

historical figures. There is a natural fascination with the lives of those who have gone before us. So the point here is that *at the very time we are reading* about legacies of those in the past, legacies of our *own time* are *being* formed.

If the world stage — at this moment — was observing your life, what would be recorded? If historians were determining exactly how to record *your* legacy, would it be recorded as a positive or as a negative legacy — a desirable or an undesirable legacy? Would you be seen as a person after God’s own heart, or would you be more like Herod — a god to your own self? Regardless of the outcome, *it is a fact* that our legacy *is forming* as we walk day by day. Even if the *world* doesn’t record it for all time, God does.

In an effort to make this a bit more meaningful, think about how you would answer the following questions:

1. Does it *matter* to you what others think of you now, or when you’re gone?
2. What traits would you like to have associated with your name when it’s brought up by family or friends after your death?
3. Are there specific character traits you would hope your grandchildren or great grandchildren, nieces or nephews received because of the influence you had on their parents or grandparents?
4. What changes if any would you consider making in order to create a more positive or more desirable legacy?
5. Are there acquaintances or relatives that you remember who left an endearing legacy? If so, what is most memorable about them and why?

While it’s true that we should not live to please mankind, it is — at the same time — less than admirable to live a life that would only be defined by negative memories.

The remakeable thing that is the most common trait among the *desirable* legacies of the Scriptures, is that they involve common everyday actions that can be accomplished by any God fearing person. They each did what was asked of them in their life situation without complaining or balking at God’s will for them. They accepted responsibility. They did not *set out* to make a *legacy* but rather to live God fearing lives — and in doing so — left legacies worth remembering.

Planned or not — your legacy *is in the process* of being constructed. How is it progressing? A great legacy for any Christian would be to have grandchildren and great grandchildren, great nieces and great nephews who are obedient to God and are faithful Christians due to the example and influence of parents, grandparents, great grandparents or aunts, uncles, great aunts or great uncles. That is one *truly great legacy* for which all Christians can strive.

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Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio
diligence@gorfsystems.com — <http://diligence.gorfsystems.com/>*



DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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What About a Legacy?

Legacy is by definition, a gift or bequest by will. In the financial sense this is a big topic among those who have assets that they wish to benefit others beyond their *own* lifetime. Because of my profession, Legacy Planning is the topic of *numerous* discussions with clients. Even though it’s often an uncomfortable subject — it’s a *necessary* one if the accumulated assets of the benefactor are to benefit others in the *way* desired *by* him or her.

Common usage of the word legacy in today’s world, has a *broader* meaning that includes the view future generations will have of us when we are long gone from this earth. It is often used in a context that has to do with our actions and accomplishments while on this earth. This *broader* context is the focus in this article.

As we approach the subject of legacy planning in the broad context of how others might view our accomplishments and character after we are gone, let’s consider a few Biblical personalities and the legacy *they* have left for our review. We’ll begin with Noah.

Noah was an extremely interesting individual and we all know quite a bit about him as we discuss his legacy. Several traits probably come to our mind immediately as we recall *his* actions and accomplishments during his time on earth. We know first of all that he had total trust in God. He took *detailed* instructions as to how to build the ark and did it to the *exact* specifications. He most likely did so among ridicule from others yet with total faith that God would in fact send rain on an earth that — to that point had never *seen* rain. (Gen. 2:5-6) Maybe even of *more* importance however, was that Noah was able to convince his wife, his sons and their wives that salvation from the flood would *only* be in the ark. Beyond his family no others were saved. What a legacy — salvation for his family! (Gen. 6-8)

Let’s look now at another account that involved Abraham and Lot. While Lot and his family was dwelling in Sodom, Abraham was warned by God that destruction was going to come upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham however pleaded with God — we might even say he “bargained” with God — hoping to at least save those who were righteous from that impending destruction. We know from the Scriptures that Abraham was somewhat successful in that endeavor. But we also know that when the angels arrived in Sodom to deliver the message of destruction to Lot, the story goes downhill from there. Lot’s attempt to protect those messengers

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from the wicked people of Sodom, resulted in him being ridiculed, taunted, and threatened by the Sodomites to the point of offering his daughters to be used by the men of Sodom. Luckily for his daughters, those men were not interested in *women* — they were consumed with their sinful lust for other *men*. Finally — at the urging of the messengers to *hasten* their departure, Lot, his wife and his two daughters left Sodom as it was being destroyed but his wife was unable to resist the temptation to view the destruction and as a result, was turned into a pillar of salt. The legacy of Abraham in this particular account, is one of having such compassion on those who dwelled in those cities that he courageously bargained with God to spare some from the destruction. Lot's legacy is that he had remained righteous enough in the midst of a sinful city to warrant a special warning by God's messengers that saved him and his daughters from the destruction. (Gen. 18-19)

We know of the bravery of Esther — risking her life by asking for an audience with King Xerxes in order to alert him of the pending tragedy that was planned for her people. She didn't *have* to take the risk. She *could* have remained quiet and allowed her people to fend for themselves. She is known today for her faith and courage because she *chose* to be true to her people and expose the plot. (Esther 4-7)

Jacob's son Joseph, left a legacy that is similar to Christ. He had the opportunity to punish all of his brothers who had wronged him, but instead, he showed compassion for them and not only spared their lives but brought them out of famine into a land of plenty. If ever there was a mortal that had the right to turn his back on his brothers, it would have been Joseph. He left a legacy of forgiveness that is hard to match. (Gen. 37-45)

And then the legacy of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab — King of Israel is quite different. Her husband Ahab was one of Israel's most evil kings, and Jezebel was equally evil. She was passionately attached to heathen worship of idols. She turned Ahab away from God to heathen gods and persuaded him to rule over Israel as a tyrant. In II Kings, chapter 9, we are told that Jezebel was thrown from the window of her palace to the street below at the request of Jehu. She was eaten by wild dogs, and only her skull, her feet and the palms of her hands remained, fulfilling a prophecy by Ahijah in I Kings 14:11.

Because of her extreme wickedness, the name "Jezebel" has become symbolic for any woman who is regarded as scheming, crafty, malicious, vengeful, cruel, wicked or of loose morals. An undesirable legacy but a legacy none the less.

Still another legacy left by a Biblical character was that of King Herod "*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man.' Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*" Eaten by worms because of failing to give praise to God — obviously not a *desirable* legacy to leave (Act 12:21-23).

Students of the Bible will be able to quickly identify the legacy of many other Bible characters — legacies that are defined forever by their actions recorded in the Scriptures. For example:

The Apostle Thomas — his legacy? The doubter.

The Apostle Peter — *his* legacy? The one who denied knowing Jesus.

John the Baptist — The voice in the wilderness that prepared the way for Christ.

We could of course, go on and on discussing everlasting legacies of those in the *Scriptures* but it's doubtful that any of *us* — unless we did something *very* visible or well publicized — will have a legacy for more than just a short time — much less forever — and even then — probably only among a few family members and friends. Regardless of the extent or duration of *our* legacy however, we would *all* surely agree that a legacy more like Joseph's would be far more preferred than one like Jezebel's.

But let's move on to discussing a legacy itself rather than the legacies of specific individuals. Did *any* of the Biblical examples we have mentioned involve *Legacy Planning*? Not really — not in a formal process of setting goals, determining how to reach them and then implementing the proper plans to achieve the pre-determined goals. But — in each case — they lived their lives in such a way that *molded* their character and included people that ultimately set the course that *would become* their legacy. There are common threads throughout the lives of *all* who leave a legacy — whether desirable or undesirable — brief or forever.

Let's consider some common traits that will produce a *desirable* legacy.

- Faith in God.
- Obedience to God.
- Concern for the well being of others.
- Acceptance of trials as part of life while continuing to be faithful to God.
- Teaching children about God and the need to trust God.

Now let's consider some traits that would most likely produce an *undesirable* legacy.

- Faith in self, in might or in power.
- Looking out for oneself — not regarding others.
- Holding a world view that this is all there is — get all you can — now.
- Complaining about everything.
- Being a taker — not a giver.
- Passing the buck to anyone who will take it — being irresponsible.
- Parents letting children raise themselves.
- Dishonesty — unable to believe anything an individual says.

This is of course not anywhere *near* an exhaustive list but there's a point here that may not be immediately obvious. We need to realize that it's doubtful that *any* of the individuals we mentioned earlier *set out* to have a noteworthy legacy — good or bad. Yet, we all *know* about their legacy — as well as that of numerous *other*