A man with dark hair, wearing a grey suit jacket, white shirt, and tie, is sitting and looking down at an open book he is holding. The book has handwritten text and a small photograph of two people on the left page. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the man and the book.

# theultimatelife

Some things are worth more than money.

**Complete Sermon Series**

# SERMON #1

## The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Thankfulness

### SCRIPTURE:

Ephesians 5:19–20

### PREPARATION:

Make available (in the church bulletin, for example) to every listener a blank sheet of paper and a pen or pencil.

### OPTION:

For added visual interest, the starred items “\*” in the introduction can be supported by donning the following props: a firefighter hat, baseball glove, sunglasses, and a wad of play money.

I'd like to send us all back to our childhoods for just a moment. I know for some of you that will be a long, long journey, but go there with me for a few moments.

Do you remember when you were a child the kind of future you dreamt about?

Maybe some in this room saw your grownup self as a firefighter,\* risking your life to save others from danger.

Others may have envisioned a future as a baseball player,\* scooping up ground balls and hitting home runs to the cheers of thousands.

You may have pictured yourself as a movie star,\* winning Oscars and fighting off paparazzi.

Or perhaps your vision of the ultimate life was that of a business tycoon,\* becoming richer than the kid in those "Richie Rich" comic books \_\_\_\_\_[insert name]\_\_\_\_\_ read as a kid.

Or maybe the ultimate life of your imagination was something else entirely. And maybe that picture, that idea, has changed over the years...or maybe it hasn't.

Whatever the case may be for you, we're going to spend today and the next five weeks exploring "The Ultimate Life" in a series of messages and studies based on the faith-based movie of that name.

It is the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about the ultimate life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life.

It is a story that can teach us, too. And that is how we will approach it today and for the next five Sundays, as we extract six priceless treasures from the lives of Jason and his grandfather Red.

Treasures that—taken together—can transform any life into the ultimate life.

Along the way, we will also be learning about the ultimate life from the teachings of Paul in the Bible, a man who lived the ultimate life himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to struggling people like you and me.

So let's look at the first of those six treasures in the following scene from *The Ultimate Life* movie and then we will turn to our Bibles to learn more.

**Video clip:** The Ultimate Life, train scene re: "Golden List" (20:08–24:00, end after "otherwise, you'll never be grateful for nothing")

It is "The Treasure of Thankfulness."

As the man on the train explained to Jason, no matter how low you may feel and no matter how high the odds seem to be stacked against you, the path to living the ultimate life starts by recognizing and cultivating the treasure of thankfulness, as expressed in "the Golden List" that man recommended to Jason.

So let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, the tenth book of the New Testament. Once there, find the fifth chapter, and we'll look together at the last part of verse 18, and then at verses 19 and 20.

These words were written by the Apostle Paul to the followers of Jesus in a city called Ephesus, in the first century.

He wrote:

***Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** —Ephesians 5:18b–20

It is that last verse we will focus on, in which Paul commands us to be "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

We're going to unpack the treasure of thankfulness by taking Paul's command just a little at a time, as he says, first:

### **1. Give thanks to God.**

The treasure of thankfulness is not simply positive thinking. It is nothing like the Hindu belief in karma, which says something like if you put out good energy into the atmosphere, you'll get good energy back.

No, the ultimate life comes about as we direct our thankfulness toward God.

Because, as another of Jesus' apostles said:

***Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.*** — James 1:17

Everything you are and have and hope for comes from God, therefore, you should direct your gratitude to Him.

But you may say, like Jason on that train, "What do I have to be thankful for?"

Well, let's do a quick check of the context in which Paul tells us to always be giving thanks to God.

Back in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, he said:

***The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.***  
— Ephesians 1:3, NIV

Underline "every." If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, if you have surrendered your life to Him and experienced new life in Him, God has given you every spiritual blessing; you're not missing or lacking a single ONE!

"Like what?" you may ask.

a. You have been forgiven and redeemed.

***In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*** — Ephesians 1:7a, NIV

Jesus came into this world of sin. He paid the ultimate price for you—His own blood—And He did it to set you free.

Your sin is forgiven. Your burden is lifted. Your past is forgotten. But that's not all. There's more. You can say:

b. You have been given the riches of His grace.

Look at Ephesians 1:7–8:

***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.*** — Ephesians 1:7–8a, NIV

How rich is God? How much does He possess? An inexhaustible supply. All of God's attributes are of infinite measure. So, if He has given to us according to the riches of His grace, then we are INFINITELY rich!

Dr. Stanley Livingston, the great explorer and missionary, had a medical condition that required him to drink goat's milk every day. He was visited one day by a tribal king and he noticed that the king was eyeing his goat. Livingston felt that God would want him to give the goat as a gift to the king. So he did. And, in return, the king presented him with the staff he was carrying.

Later that day, Livingston confided to a friend, "I don't know what I was thinking. How could I have been so foolish as to give my goat away. I don't know what I shall do with this stick."

His friend replied, "You don't understand. That isn't a stick. It is a scepter. You don't own just one goat any more; you own all the goats in the tribe."

Guess what? You have been given a scepter; you are infinitely rich!

But even THAT's not all He's given you.

c. You have been shown the mystery of his will.

***With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure.***  
— Ephesians 1:8b–9a, NIV

God has a plan for the universe.

History is moving toward a goal. And you don't have to guess at the plan or the goal. You have the beginning of the story in the Old Testament; the middle of the story in the coming of Christ and in His death, burial, and resurrection; and even the end of the story, for you have His promise that one day He will return.

d. You have a guaranteed inheritance.

Ephesians 1:13–14 says:

***When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. —Ephesians 1:13–14, NIV)***

We don't use seals much today. But they were commonplace throughout the ancient world.

The seal Paul's talking about here was a stamp pressed into a soft surface like wax in order to leave a symbol or impression.

Seals served a variety of purposes. They were used on invoices to authenticate them and establish them as genuine. A seal ratified a covenant or contract and guaranteed payment or fulfillment.

The Holy Spirit has placed a seal on you, identifying you as a genuine member of God's kingdom, marking you as a prized possession of God, guaranteeing your inheritance of all God's promises, all God's wealth, all God's goodness.

YOU stand to inherit . . . EVERYTHING! Nothing can destroy it. No stock market dive can devalue it. No recession can deflate it. No one can defraud you of it. You—if you are a Christ-follower—are God's possession, and everything God has is yours.

And yet there is more, more than we have time to detail.  
But let me just mention quickly:

e. You are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

You thought you were sitting in church today, right? Well, you are, but Paul also says:

***God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.*** —Ephesians 2:6, NIV

You are already in a position of great status and authority!

f. You are brought near.

You may sometimes feel as though you are far from God, but Paul says:

***Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*** —Ephesians 2:13, NIV

Nearer than you may feel...Nearer than you may seem...you are now and always near...never far...How can you be otherwise when you are seated with Christ?

g. You are brought together.

Paul says:

***You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household. ... And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*** —Ephesians 2:19, 22, NIV

You are not alone. You are part of the family, a brick in the holy temple God is building as His dwelling place.

And those things are a mere beginning. Those are just SOME of the blessings that are yours through faith in Jesus Christ. The first three chapters of Ephesians, in fact, list one after another of the things you have to be thankful for. So that's a great place to start.

Give thanks to God. He is the source of all good things—your life and breath, your health, your mind and memory, your senses, your surroundings...Give thanks to God.

But Paul goes beyond that in Ephesians 5:20, as he says, next:

## **2. Give thanks always.**

The treasure of thankfulness is not a one-time discovery. It is not just for special occasions.

Notice that Paul said we should be:

***Always giving thanks to God the Father ...*** —Ephesians 5:20a, NIV

In other words, make it a habit. It should be a daily thing. Not just one day in November, but every day.

As the man on the train told Jason, “Every day has something in it you can be thankful for.”

Did you wake up this morning?  
Did you have something to eat?  
Were you able to breathe without pain?  
Could you hear the birds outside?  
Could you smell the coffee in your cup?  
Did you have clothes to wear?  
Are there shoes on your feet?  
Has someone smiled at you?  
Did other cars avoid crashing into you on your way to church?

*Every day* has something in it you can be thankful for.

You can make a “Golden List” every day, just like that man on the train. How hard can it be to list ten things to be grateful for? How long could it possibly take you? And how might it set the tone for your day if you were to do that every morning?

“Give thanks always,” Paul says.

Make it a habit.

Make it a practice.

Make it part of your daily routine.

Make it part of your morning prayers.

Make it part of your morning commute.

Teach your children to make Golden List on their way to school.

And then, finally:

### **3. Give thanks for everything.**

The treasure of thankfulness is not a fair-weather treasure. It operates on cloudy days as well as in the sunshine.

Notice that Paul said we should be:

***Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** —Ephesians 5:20, NIV

For everything.

The Greek word in that verse for *everything* means ... EVERYTHING. Didn't know I knew so much, did you?

It is the same word he used in writing to the church in Thessalonica, a city on the other side of the Aegean Sea from Ephesus, when he said:

***In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*** —1 Thessalonians 5:18, KJV

Give thanks *for* everything, Paul told the Ephesians.  
Give thanks *in* everything, he told the Thessalonians.

Not just when you win the Publishers Clearinghouse Sweepstakes.  
Not just when the "world's all as it should be."  
Not just when "everything's coming up roses."

In everything. For everything.

That means for little things, too.

You see, we tend to be like Jason in that scene on the train:

"I'll give thanks when I have something to be thankful for."

"I'll be thankful when things turn around for me."

"I'll be grateful *someday*."

But the older man said, “No, you’ve gotta be grateful for the little things in life, otherwise you’ll never be grateful for nothing.”

The Treasure of Thankfulness is NOT available only to those who are rolling in clover. The Ultimate Life is NOT just for those whose circumstances have been kind to them. It is available to everyone, regardless of circumstances. It is for those who give thanks in everything, even in difficulty.

There are a couple good reasons to be grateful, even in difficult times:

a. One reason is because you don’t have the “big” picture perspective and can’t always see God working “behind the scenes” to turn things for good in your life.

Sure, being a social outcast was a bad thing, but for the Samaritan woman it led to a private audience with Jesus.

Sure, prison was a bad thing; but in Joseph’s life it turned out to be the means God used to make him Viceroy over all of Egypt!

***Giving thanks only for “good things” means I don’t believe: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”***

— Romans 8:28, NASB

b. Another reason to be grateful, even in difficult times is because this Treasure of Thankfulness can actually turn curses into blessings.

Ann Voskamp’s book, *One Thousand Gifts*, tells the story of a life that was nearly crushed by circumstances. When she was a child, her baby sister chased a cat into a farm lane and was crushed under the wheels of a delivery truck. Unable to cope, Ann’s mother checked herself into a psychiatric hospital. Ann’s father was never the same. And Ann reached adulthood with a history of darkness and depression.

But one day a caring friend issued a challenge and Ann embarked on a daily task of noticing, listing, and giving thanks for the good things she had experienced, no matter how small or routine. The practice changed her perspective—and her life.

It can do the same for any one of us.

Give thanks to God.  
Give thanks always.  
Give thanks for everything.

If you haven't already done so, the best way to give thanks to God for all He's done for you is to surrender your life into His loving hands. Gratefully accept the gift of salvation He offers by praying:

Lord Jesus, thank you for your redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and the riches of your grace. I turn to You and accept your sacrifice on the cross as complete payment for all the wrong things I've ever done. I ask you to come into my heart and take charge of my life from this moment on, amen.

Now, if you've prayed that prayer, whether today or many years ago, you should have no trouble making your "Golden List."

If for any reason you have trouble praying that prayer, I would love to talk with you and pray with you after this service ends.

And for everyone here today, no matter where you are in your spiritual journey, I want to invite you to begin right here, right now, your passage into "The Ultimate Life."

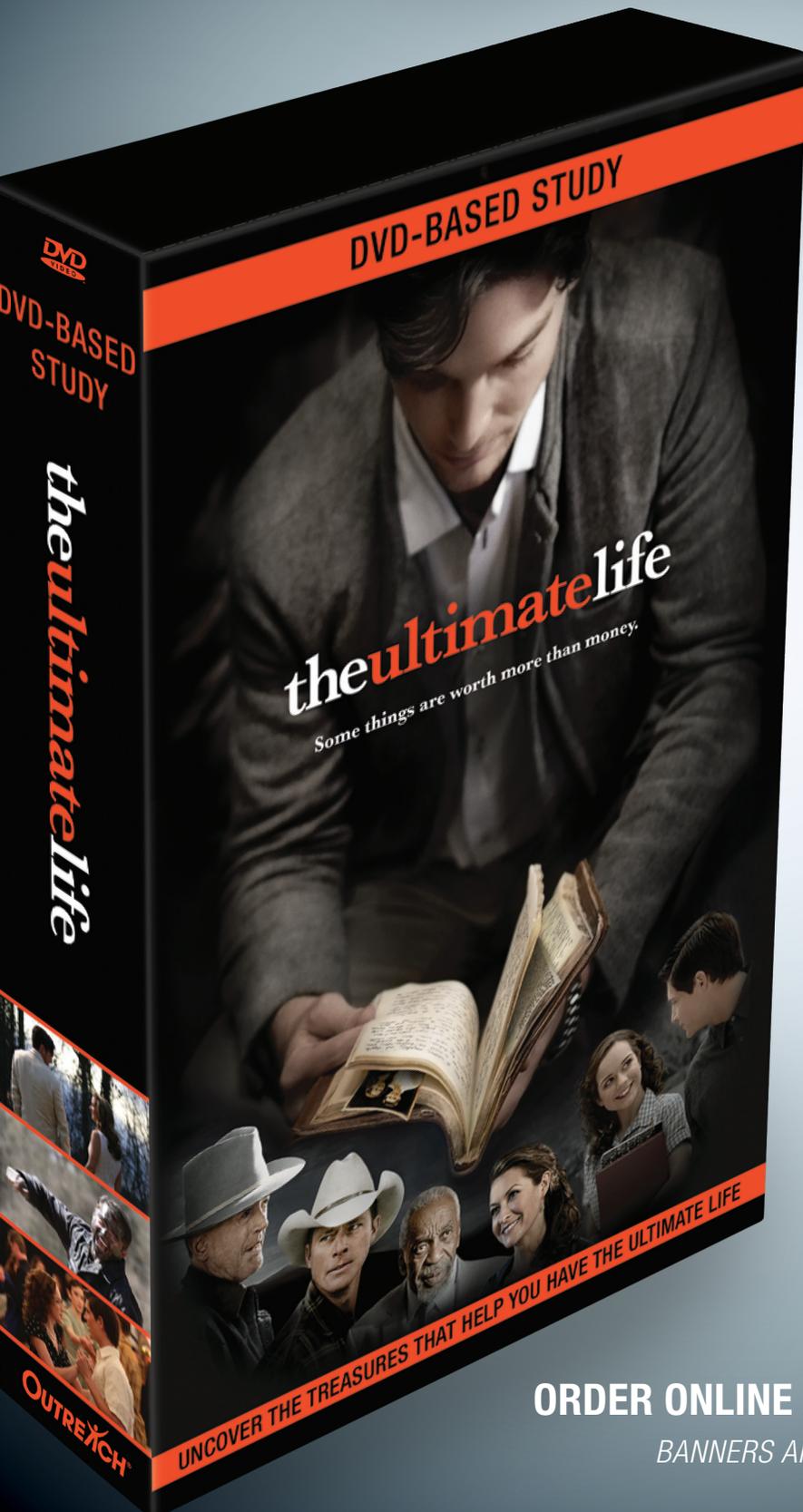
Before we sing our closing song, we're going to give you a few moments to take a blank sheet of paper [provided for you in your bulletins], number it from 1 to 10, and write down your first "Golden List" now.

I hope and pray it will be the first of many, a daily practice, perhaps as part of your morning prayers, your daily journal, or your bedtime prayers.

But right here, right now, let's give thanks ... always ... and for everything.

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BANNERS AND INVITATION TOOLS ALSO AVAILABLE

# **SERMON #2**

**The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Stewardship**

**SCRIPTURE:**

2 Corinthians 9:6–11

I'm no mathematician, but I've been told that the branch of mathematics known as Calculus is basically the study of change.

How many people here knew that? [allow a moment for show of hands]  
How many people took Calculus in school? [allow a moment for show of hands]  
How many actually passed Calculus? [allow a moment for show of hands]  
How many people just lied in church? [allow a moment for show of hands]

Just kidding. I'm sure no one here would do such a thing.

But whether you ever took a Calculus course or not, you can believe me when I say the field of mathematics known as Calculus is largely the study of change.

Its two major branches deal with the eventual difference in results that will be brought about by a tiny change in a process.

And it has its parallel in The Ultimate Life, which we began studying last week.

Because, believe it or not, The Ultimate Life can result from a series of changes every one of us can make—some of them small; some of them large; some of them very counter-intuitive, but totally biblical, as we'll see in the next few moments.

And that exploration of The Ultimate Life will continue today and for the next four weekends, in a series of messages and studies based on the faith-based movie of that name.

The movie is the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about The Ultimate Life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life—six priceless treasures that we will also extract from the lives of Jason and Red Stevens. Treasures that—taken together—can transform any life into The Ultimate Life.

And as we do that, we will be hearing from the teachings of Paul in the Bible—a man who lived "The Ultimate Life" himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to struggling people like you and me.

And today, we will be looking at the Treasure of Stewardship, a life-changing principle and practice that is taught throughout the Bible.

So let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians, the eighth book of the New Testament. Find the ninth chapter, where we will read together verses 6–11.

Because, you see, if God truly has our hearts, if we truly belong to Him, and we get to the point where we truly believe and operate according to God's Calculus instead of our own, we will be blown away by what He will do in, through, and with our money.

Let me show you what I mean.

There are some mind-blowing truths in this short passage. Here's what it says:

***Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:***

***“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever.”***

***Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. — 2 Corinthians 9:6–11, NIV***

Those words were written by Paul, the great planter of the first century, to people in the city of Corinth, urging them to collect an offering for Christ-followers who were suffering even more than they were.

And while this passage was written to specific people in a particular place at a certain time in history, it is also chock full of principles that can lead us, today, to The Ultimate Life, and the first is...

## **1. Be guided by gratitude**

Paul said not to give “reluctantly or under compulsion.”

Other translations use the words, “not grudgingly, or of necessity” (KJV), or not “with hesitation or because of pressure” (CEB).

Your giving should be guided not by obligation, but by gratitude, which we talked about last week as we discussed the Treasure of Thankfulness.

Do you remember? We talked about giving thanks to God, always, and in everything.

The man or woman who can live like that has discovered a treasure, and is well on his or her way to The Ultimate Life.

And it relates inextricably to this treasure of stewardship, as you are guided by gratitude in all you do.

And that comes about as a result of three key perspectives about your life, your possessions, and your resources. It starts with this:

a. See your life as a gift.

Songwriter Joni Mitchell famously wrote, “Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone?”

It’s true. Most of us skip blithely through this life as though the world never existed until we came along and as though we are going to live forever.

We collect things and amass things like the rich man in one of Jesus’ parables, who built bigger and bigger barns and stored more and more surplus, never imagining that God would say to him,

***You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? — Luke 12:20, NIV***

That rich fool didn’t realize that his very life was a gift; it was not a given.

So it is with each of us, and we move closer to The Ultimate Life as we learn to see our lives as the gift that they are.

It was a lesson that formed a major turning point in The Ultimate Life movie, as Red, who had previously been like that rich fool in the Bible, suddenly awoke to the realization that life itself is a precious gift, more precious than all the oil fields in the world:

**Video clip: The Ultimate Life, scene where Red gives away his kidney to Hamilton (1:26–50–1:31:42).**

That moment had a major effect on Red’s eventual realization of The Ultimate Life; and seeing our lives as a gift will do the same for you and me, as will this:

b. See your possessions as a “grace.”

We didn’t read all of chapter 9 in 2 Corinthians, but if we had, you would have seen that Paul referred to the people the Corinthians were giving to as the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

He said:

***In their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.*** — 2 Corinthians 9:12, NIV

“Because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”

Your possessions are a grace from God. He doesn’t owe you anything. He didn’t have to bless you with a single cent. It is all grace—a kindness, an unmerited blessing.

The problem is, we get used to our money and possessions. We worked hard for them, so we figure we deserve them. Well, guess what? Lots of people work hard and have nothing. It is at the same time a mystery...and a surpassing grace...that we have anything.

When we begin to appreciate that fact, we take a step toward The Ultimate Life.

When we see our possessions not as a right, an entitlement, or as something we deserve, but as a grace, God can begin to change our hearts...and our lives.

He can then help each of us to...

c. See your resources as a “trust.”

Paul says something important in that passage from 2 Corinthians. Well, he says a lot of important things. But one of them is in verse 10. If you have your Bible open, look at it. Who does Paul say seed is supplied to? [give time for answers]

He says that God “supplies seed to the sower.” Right? Do you see that?

He does not say that God supplies seed to the hoarder. It is the nature of seeds... they are supposed to be sown...planted. In other words, the seed isn't meant to stay in your hand. It is a trust. Just like bread, which is not given to sit on a shelf somewhere...it is meant to be eaten. To be used. To be food for someone.

Elementary, right?

But we don't ordinarily see our resources that way. We talk about what we make. We use terms like “my income,” “my money,” “my house,” “my stuff.”

But in Deuteronomy 8, God warned His people,

***When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God... You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.***

— Deuteronomy 8:10, 17–18, NIV

We see our money, home, car, and possessions as ours...but they are not ours. They are a trust from Him.

And our response to that trust should be twofold: We should be grateful; and we should be responsible.

So if you want to move closer to this Ultimate Life we're talking about, be guided by gratitude.

Then, I would say...

## 2. Be cheerful in giving.

Paul said not to give “reluctantly or under compulsion,”

***For God loves a cheerful giver.*** — 2 Corinthians 9:7b, NIV

Now, let’s just stop there for a minute. That verse is familiar to pretty much everyone, right? It is so familiar, we hear it and say it without even thinking: “God loves a cheerful giver.”

But *think about it*.

To us, who are among the most blessed people on earth, among the most blessed people in the history of the world, a cheerful giver is a rare bird...an odd duck, you might say.

We don’t naturally think in those terms. Faithful givers, yes. Regular givers, yes. But cheerful givers just isn’t on our radar.

But the very words—in God’s Word, no less—tell us that this is a real thing. It is an actuality. It is a possibility.

Because God knows what we have long forgotten: Giving can be fun! Giving can be a blast. Giving can open up your life to blessing, sweetness, joy, and laughter.

Do you remember the first time you spent your own money to buy a gift for someone? Do you remember how excited you were to give that gift? How you couldn’t wait for the moment when your gift would be opened and enjoyed?

That’s what The Ultimate Life feels like. That’s what God wants you to experience all the time.

And it is possible.

It can be so much fun to give.

Have you heard of the reality-TV show called Secret Millionaire? It aired originally in England, and lasted only a couple seasons in the U.S. The show features actual millionaires who go undercover in some of the most deprived and depressed areas. They spend a week living in the community on a budget like their neighbors. In one episode, a millionaire couple lived on less than \$7 a day and visited three non-profit organizations to try to understand their needs and challenges.

The other people on the show were told that a documentary was being filmed, but they had no idea that they were meeting and talking to millionaires. At the end of the episode, the millionaires revealed their identities and made donations to the organizations totaling more than \$400,000 in cash.

The recipients, of course, are dumbstruck and overjoyed. But the best part of the show, I think, is the vicarious thrill, the joy of imagining what it would be like to be able to do something like that—to be able to bless other people like that.

Well, guess what? You may not be a millionaire, and there may not be TV cameras filming your every waking moment, but you can know that feeling, that blessing, that joy.

You can buy a goat for a village in Africa through Partners International! You can sponsor a child in a foreign country through World Vision! You can help to plant a church through an organization called Dynamic Church Planting International! You can surprise your pastor with tickets to ball games!

Okay, that last one may have been a little self-serving, but you get the idea.

It can be a joy and a blessing to secretly pay for someone's lunch at McDonald's, to pay for the person behind you in the drive-through, to leave a bag of groceries on someone's doorstep, to mow a neighbor's lawn or shovel their driveway as a surprise.

***God loves a cheerful giver.*** — 2 Corinthians 9:7b, NIV

And cheerful givers love life.

Cheerful givers move closer to The Ultimate Life.

So if you want The Ultimate Life we're talking about, be guided by gratitude and be cheerful in giving.

And lastly ...

### **3. Be generous on every occasion.**

Paul said:

***Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*** — 2 Corinthians 9:6, NIV

Every farmer knows this. Every gardener knows this. Even people who can't keep artificial flowers alive know this.

Everyone knows, if you want an acre of wheat at harvest, you can't just plant one or two seeds. That won't cut it.

If you want an acre of wheat, you've got to plant roughly two bushels of seed. If you plant one bushel, or half a bushel, or even less ... guess what? You won't reap as much at harvest time, will you?

That principle is true of your giving.

See, most of us have no problem seeing it that way if we're talking about seed, but we don't think that way when we're talking about money and possessions. We think, "If I give too much, I won't have enough when I need it."

But God's Word says your resources are like a farmer's seed...if you give sparingly, you'll never have enough.

We think the key to having enough is HOARDING...but God's Word says the key is GIVING.

We think, "I would give a lot more to God's work if I had it to give."

***But the Bible doesn't teach that.*** The Bible says God supplies seed to sowers, not to hoarders. The Bible says God will increase your store of seed...as you sow generously.

The English Standard Version phrases it this way:

***God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work...You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way.*** — 2 Corinthians 9:8, 11, ESV

Let me give a quick Greek lesson. Pay attention. I'll try to explain it simply. You know what the translated Greek word all really means there?

**IT MEANS ALL!** As in "all."

"God is able to make **all** grace abound to you, so that having **all** sufficiency in **all** things at **all** times, you may abound in every good work."

*All grace abounding is The Ultimate Life.*

As Dr. Kenneth Chafin, author of *Shaping a Successful Life*, says,

"In my ministry as a pastor I have known many generous givers and many who were nongivers, and I can bear witness to the truth of Paul's statement. A person who continues to be preoccupied with accumulating material things and does not develop a spirit of generosity always falls short of achieving his or her full potential. In contrast, equally successful people who are generous seem to enjoy a higher quality of life."  
(The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Corinthians, pp. 267–268).

God is able to make all grace abound to you. He is able to supply your needs and, through you, the needs of others. He is able to make your life The Ultimate Life, as you are guided by gratitude, cheerful in giving, and generous on every occasion.

Let's pray.

Gracious, generous God, help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and hearts in this area. Teach us to invite "all grace abounding" by our gratitude, cheerfulness, and generosity. Help us to live The Ultimate Life as we experience the Treasure of Stewardship.

And, Lord, for anyone here who has not yet experienced your gracious, generous, and great salvation through faith in Christ, let today be the day that they surrender their life to you, experience your forgiveness, and invite the indwelling Christ to enter their heart and control their life, in Jesus' name, amen.

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# **SERMON #3**

**The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Contentment**

**SCRIPTURE:**

Philippians 4:10–13

No one here is old enough to remember, but there was once a popular television game show called *Let's Make a Deal*.

The show was hosted by Monty Hall for roughly a billion years. The show's contestants were chosen from the studio audience. They brought with them unusual items to begin the "trading" process. Over the years, contestants got more and more creative in their attempts to attract Monty Hall's attention in hopes of being chosen to play *Let's Make a Deal*.

Someone brought a sign, someone wore a crazy hat, then one day someone dressed as a chicken, and the show was never the same again.

The game, of course, was to trade something in your possession for a possible prize, and then to be given the option to trade that prize for a chance at something even better.

Over and over again, contestants would have to decide whether to keep what they had won, or risk it for the chance to win a television, or a washer and dryer, or a new car...or a "zonker" prize like a goat or pig.

People would agonize over the possibility of greater gains, or choosing to be content with what they had.

Imagine.

Imagine if YOU were one of those contestants. Imagine that you had just been given \$1,000 for a boiled egg, but were offered a chance at a new car.

Would you keep the money? Or would you risk it? Would you walk away? Or go for the gold? Would you be content with what you had? Or would you want more?

That's not just a game show question. It is a life question.

And it is a question that figures in our pursuit of The Ultimate Life, which we began studying two weeks ago. Today, and the next three weeks, we will continue in this series of messages and studies based on the faith-based movie, *The Ultimate Life*.

It is a study of the kind of life that can result from a series of changes every one of us can make—some small, some large, and some counter-intuitive but totally biblical, as we'll see in the next few moments.

The movie is the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about The Ultimate Life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life. It's six priceless treasures that we will also extract from the lives of Jason and Red Stevens. Treasures that—taken together—can transform any life in to The Ultimate Life.

And as we do that, we will also be hearing from the teachings of Paul in the Bible, a man who lived The Ultimate Life himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to mostly ordinary people like you and me.

Today, we will be looking at the Treasure of Contentment, starting with the following scene from *The Ultimate Life movie*, after which we will turn to our Bibles to learn more:

**Video clip: The Ultimate Life, scene when Jay says, "I have enough" (1:34:22–1:38:26).**

Wow.

Can you imagine? Being offered ten thousand dollars cash? And then giving it back? Can you imagine saying, "I have enough?" Can you imagine being that content?

Maybe you can, but for most of us, that's pretty difficult. We are not accustomed to saying, "I have enough." Most of us have practiced, from infancy, saying, "More, more, more." And in doing so, we miss out. We deprive ourselves. We lose out on the Treasure of Contentment.

We never discover the blessing Paul the apostle described when he wrote,

***I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. — Philipians 4:11b–13, NIV***

Nice words, aren't they? But are they really possible? In this day and age? In our culture of commercialism and consumerism?

Can we really discover the Treasure of Contentment here and now in the twenty-first century?

I think we can.

But it will take a fundamental transformation—a spiritual makeover.

And it will begin with this...

### **1. Clearly define your needs.**

Our culture has thoroughly blurred the line between needs and wants.

You see it over and over, in our television commercials, magazine ads, and billboards. We have come to equate desiring something with needing it.

It goes like this:

**Phase One:** Your yearnings exceed your earnings. You see a thing—a new car or gadget or convenience—and you think, “That would be awesome; I would be set if I had that.”

**Phase Two:** You go out and get it. You can't afford it, but you HAVE TO HAVE IT. And you overextend yourself financially because you want more than you currently have. You think, “I would be set if I could make enough to pay off these bills.”

**Phase Three:** You have to hustle just to make ends meet. You're working harder and longer. You're bringing in more than ever, but you're also paying out more than ever.

And after year after year of hustling, you're more stressed than ever, you're seeing less of your husband or wife, and your family life begins to deteriorate. Everybody is exhausted. Nobody has time. Everybody feels neglected, unappreciated, and unloved. You think, “I would be set, if I just didn't have to work so much.”

And it all started because you didn't clearly define your needs. You confused your desires with your needs, and over time your desires overshadowed the things you really need.

Paul the apostle advised his protégé, Timothy:

***Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*** —1 Timothy 6:6–10, NIV

Did you hear how Paul defined what we NEED? “Food and clothing.” Wow.

We've come a long way, baby. And along the way we've lost the Treasure of Contentment.

We speak of iPhones and iPads, HDTVs and the NFL Sunday Ticket, and newer cars and bigger homes as if they were needs. We say things like, “I've GOT to have that.”

“I NEED one of those.”

We wait in line for things we don't need. We pay more to get it first. We add on extras we don't need to improve the things we don't need.

And we pierce ourselves with many griefs—bills, debt, overwork, and stress.

The Roman philosopher Seneca said, “Money had never yet made anyone rich.”

The Bible say:

***Whoever loves money will never be satisfied with money. Whoever loves wealth will never be satisfied with more income. Even this is pointless.*** — Ecclesiastes 5:10, GW

So clearly define your needs. Your list may not be as short as Paul's, but it's probably shorter than you think.

And once you've done that, then...

## **2. Keep yourself occupied with gladness of heart.**

The Bible says:

***When God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.***

— Ecclesiastes 5:19–20, NIV

One of the reasons we don't enjoy the Treasure of Contentment is that we let the culture and the media, manufacturers and advertisers, play on our emotions and appeal to our greed.

They convince us that we can't be happy without this or that product or service... INSTEAD OF accepting our lot, being happy in our toil, and letting GOD keep us occupied with gladness of heart.

If we would spend more time thanking God for the blessings we have, we wouldn't be so prone to want the things we don't have.

A big part of the Treasure of Contentment is the Treasure of Thankfulness, which we talked about two weeks ago when we talked about the Golden List.

If you're taking thought and time every day to thank God for the blessings you possess, you're less likely to stress over the things you don't possess!

It's hard to covet a new iPhone while thanking God for the phone you've got. It's crazy to want a new car while thanking God that you have no car payment. The more often you give thanks for your old Mr. Coffee pot, the more you'll realize you don't need a sterling silver Louis XIV solar-powered coffee pot. It will seem sillier and sillier to crave more when you're overwhelmed by the blessings you already enjoy.

Do you realize in this marvelous world God made, in this great country of ours, how many things you enjoy *without* owning them—even without paying a dime?

A sunset, a library book, a shade tree, a public playground, a window display, the free samples at Sam's Club, free concerts in the park—How much more could you ask?

How many more reasons do you need to accept your lot, be happy in your toil, and let God keep you occupied with gladness of heart?

If you cannot do as the Bible says,

***Be content with what you have*** — Hebrews 13:5, NIV

Your problem is NOT that you don't have enough, it is that you haven't learned the Treasure of Thankfulness.

So clearly define your needs; don't confuse them with wants. Secondly, keep yourself occupied with gladness of heart. Try to spend so much time and effort thanking God and enjoying what you have that you can't spare time to crave what you don't have.

And then, thirdly...

### **3. Focus on things that endure.**

It is a shame to focus so much of our attention on things that don't last.

A new car will lose value the moment you drive it off the lot. The latest smartphone will be obsolete in a few months. Depending on the economy, your home may be worth less now than when you bought it.

Yet, we put so much stock in such things.

Jesus said:

***Put away riches in heaven that will not be used up. There, no thief can come near it. There, no moth can destroy it.*** — Luke 12:33, NIRV

Now, obviously, “riches in heaven” include your salvation, your relationship with God.

In fact, if there’s anyone here who hasn’t already opened an account in heaven, who hasn’t experienced the mercy, grace, forgiveness, and salvation from God through Jesus Christ, then I invite you to take care of that right now.

If you’ll let me help you, and if all those around you would help by bowing our heads and closing our eyes, please pray along with me and invite the living Jesus into your life by saying:

“Lord Jesus, I know I’m a sinner, just like everyone else here. I’m sorry for my sin. Please forgive me and wash me clean. I accept your sacrificial death on the cross as the payment for my sins. In gratitude I ask you to come into my heart right now and make me a new person from the inside out. I commit to following you for the rest of my life; and I accept the riches that await me in heaven when I die because of what you have done for me. Amen.”

If you have prayed that prayer today, I would love to learn about that when this service ends. Or if you have questions or need help making that commitment, I will be here to talk to you and pray with you.

But your soul isn’t the only thing you can take into eternity with you!

You have other heavenly riches, too: children, family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, students, and so on.

Your relationships are riches that don’t decay. Unfortunately, those are often the first things to suffer when we get all wrapped up in money and possessions and acquiring stuff.

Focus on things that endure. Focus on growing stronger in your faith rather than higher in your tax bracket. Focus on spending time with people rather than spending money on possessions. Focus on amassing memories rather than hoarding money.

Which leaves just one more challenge I’d like to give you:

#### 4. Don't focus on "getting," but on giving.

The best and quickest way to pursue the Treasure of Contentment is through giving, like we discussed last week in the Treasure of Stewardship.

Giving provides you experience in releasing your grip on money and things. Giving is the soil in which contentment grows. It is the grease in the gearbox of contentment.

Contented people give; greedy people don't. Contented people can hand back a \$10,000 check, like Jason did. Contentment comes about as the result of giving:

giving thanks to God,  
giving time,  
giving attention,  
giving to those in need,  
giving to your church, and  
giving to worthy causes.

Because the act of giving reminds you of the things we talked about last week; that everything belongs to God. He supplies seed to those who sow, not to those who hoard.

***He can make "all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.***

— 2 Corinthians 9:8, ESV

The act of giving drives home to you the truth that God is able to supply your needs and, through you, the needs of others. The act of giving reminds you that it is God's work—not your efforts—that will make your life The Ultimate Life.

In fact, for those reasons, I would go so far as to say you shouldn't even focus on "getting" contentment. Don't concentrate on "being content."

Contentment is a lot like one of those "magic eye" pictures. You know what I'm talking about? They are those pictures that contain a hidden picture. If you focus on the obvious image, you'll never see the hidden picture. You have to focus on something beyond, some point past the surface, and then the "hidden picture" becomes clear and even multidimensional.

That's how it is with contentment. If you focus on "getting" contentment, you'll never get it because your focus is all wrong. But if you change your focus, look beyond, and get past the obvious, you'll find contentment.

And that "something"...that "beyond"...that "focus"...is outflow to others. It's giving instead of getting; and seeing all the things that were once obscured by greed, money, possessions, and the things of this world.

If you want to know The Ultimate Life; if you want to experience all God has to offer; then, you must discover the priceless Treasure of Contentment. It is a gift from God, a blessing from Him.

It is more valuable than all the money in the world.

In fact, you can have all the wealth this world has to offer and still be miserable. You can own more than anyone on earth and still be poor. You can fill your life with things and still be empty. You can make the Forbes Richest People list and still be bankrupt...in what really matters.

The Treasure of Contentment can be yours. Today. Now.

You don't have to wait until you have "enough" because contentment is deciding that you already have it. It is agreeing with the Bible, which says:

***It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else.*** — Ecclesiastes 6:9, GN

It comes from clearly defining your needs and not confusing them with wants. It comes by keeping yourself occupied with gladness of heart. It comes as you focus on things that endure rather than things that decay. And it comes through the practice of giving instead of getting.

Let's pray:

*Lord, make it so for each of us today. Forgive us for our greedy and covetous ways. Forgive us the ingratitude of living as we do and saying it's not "enough." Work in each of us, here and now, to change our hearts and minds, to change our focus, and to grant us the Treasure of Contentment with increasing joy, to your glory, in Jesus' name, amen.*

# **SERMON #4**

**The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Relationships**

**SCRIPTURE:**

Philippians 1:1–11

Tell me if this has ever happened to you. You pull an article of clothing out of your dresser or closet, something you haven't worn in a while. Maybe it's a jacket or a pair of pants.

You brush it off, slip it on, and then you put your hand into a pocket...and find some money.

Has that ever happened to you? Is that not a great feeling?

It may be only a dollar or two, but it's "found money!" If your family finances are anything like mine, a little thing like that is enough to make your day, am I right?

That's the sort of thing we've been talking about in our worship services these past few weeks. Only instead of finding a couple dollars in an old pair of pants, we've been talking about extracting six treasures that can actually combine to produce something called The Ultimate Life.

And we've been doing that with the help of the faith-based movie of that name; the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about The Ultimate Life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life.

Each week we've been seeing not only how those treasures unfold in that movie, but how they are shown to us in the teachings of the Apostle Paul in the Bible—a man who lived The Ultimate Life himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to struggling people like you and me.

The treasure we explore this week is the Treasure of Relationships—something that took Red Stevens some time to discover.

After a tragic start in life, Red took off on his own. He left home, jumped a train, and started from scratch.

Before long, he met a young woman named Hannah who saw something in him and took an interest in him:

**Video clip:** The Ultimate Life (44:14–44:58), in which Hannah tells Red, "Everybody in this world needs somebody to believe in them... I would've believed in you, Red."

“Everybody in this world needs somebody to believe in them,” Hannah said. And she was right. We all need that.

We aren’t wired to go through life alone. No matter how shy or introverted you may be, no matter how independent you think you are, or no matter how self-sufficient you want to be, you shouldn’t go through life alone.

Every one of us needs relationships—key relationships, healthy relationships, strong relationships.

Every one of us needs someone to believe in us, to walk with us, to care about us and love us.

But how do we go about finding those relationships? How do we make them a part of our lives? How do we hold on to them and cultivate them?

For answers, we will turn to our Bibles and hear the Word of God, spoken to us and written for us through the Apostle Paul, in Philippians, chapter 1.

So let me ask you to turn there in your Bibles, to the book of Philippians, the eleventh book of the New Testament, which is one of several letters Paul wrote to the various churches he had started, visited, or intended to visit.

We are going to look together at the first eleven verses of chapter one. In that short passage—just over two hundred words—we can find six practices to follow, like “found money” in a coat pocket, that will, if we follow them, help us cultivate the Treasure of Relationships and lead us another step further into The Ultimate Life.

The first practice is this:

### **1. Be quick to bless others.**

The first verse of Philippians 1 is a standard greeting for a letter of that day. We usually start our letters with the salutation—“Dear So-and-so”— and end them with a signature.

But in Paul's day, the accepted format was to start with both, the signature—"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus"—and then the salutation—"To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons."

But the letter isn't properly started until one more thing is added, which you see in verse 2:

***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** — Philippians 1:2, NIV

Now, if you've been reading the Bible for any length of time, you probably do the same thing I do when you see a verse like that: you skip right over it.

After all, it's pretty much the standard way Paul opened all his letters, with a small variation here or there.

But it's still important. It's still a great example for us.

Paul is quick to bless the people to whom he's writing. We even know who some of them were.

You see, about ten years before this letter was written, Paul and another man named Silas had arrived in Philippi to spread the news about Jesus. There was apparently no Jewish synagogue there, but there was a place of prayer by the river where some women met on the Sabbath to pray. One of those women, Lydia, believed the Gospel message Paul preached. As a result of her gratitude to God and to the missionaries, she opened her home to them.

Then one day, after Paul cast out a demon from a slave girl, her masters managed to get Paul and Silas thrown into prison.

But while Paul and Silas were praising God and singing hymns in jail, an earthquake broke the place open. They could have made their escape, but they stuck around long enough to help the man in charge of the jail place his trust in Jesus Christ, and before long, he and his whole family were baptized.

It's all recorded in Acts 16 in your Bibles, so when Paul says:

***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*** — Philippians 1:1–2, NIV,

We can be pretty sure that Lydia, the Philippian jailer and his family, and the slave girl who'd been delivered from demon possession, were among the people he blessed.

That's an important part of discovering the Treasure of Relationships: Be quick to bless others.

You can bless them with a word, a smile, a card, a gift, you can bless them any number of ways, but however you do it, make a habit out of blessing others.

Because here's the thing: You never know which of those relationships are going to blossom and bear fruit in surprising ways.

You don't know who's going to be your Lydia, or your "Philippian jailer," so to speak. You don't know who's going to be important in your life in years to come, for years to come.

Be quick to bless others. Not just the ones who are already your friends and family, but everyone you can.

And then...

## **2. Be grateful for your relationships.**

In verse three, Paul says:

***I thank my God every time I remember you.*** — Philippians 1:3, NIV

Just nine words in English, and yet it's a key to The Ultimate Life—being grateful for your relationships.

In fact, psychologists and authors Les and Leslie Parrot say this:

“Recently a pioneering band of researchers studied the age-old mystery of what makes people happy. Their answer is not what you might expect. What appears consistently at the top of the charts is not success, wealth, achievement, good looks, or any of those enviable assets. The clear winner is relationships. Close ones.” (Les and Leslie Parrot, *Real Relationships*, 11)

Take just a minute and think about your relationships...your family relationships... your friends...your brothers and sisters in Christ...your colleagues at work or classmates in school...and your small group.

I know all those relationships aren't perfect, but I bet some of them are worthy of your gratitude.

So, when's the last time—if ever—you said to someone, “I thank God for you?”

How long's it been? How long's it gonna be?

Be grateful for your relationships, and you'll get closer and closer to The Ultimate Life.

Not only that, but look at the next verses, where you'll see something else:

### **3. Be prayerful in your relationships.**

In verses four and five, Paul says:

***In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.***

— Philippians 1:4–5, NIV

We'll pause there, even though Paul keeps on going. Notice how emphatic Paul's words are. He says: “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.” — Philippians 1:4, NIV

I honestly believe that many of us are tense, stressed, and frustrated in our relationships because we are willful and controlling, instead of prayerful and joyful, like Paul.

You may wonder, “How can I get my wife to stop being late?” Tell you what: Try praying for her instead of honking the horn while you wait for her and see if anything changes.

You may say, “Should I make my kid break up with that loser?” Try praying, not only for your kid, but for the “loser,” too.

Not only will you find God answering your prayers for that relationship, but as you pray, you will find your faith growing, your muscles relaxing, and your heart changing.

Sometimes you’ll find that God answers your prayer for this or that relationship by making YOU a better husband, wife, parent, friend, or whatever.

Sometimes He will change the other person, no doubt about it, but if you are faithful in praying with joy for your relationships, I promise you, God will change you.

So be prayerful in your relationships. And then...

#### **4. Be hopeful in your relationships.**

Look at verse 6. Paul says, I always pray with joy for you,

***Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.***

— Philippians 1:6, NIV

Bible scholar William Barclay points out something fascinating about the language Paul chooses here:

“There is a picture here in the Greek which it is not possible to reproduce in translation...The words Paul uses for to begin (enarchesthai) and for to complete (epitelein) are technical terms for the beginning and ending of a sacrifice.” (William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Philippians)

In other words, Paul is saying, “I’m confident that God, who has chosen you, cleansed you, and laid you on the altar of sacrifice, will supply the the fire, just as he did on Mt. Carmel, so that the sacrifice of your life will be complete, holy, and pleasing to God.”

Wow, what a picture!

Do you see Paul’s confidence and faith? Can you imagine how those Christ-followers in Philippi felt when they heard Paul’s words?

Can you imagine how your friends, family, co-workers, and classmates would feel if you expressed such confident hope in God’s way with them?

Can you imagine how it will feel for someone to hear, “I believe God is going to make you a wonderful teacher;” or “I’m confident God is going to make us close friends;” or “I’m sure God is going to use your sense of humor to touch a lot of people;” or “I’m hopeful that God is going to show you how your cooking skills have made me a bigger—a much bigger—man.”

Or something like that.

Being hopeful in your relationships is much like what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, when he said,

***If you love someone ... you will always believe in him,[ and] always expect the best of him.*** — 1 Corinthians 13:7, TLB

So be hopeful in your relationships, as well as...

## **5. Be transparent about your relationships.**

Notice what Paul says next:

***It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.***

— Philippians 1:7–8, NIV

Now, those are some mighty personal words, transparent words, vulnerable words.

Some of us would have trouble saying things like that.

We might say, “You’re on my last nerve,” but not, “I have you in my heart.”

We might say, “I’ve had it up to ‘here’ with you!” but not, “I have you right here [in my heart].”

But Paul says,  
“I have you in my heart.”  
“I long for you.”  
“I miss you.”

Now, I know some of us are afraid that if we talk like that to someone, they’ll think we’re weird, or they might not feel the same way, or they might not respond at all.

Being transparent in your relationships, truth be told, is a good way to get hurt. But it’s also the only way to The Ultimate Life.

Because—who knows? Maybe if you say what you really feel, a new depth will open up in your relationship, a new honesty will start to grow, a new comfort level will be reached, and seeds of relationship will take root and bear fruit.

Which leaves me just one more point to make from these first eleven verses of Philippians. One more key to the Treasure of Relationships is...

## **6. Be purposeful in your relationships.**

Look at Philippians 1:9–11, where Paul says this:

***And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. — Philippians 1:9–11, NIV***

There's so much content in those three short verses; I wish we could spend all day on it.

But this much is obvious: Paul had a purpose in mind, a vision that he wanted to see fulfilled in his Philippian friends.

If I asked you, "What's the main thing you want to see happen in your friend's life?" What would you say? If I asked, "What's the central purpose of your marriage?" What would you say? If I asked, "Where do you want your relationship with so-and-so to go?" What would you say?

Or, if I asked, "Who do you want your closest friends to be, and what are you doing to get closer to them?" What would you say? Does that sound strange to you? Artificial?

Maybe. But Paul apparently knew what kind of growth, progress, and purpose he wanted to see in his Philippian friends, and in his relationship with them.

I believe that purpose, at least in part, was why he lived The Ultimate Life.

To quote Les and Leslie Parrot again:

"Nothing reaches so deeply into human personality, tugs so tightly, as relationship. Why? For one reason, it is only in the context of connection with others that our deepest needs can be met. ... We need camaraderie, affection, love. These are not options in life, or sentimental trimmings; they are part of our species' survival kit." (Les and Leslie Parrot, *Real Relationships*, 11)

And, I would add, they are essential to The Ultimate Life.

Let's pray.

If you haven't already done so, the most important, most life-changing relationship in The Ultimate Life is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In addition to changing your daily life and eternal destiny, that relationship can form a solid foundation for all other relationships. And it is something you can begin right here, right now, by praying:

“Lord Jesus, thank you for your offer of redemption, the forgiveness of sins, the riches of your grace. I ask your forgiveness for all my sin, and accept your sacrifice on the cross as payment for all the wrong things I’ve done. I ask you to come into my heart, and take charge of my life from this moment on, amen.”

If for any reason you have trouble praying that prayer, I would love to talk with you and pray with you after this service ends.

And, for all of us, I pray:

“Lord, thank you for meeting our common need for someone to believe in us and walk through life with us. Thank you for the people you’ve placed around us. Help us, day by day, to build better, stronger, and deeper relationships by blessing others, being grateful for them, praying for them, and being hopeful, transparent, and purposeful in our relationships. As you have so graciously done for us, let us do for each other, in Jesus’ name, amen.”

# **SERMON #5**

**The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Life Purpose**

## **SCRIPTURE:**

Philippians 3:4–14

## **PREPARATION:**

Make available to every listener (inserted in the church bulletin, for example) an index card and a pen or pencil.

I don't know if you're aware, but depending on how you classify them, there are more than three hundred dog breeds in this world!

And of those three-hundred-plus dog breeds, each one is born and bred for a specific purpose. Did you know that?

Most terriers are just BORN to hunt mice and rats and other vermin. Retrievers and spaniels are MADE to hunt and retrieve waterfowl.

Greyhounds are for racing, Malamutes are for pulling sleds, and Afghan Hounds are for hunting leopards.

If you've ever seen a sheepdog, such as the Australian Shepherd, the Shetland, or the Old English Sheepdog at work herding sheep or cattle, you just KNOW that they are doing what they were MADE TO DO!

And dogs are happiest when they are free to pursue their life purpose!

In that respect, they are like you and me.

All of us want to make a difference in this world. We want to make our life count. We long to discover and fulfill our true purpose in life—the thing for which we were made.

But many of us are not sure what that is.

Some of us go through life without a purpose. We just kind of live day to day, eating, sleeping, working, playing...with no real purpose in it all.

Others among us latch onto a purpose, but we get so far in life, and then we realize the things we've given ourselves to weren't really ... worth it. You know?

But each of us can discover our life's purpose, which can inspire us, motivate us, and sustain us through difficult times.

That is our topic today in our quest for The Ultimate Life, which we've been exploring with the help of the faith-based movie of that name. It's the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about The Ultimate Life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life.

And we've been discovering not only how the different "treasures" that contribute to The Ultimate Life show up in that movie, but also how they are revealed in the teachings of the Apostle Paul in the Bible—a man who lived The Ultimate Life himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to struggling people like you and me.

The treasure we explore this week is the Treasure of Life Purpose, something Red Stevens strove for and struggled with throughout that movie:

**Video clip:** The Ultimate Life (14:22–16:04), ending with Red's avowal, "He ended up a billionaire...So will I."

Well, that's definitely a life purpose. And it is a purpose pursued by many. A lot of people, whether they ever say so or not, share that life purpose.

And some, like Red Stevens, actually achieve their goal...and then they find out it doesn't satisfy.

So what about you? What are you living for? Are you going somewhere? Do you have a destination in mind? Do you have the route mapped out? Or are you just living life day-to-day, seeing what happens, and taking what comes?

Let me suggest to you that it is a whole lot better to live life on purpose, and to discover the treasure of life purpose, than any other way you might go.

And to help me make that case, let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Philippians, the eleventh book of the New Testament. Once there, find chapter 3 and we'll learn together from verses 4 through 14.

While you're turning there, let me explain something. Paul the apostle wrote these words we're going to read to a church in a city called Philippi, in the first century. And he has been warning them not to trust in their own human efforts, what he calls "the flesh," but to trust instead in what Jesus has accomplished and can accomplish in, for, and through them.

He says:

***If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.***

***But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.***

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***  
— Philippians 3:4b–14, NIV

I want to suggest to you that whatever you've been living for, whether you've been consciously pursuing a life purpose or not, you can right here and now ... today ... before leaving this room, discover the wonderful treasure of life purpose by putting some of Paul's thoughts and words into practice.

And the first thing I suggest you consider is this:

### **1. Specify your non-priorities.**

What can you say—decisively, conclusively—is not your life purpose?

That can be a great place to start. Because you can't do everything. A life that pursues everything pursues nothing.

Robert Browning said,

“Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve,” which is pretty much what Paul meant when he said, ‘One thing I do’ in Philippians 3:13.”

As Paul starts out talking about the Treasure of Life Purpose, he says this, as phrased by the New Century Version of the Bible:

***If anyone thinks he has a reason to trust in himself, he should know that I have greater reason for trusting in myself. I was circumcised eight days after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew, and my parents were Hebrews. I had a strict view of the law, which is why I became a Pharisee. I was so enthusiastic I tried to hurt the church. No one could find fault with the way I obeyed the law of Moses. Those things were important to me, but now I think they are worth nothing because of Christ.***

— Philippians 3:4b–7, NCV

Paul lists all the things he once took pride in, the things he could give his life to, and then says, “They are worth nothing.”

In other words, they were non-priorities.

I suggest you do the same. You might do it in much the same way Paul did, by:

A. Look back at where you've come from.

Paul talks about his Jewish birth and upbringing, his lineage, and his pedigree. Rather than leaning on his history, he leaned into the future.

So it may be with you. You may come from a long line of doctors and lawyers, but that may not decide your purpose. You may come from an abusive background, but that need not define you.

You may come out of poverty or pain, but those things don't have to influence your priorities.

Look back at where you've come from, and proactively decide what you will let go and what you will keep.

You might also go about...

B. List things you've tried and found wanting.

Paul talked about his past as a Pharisee. He had been as upright and legalistic as a person could be. He had kept all the rules, followed all the regulations. And he says, "That's no longer important to me." He had tried it and tossed it in the trash.

So it may be with you. Perhaps like Red Stevens, you started out in life with a purpose, plan, or goal, but now you've come to a point where that won't cut it.

So make a list of the things you've tried and found wanting—the things you've pursued that are no longer worthy of your time and effort.

And then you might try to:

C. Describe the person you do NOT want to be.

Paul looked back on his past and said, "Back in the day, I persecuted the church."

But that was no longer the person he wanted to be.

Some people have found this a powerful way to define their life purpose: "I will not be a philanderer like my father." "I will never again let my family see me like that."

You may even write down such things; I strongly recommend it. Look back at where you've come from, list things you've tried and found wanting, and describe the person you do NOT want to be.

And then, following Paul's pattern, you might:

**2. State your purpose.**

Look at what Paul wrote in verses 7 and 8 of Philippians 3:

***What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.***

— Philippians 3:7–8, NIV

Paul takes all his family pride, degrees, accomplishments, promotions, and possessions, and puts it out at the curb to be picked up with the rest of the garbage.

“None of that is worth keeping,” he says, “compared to the single, guiding purpose of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

It is his sole pursuit. It is his mission statement. It is his life purpose.

So...what are you doing with your life? What have you found that matters? What is worthy of your life? What are you going to do with your time, talents, and life that will enable you to someday stand before God and say “I did it!” and, “It was worth it!”?

Have you ever given thought to that? Have you defined it? Written it down? Maybe even memorized it?

If you haven't, I encourage you to do so...draft a “mission statement.”

Just one or two sentences is best...something that would fit in your wallet... something you can easily remember.

Maybe it is like Paul's: “Knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” Or maybe it is like Jesus' mission statement: “To proclaim good news to the poor...To proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Or maybe, to be honest, it's more like Red Stevens' early mission statement: “To become a billionaire.”

Or it may be nothing like any of those.

But this much I know: If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it.

That is why you have been given an index card...because I want you to write the first draft now, before you leave this room. It doesn't have to be a finished product. It doesn't have to be fancy. In fact, it's best if you don't try to impress anyone. Just try to honestly reflect what you want your life to be about. And then write it on that card.

Once you've done that, I suggest just one more thing:

### **3. Devise a plan to get there.**

A purpose isn't worth much without a plan. Knowing your destination does you no good unless you can map out the route.

Ideally, your plan should include two main components. The first we will call:

#### **A. Objectives.**

For example, if your life purpose is, like Paul, "To know Christ," then there are things you hope for, things you shoot for, and objectives you want to realize somehow, someday, some way.

They are the big picture items in your future. Maybe things like, "Overcome my addiction by His power," or "Be able to hear His voice throughout the day."

Objectives are those places you need to get to—in order to fulfill your purpose—but that are not entirely in your control. You know, you want it, you hope for it, you go in that direction, but it's going to take more than you can do to make it a reality.

However, it's important to define those big picture items. Then, when you've done that, you begin to set...

#### **B. Goals.**

These are the actions you can take, the things you can control, that will add up to your objective.

So, if your life purpose is to know Christ, and one objective is to hear and be guided by His voice on a regular basis, then a good goal might be to read a Bible chapter every day because reading His Word can attune you to His voice.

Or, to choose another example, if your life purpose is “To know Christ and make Him known,” then an objective may be to lead, say, ten people to make a decision to trust Christ between now and the day you die.

See, that’s an objective because you don’t control the results; whether or not someone trusts Christ is in God’s hands, not yours, right? BUT a good goal might be to tell your faith story to at least one new person a month, because that is something you have more control over, and something that will, over time, lead you closer and closer to your objective...all the while, fulfilling your life purpose.

So let me conclude with a few more words of advice.

First, make sure your plan is honest—that it truly reflects what you want your life to look like and count for (not what you think a parent, pastor, or Sunday School teacher wants to hear), and then, second, to make sure your plan takes eternity into consideration.

Because, it would be a tragic mistake to pursue a life purpose that only applies to this life.

If your life purpose does not take eternity into consideration, then you are cheating yourself.

In fact, let’s take just one more good look at Paul’s purpose, because it forms the outline of what I’d like to impress on everyone, and that is, whatever else you may pursue...

C. Gain Christ.

Look at Philippians 3:8. Paul said the driving force in his life was “that I may gain Christ.”

Whatever else you may hear me say today, hear me say this: Gain Christ. Whatever it takes. Whatever it costs. Whatever you must lay down or put aside, Gain Christ.

As Paul said, anything else you may give your life to is “garbage” compared to that.

In fact, you can do that right here, right now, by praying:

“Lord Jesus, thank you for your sacrificial love, and your death on a cross to atone for my sin. I turn to you and accept your sacrifice on the cross as payment for all the wrong things I’ve done. I ask you to forgive me and cleanse me from sin. Come into my heart and take charge of my life from this moment on, amen.”

If for any reason you have trouble praying that prayer, I would love to talk with you and pray with you after this service ends.

Next, I would say ...

D. Know Christ.

In Philippians 3:10, Paul said, “I want to know Christ.”

Whatever else you may pursue in life, get to know Christ more and more, day by day, through prayer and Bible reading, through worship—both private and public—and through fellowship and service alongside others who know Him and love Him.

And, finally, with Paul, I would say to...

E. Become like Christ.

In the last part of Philippians 3:10, Paul said his objective was “becoming like Christ,” even though that may mean suffering and dying. Paul wanted nothing more than to become like Jesus, to resemble Him, and reflect His beauty to a hurting and dying world.

That is the kind of life that matters, not only for this life, but for eternity. It is the kind of life that lasts forever and wields immeasurable influence.

Let’s pray.

“Lord, fulfill your Word in us today. Give us a life purpose that will matter, that will last forever, and that will be worthy of the grace you’ve shown and the gifts you’ve given to each and every one of us.

I pray for every soul here, that we may know the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord. To know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in all we do, in Jesus’ name, amen.”

# **SERMON #6**

**The Ultimate Life: The Treasure of Leaving a Legacy**

**SCRIPTURE:**

2 Timothy 3:10–4:8

A stroll through a cemetery can be a soul-bracing thing. These days, most headstones say little more than names and dates. But it hasn't always been so.

In previous generations, a tombstone provided a final opportunity to sum up a life. Some people did it with humor, some with irony, while others took a more serious approach.

Singer Dean Martin's epitaph reads: "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime," the title of his most famous song.

Similarly, Frank Sinatra's tombstone appropriately echoes one of his songs: "The Best Is Yet to Come."

Winston Churchill's headstone says: "I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."

Mel Blanc, the voice of Porky Pig, is buried beneath the words: "That's all, folks!"

And the epitaph of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is: "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty I'm Free at Last."

One of the strangest, perhaps, is a grave without a name in Stowe, Vermont. It is engraved: "I was somebody. Who, is no business of yours."

Interesting, isn't it, how some people choose to be remembered? Or not remembered?

A few years ago, an advertisement for a television drama, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, carried the slogan: "We will be known forever by the tracks we leave behind."

I think we know that, but we don't often think about it, do we? We live our lives from day to day with virtually no thought of the kind of tracks we're leaving.

Well, I'm going to suggest today that we change that; that we give thought, careful thought, to the kinds of tracks we leave behind, the kinds of things we want to be known for, and the kind of legacy we can leave, if we let God help us.

Because we are leaving tracks...

it's not a question of whether we leave a legacy or not; it's a question of whether the tracks we leave behind are the ones we want to leave behind!

That is our topic today, the final installment in our quest for The Ultimate Life, which we began five weeks ago with the help of the faith-based movie by that name. It's the story of young Jason Stevens, who learns about The Ultimate Life from the lessons of his oilman grandfather's life.

And we've been seeing not only how the different "treasures" that contribute to The Ultimate Life show up in that movie, but also how they are revealed in the teachings of the Apostle Paul in the Bible, a man who lived The Ultimate Life himself, taught it to others, and wrote about it in his letters to struggling people like you and me.

The final treasure we will explore is the Treasure of Leaving a Legacy, something Red Stevens eventually discovered in that movie:

Video clip: The Ultimate Life (1:32.10–1:34.21), ending,  
"You still got time, Red."

"You still got time, Red." And so do you. So do I.

No matter how young or old you may be, if you are here today, if you are breathing, if you can hear my voice, you still have time to craft The Ultimate Life by discovering the Treasure of Leaving a Legacy.

To help us do that, we're going to look once more to God's Word, the Bible.

Let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to Second Timothy, the third chapter. We are going to study the last eight verses of that chapter and the first eight verses of the next chapter, to uncover some valuable godly guidance for anyone who wants to know the satisfaction of leaving a positive legacy that impacts the world and influences those we love.

That counsel, that guidance, is contained in a letter written by the Apostle Paul, the former persecutor of the church who became the great church planter of the first century, to his younger protégé, Timothy, for whom two letters in the Bible are named.

The first thing I want to point out to you from Paul's counsel to Timothy, is this:

**1. Consider the example you are setting.**

Follow along as I read 2 Timothy 3:10–17. Paul writes this to his protégé:

***You, [Timothy,] know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. — 2 Timothy 3:10–17, NIV***

Notice that Paul cites at least three sources of information—three guiding lights in Timothy's life and ministry.

A. The first is Paul himself.

He says, "You...know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings."

That's quite a list!

And it's obviously offered to Timothy in the confidence that all those things have been a good example for him.

Right? After all, who would say, "You know all about my life, my faith, my patience," and so on, if doing so would cause the other person to roll his eyes and say, sarcastically, "Oh, yeah, I know all about you!"

But Paul clearly has no fear of that.

He has obviously lived in such a way that Timothy will read that list and agree that Paul has set a good example in those areas.

B. The second guiding light Paul cites is that of Timothy's family.

He says, in verses 14 and 15:

***Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.***

— 2 Timothy 3:14–15, NIV

“You know those from whom you learned it,” Paul says. And so do we, because he mentioned those people by name on the first page of his letter. Second Timothy 1:5 says:

***I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*** — 2 Timothy 1:5, NIV

So Paul cites the example of Timothy's mother and grandmother, whose example was obviously worth emulating. Those women, Paul says, possessed a sincere faith, which they then passed on to Timothy.

C. The third guiding light Paul mentions is, of course, God's Word, the Scriptures.

He says, in verses 15–17:

***From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

— 2 Timothy 3:15–17, NIV

Timothy had a rich legacy, a legacy of sincere faith, salvation in Christ Jesus, and purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance, even through persecution and suffering. A legacy that had been left to him by his mother and grandmother, by his mentor, Paul, and by their devotion to Scripture.

So is that the kind of legacy you are leaving? Could you write a letter that says, “You know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,” and so on? Or would your example more likely be summarized, “You know all about my poor example, my lack of purpose, flimsy faith, impatience,” and so on?

Consider the example you are setting. Your way of life, your purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance are the soil in which your legacy will grow...or wither and die.

Secondly, I think Paul shows us to...

## **2. Choose what and whom you will invest in.**

Look at Second Timothy 4. The first five verses say this:

***In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. — 2 Timothy 4:1–5, NIV***

There’s a lot of great instruction and advice in those verses. But my point is not primarily about the content of those verses, it is what it says about Paul’s relationship to Timothy.

Paul had met Timothy years before, on his second missionary journey, as he traveled from city to city with Silas.

Acts 16 records it:

***Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.***

— Acts 16:1–5, NIV

Paul met Timothy, apparently got to know him a little bit, and said, “I want to invest in this guy. I want him to travel with me and learn from me.”

And Timothy did. He traveled here and there with Paul, and also with Silas. He became a guy Paul could depend on, someone he could entrust with responsibility, someone he could teach to preach, someone he could send on various missions and assignments.

And Timothy apparently rose to every challenge Paul set before him. He gave valuable assistance to Paul in his ministry. He contributed to the establishment of churches throughout the civilized world at that time. He is mentioned in ten New Testament books, two of which were written specifically to instruct and inspire his own ministry.

He is a part of Paul’s legacy.

So, what and whom are you investing in? Are you spending your time and effort in areas that will leave a legacy behind? Are you investing in things that will be sold when you die...or things that will never die?

I suggest that you identify a Timothy or two...someone you can spend time with, someone to depend on, someone to mentor and influence.

Not that you’re perfect—you’re not and never will be. Not that you’re some spiritual giant.

But no matter where you are in your spiritual life, there is still someone you can influence as you yourself have been influenced. Someone to encourage, as you yourself have been encouraged.

It may not start with a Bible study or mission trip...it may start with teaching someone how to change the oil in a car. Or showing someone how to can, quilt, or play first base.

Over time, of course, that person may learn more than that. He or she may ask questions about your life, faith, purpose, and patience. The investment may pay dividends you never dreamed of.

Of course, you may wonder, how do I find those kind of people? How do I even identify a Timothy or two?

First, pray that God will bring a Timothy or two into your life, or if they're already in your life, that he'll point them out to you.

Second, take the initiative. Put up your antenna. Look around for a while, and then make an offer. Ask if they'd be interested in getting together or in having your help in some way.

Third, keep at it.

Don't be discouraged if your first efforts aren't raging successes. Just let God lead and be willing to try and try again.

Consider the example you're setting, choose what and whom you will invest in, and then:

### **3. Continue with the end in mind.**

After Paul appealed to the various examples Timothy had to guide him, and offered instruction and inspiration based on years of partnership and influence, he said this to Timothy, in Second Timothy 4:6–8:

***For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*** — 2 Timothy 4:6–8, NIV

It sounds a little like an epitaph, doesn't it? And, in a way, it is. Paul wrote those words from a Roman prison. Those words—and the few that follow in Second Timothy 4—are the last recorded words from Paul's pen. He sensed—maybe even knew—that his life would end soon, and this is his “swan song.”

Paul had lived with the end in mind. As he wrote to the church in Philippi:

***One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

— Philippians 3:13b–14, NIV

That is a focus that will leave a legacy. That is a legacy that will last forever.

It may seem like a maudlin exercise, but bear with me for a moment, and close your eyes.

Picture a funeral...

Flowers. Music. People gathered, speaking in hushed tones. But this is different from all the other funerals you've attended, because this one is yours.

Still with your eyes closed, let me ask you:

Who is there? Who are the people in that room? Who is missing?  
Who are the speakers? Who will be standing up to say something?  
And what will they say?  
What would you like them to say?  
About your life?  
About your relationships?  
About your example?  
About your legacy?

And then, allow me just one more question:

Does anything need to change to make that day look the way you want it to look?

As Hamilton said to Red in The Ultimate Life movie, “You still got time.”

Whether you are young or old, or wherever you are in your spiritual journey, if you’re still living and breathing, you still have time...to live with the end in mind... and to build The Ultimate Life with the Treasure of Leaving a Legacy.

Let’s pray.

The Bible says: Now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2, NIV). There is literally no time like the present to start living with the end in mind, to lay the foundation of a lasting legacy.

And the first and best thing you can do to that end is to receive the grace of God, the salvation that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. That is something you can begin right here, right now, by praying:

“Lord Jesus, I want to live with the end in mind. I want to live The Ultimate Life, through faith in you. I ask your forgiveness for all my sin, and accept your sacrifice on the cross as payment for all the wrong things I’ve done. I ask you to come into my heart, take up residence there, and take charge of my life from this moment on, amen.”

Now, if for any reason you have trouble praying that prayer, or if you have questions I can help to answer, I would love to talk with you and pray with you as we sing our closing song, or anytime after this service ends.

And, for all of us, I pray: “Lord, I want to know the satisfaction of a positive legacy that impacts the world and influences those I love. I want to be able to say someday, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.’ So help me, Lord—help us all—to consider the example I’m setting, to wisely choose what and whom I will invest in, and to continue the rest of my days with the end in mind, in Jesus’ name, amen.”















