayerfully ask God to help you know what you should emphasize in your letter. The apostle Paul models this when he writes: Pray that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak...let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Colossians 4:4,6

What you will write about will be personal and will take into account the relationship you have with your spouse or child. Highlight what the person means to you and include personal insights into your relationship with him or her. This is a great forum for encouragement, instilling values and casting vision. This is also an appropriate venue to point your child or spouse back to the character of God.



Naturally, some of the content in your letter to your child will vary based on your child's season of life, gender, and spiritual state. For instance, if your child has not yet trusted Christ, it would be appropriate to clearly share the Gospel so the child hears it directly from the heart of a father. If a child is a teenager, it would be appropriate to speak of future life seasons, like marriage or parenting. The bottom line is that there is no real formula for the letter! Just write from the heart and don't leave big things unsaid.

To jump start you, we have included several examples below. Please read through them to get a sense of what you would want to emphasize. Then, get out your box of tissues and start writing!

Joshua's legacy words to the leaders of Israel

Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years, that Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders and their heads and their judges and their officers, and said to them... *"Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed."* Josh 23:1,2,14

King David's legacy words to his son, Solomon

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever... Then David said to his son Solomon, *"Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you..."* Then he died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor; and his son Solomon reigned in his place. 1Chronicles 28:9, 20; 29:28

Example 1: To a Teenage Daughter

Dear Susan, Sweetie, I wanted to write this letter to you as one more way I can show my love for you. I also write this to encourage you to keep growing in and loving the Lord Whom I am with now in eternal splendor. Ever since you were born it has been my highest privilege to be your Dad. Every day while I was alive I thanked God for giving you to me as a gift, and what a precious gift you are! I loved every moment of being around you and watching you mature into a beautiful and mature woman of God.

Though I am with the Lord as you read this letter, I want you to know that I am mindful of your great heart for Him, your desire to obey Him in every area of life, your compassionate love for the people He puts around you, and your vision to serve Him whole heartedly someday as a wife and mother in missions. Honey, I am so proud of you and the godly woman you have become, and I trust that you will continue to allow Jesus, and Jesus only, to be the greatest prior-ity of your life. You have indeed become a WOW (Walk On Water) Woman!

As you continue to live your life for Him, always remember our tickle fights, running together, playing soccer, holding hands at the mall, learning to drive, hundreds of back rubs, water skiing, praying together before your first date, family vacations, talking into the wee hours of the morning, prayer walks, throwing the ball, choosing a college, graduations, and just being buddies.

Susan, there have been two passages of Scripture that have burned in my heart and mind because of my love for you which I want to give you. The first one is all of Psalm 139, especially verse 17, which says, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" Oh Susan, take the truth of these words to heart. Let your heart and mind be consumed with our Lord's gracious and positive thoughts about you, for you are indeed a very precious part of His creation. Let your security be grounded in God's love for you and His thoughts about you. The second passage is my life verse found in Exodus 33:11 which says, "Thus the Lord would speak to Moses face to face just as a man speaks to his friend." Honey, all I can say is that the Lord desires to be with you and speak with you daily just as though He was your best friend. Good friendships have always been a deep desire of your heart and I just wanted to remind you of something that you already know, and that is that even though Jesus is your God and creator, He still is your greatest friend.



Keep loving your mother as she is the greatest of all women on earth. Take care of her for me, Susan. And thanks also for being an outstanding big sister to Linda by being both an example and friend to her. I will be seeing you soon, Honey. Walk with joy every day basking in His love, enjoying His grace, and receiving His forgiveness. Invest your life in the people He puts around you so that you can be used of God to bring many to Himself while teaching them to be committed followers and disciples. And never forget that the Lord must be the center of your life. So enjoy serving Him with your whole heart. I love you, am so proud of you, and rejoice in the day we will be together as a family with the Lord forever. It won't be long now, so give your life to others so that you can bring a few with you to heaven! See you soon. All my love, DAD.

Example 2: To a Toddler Son

Dear Daniel, You are 21 months old next week! When you are old enough to read this letter, I will no longer be here on earth. I will be with God in heaven. God is the only one who knows when it is time for us to leave the earth and go to be with Him in heaven forever. God loves me and you and Joey and Mommy and only wants the best for each of us.



I want you to know in the deepest part of your heart that I love you and I am super proud to be your daddy. I love holding you, wrestling with you, swinging you, hearing you try to talk, watching you be busy, giving you baths, changing your diapers, taking showers with you, having you sit in between my legs on the floor and put your shoes on, reading to you, having you follow me around, watching you get all messy while you eat, smelling your baby scent, holding you in the pool, letting you fall on me and say 'timber', ...

You are a very happy boy. Everyone that interacts with you (Aunt Susan, Pop Pop and Mom Mom and Grandpa Burns and Grandma Burns, those who watch you in the nursery at church, Miss Jill who watches you for 5 hours, Monday through Friday)...they all say that you are a happy little fellow. You have a great smile and a laugh that is contagious. You are so smart too. You problem solve very well. You really like to line up cars and drive them around. You like balls a lot too. Recently you started climbing the ladder up the sliding board. Usually you wait for me to hold your hands before you slide down.

You have a great life ahead of you. You already have a good foundation. You love to pray at meal times with Joey and you love hearing and trying to say, "In Jesus' name, Amen." Someday you will understand God's great love for you. I am including a summary of God's good news here so you can hear it from your dad. Your mom and I have prayed that God would draw you to Himself someday. It is the best thing and most important thing in all of your life. It is awesome being Sam Burn' son. But it is even MORE Awesome to be God's son! I encourage you to talk to your mother about these things and ask any questions you have about the Bible and the good news.

The Good News from Romans 3:19-26

1. No one can be right with God by being good (Romans 3:20)
2. God provides a way to be in a right relationship with him apart from "trying to be good enough" (Romans 3:21)
3. This "way" is through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22)
4. This way is available to everyone on the same basis because all people fall short of pleasing God (Romans 3:23)
5. This "way" is a free gift of God (Romans 3:24; 6:23)

6. Although it is free to us, it cost God a lot – the death of his son, Jesus
7. God's wrath was directed at Jesus (who took on your sin). God's wrath will never be directed towards you!

My prayer for you continues to be that someday you will understand this Good News and believe in Jesus with all of your heart and soul. I also pray, that this Good News will continue to remind you that you can never do anything to earn God's favor more and you can never do anything to cause God to love you any less. This is the most important decision you will ever make and is the most important relationship you will ever have. Believing in Jesus the first time is only the beginning. He longs for you to know Him and to mature in your faith, which takes the rest of your life. I can honestly say that God has never let me down.

As you grow up, I want you to know that I love your mother very much. She is an awesome wife and a super duper great mom. She loves you and Joey so much. Listen to her and obey her. That will please me and God.

Be a good friend to those around you. Relationships are the most important experience here on earth. Learn to listen to your friends and be sensitive to people who might not fit in with the "in crowd." When you get to the age when you want to date, listen to your mom's counsel. Treat any girl you date as a princess. You will learn that God's way is the best way when it comes to relationships. Respect, listen, and do not get physically involved until you are married.

Even though I have only known you for a short time, I have loads of great memories with you. Please know that I am entirely committed to you. I am for you. You will succeed in life. Trust God and rely on His Word, the Bible. You have what it takes! I am proud to have given you the name Burns.

I love you and I'm proud to be your dad!

Example 3: To a Wife

Dear Rose, if you are reading this letter, God has taken me home to be with Him. I know your heart is full right now of all kinds of feelings. As I am writing this letter, you and Sam are at a birthday party. I wanted to pause in my day and write this letter that I have been putting off for months.

God made us complete before we had Sam. Sam makes our family bigger, but not more complete. You and I make each other complete as a family. As I write this, I can clearly see that you have made my life complete. If I am now absent, then God the father will fill your void with Himself.

I know that you know how much I love you. But, I will tell you again – I love you. You are so good to me. You are a great wife. I don't know why God gave me the best one, but He did! I was serious when I took my vows to you on our wedding day and God has allowed both of us to keep them:



Rose, I love you and I receive you to be my wedded wife. I accept you as a precious gift from God. I love you with a love that only Christ could place within my heart. I wish to have and hold you, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love you and cherish you as long as we both shall live or until our Lord shall come. I dedicate our marriage and our home to the Lordship of Christ and pledge myself and all that I am in love to you.

As I write this, I have all kinds of feelings. One feeling is regret. I wish that I would have shown you so much more how much you meant to me. I fell short in so many areas (Setting long term goals for us as a couple; Pray more for you and with you; Talk more about everything to find out what's in your heart). You were so patient with me!

Another feeling I have is that I miss you (even as I think about not being around). I understand with my mind that heaven will be a place of perfect contentment, but while I am still here the idea of not being with you makes me sad. What exactly would I miss? There are so many things: when you come to bed without any socks on and your feet are cold; when you come home from shopping and tell me how much money you've "saved us"; getting beat by you in ping pong; playing the clean game; transplanting bushes; going canoeing and letting you sun bathe; taking Sam to the doctors together; walking through the kitchen and not being able to keep my hands off of you; eating pizza together with you on Friday nights; going for a walk around the loop; playing hand and foot against you; saying "Honey, you're so funny";

laughing about the words Sam is saying these days, like "Waz Zat? Ova dare"; Honey, I want the best for you and Sam. Please know that. I want you to feel released to remarry when the time for that comes. When you are ready and God brings another man in your life, please know that I am smiling on you J. I know that God will provide just the right person at just the right time. You are an awesome woman of God and a great mom! Yu rock!

We've had some tremendous memories and experiences together. As you recall them, know that I love you very, very much. I honestly can't imagine life without you, but God has us moving in different seasons now. God's character is weighty in your life and I pray that He would continue to be. I love the words in Isaiah 41:10,

"Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

I Love you. The greatest role in my life has been to be your husband!

Now, It's Your Turn!

Find a quiet place and start writingJ

