

**HEREDITY, HERITAGE, INHERITANCE AND LEGACY****By Robert J. Tamasy**

Some time ago I engaged in a fascinating discussion with members of a CBMC group in another city. I had written an edition of Monday Manna about the importance of leaving a legacy, and they were curious to know the distinction between four seemingly similar terms: Heredity, heritage, inheritance, and legacy.

There is some similarity between these four terms, but they are all very different. Two of them we have virtually no control over. One we may be able to determine in a substantial way depending on how prosperous we have been. Only one can be established largely based on the decisions we make and relationships we establish during our lives.

Heredity describes traits passed on genetically, such things as skin and hair color, stature, ethnic characteristics, and other physical, mental, and familial characteristics. Heritage tends to concern the culture, traditions, history and language of a society or group of people. Inheritance is something passed down to individuals after someone's death, typically money or material possessions.

A legacy is the only one of the four we can shape in a significant manner regardless of social status or level of affluence. It consists of the lasting impact of our lives that remains long after we are gone. A legacy can transform individuals, organizations, even society through values, character, and faith.

As people who spend much of our time in the marketplace, we have opportunities to exert leadership in one way or another. Regardless of our role in a company, whether we hold the highest executive role or report to one or more individuals, we can build a legacy. Because the true test of leaders, whoever they are and whatever they do, is what remains after they are gone.

I recall a presentation made by a leader years ago as he explained how his previous organization was constructed. On the company's organizational chart, everything was built around him. Not long after he left, the business fell apart like a house of cards. His "legacy," in terms of leadership, was failure.

Contrast that with Nelson Bell, who served as a missionary doctor in China for more than 24 years. His godly daughter, Ruth, married a young man named Billy Graham. Together they had several children who today remain in Christian ministry and, through Ruth's support, the Rev. Graham touched millions of lives for Jesus Christ through his evangelistic crusades and books. What a legacy Dr. Bell left behind!

**Build on a strong foundation.** The world around us suggests we can build our lives on many

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different kinds of foundations, but there is only one foundation that will last for eternity. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

**Devote yourself 100% to Christ's purposes.** As one poet wrote, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." "For in [Jesus Christ] we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

**Invest in people.** We can positively influence people in many ways, but the most lasting of all are through making disciples and mentoring. "And the things you have heard me [Paul] say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2).

© 2023. Robert J. Tamasy has written *Marketplace Ambassadors: CBMC's Continuing Legacy of Evangelism and Discipleship*; *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace*; *Pursuing Life With a Shepherd's Heart*, coauthored with Ken Johnson; and *The Heart of Mentoring*, coauthored with David A.

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions Challenge

1. If you were to restate the differences between heredity, heritage, inheritance, and legacy, who would you distinguish them from one another?
2. At this stage of your life, what has had the greatest impact on you – heredity, heritage, inheritance, or legacy? Explain your answer.
3. Do you agree that of the four, legacy is the one thing that can be passed on from one generation to another that we have the most control over? Why or why not?
4. How would you describe the foundation for your life, not only at work but also in your personal pursuits and the things you value most?

### Challenge

As we have discussed, our heredity was pre-determined for us, our personal heritage was well-established early in our lives, and an inheritance may or may not be in our future. But the nature of the legacy we one day will leave behind – in our homes and where we work – is up to us. A positive, enduring legacy is not established in isolation – we need help and support from people we trust.

Who do you know that can help you in defining the kind of legacy you would like to leave, and how you can succeed in building it? What steps can you take now to get started?

### NOTE:

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:*  
Psalm 18:31; Isaiah 43:4; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 6:46-49; Colossians 3:23-24

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