

A Psalm of Legacy
by Randy Reynolds

PSALM 112
Interpretation by Randy Reynolds
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REFLECTIONS ON LEGACIES

A legacy is about what you contribute in your lifetime. Legacies are as unique as your fingerprint because they represent you. To whom do you make contributions? What difference do those contributions make? Are they contributions that naturally bring honor or do they bring shame?

Legacies are ambiguous in that we make both positive and negative contributions in our lives. Are you planting seeds of the Kingdom or seeds of the flesh or the world? In what group or domain do you contribute: business, church, sports, or family, and do they bring honor or shame? Every choice we make has eternal significance in our life and the lives of others, when viewed from the perspective of legacy.

In her CD called "Conversations" Sarah Grove describes this significance in a song called, "Generations" that relates to family legacies. "Remind me of this with every decision: Generations will reap what I sow. I can pass on a curse or a blessing to those I will never know."

Erickson, the developmental psychologist, described the last stage of life as one that either brings integrity from the contributions you have made to the common good and Kingdom; or despair, the consequence of being too self-absorbed, for whatever reason and not contributing to others, especially the next generation.

Everyone at some point in time will take a serious look at their life and ask, "Was life worth living?" Did I make a difference? When I was a young pastor years ago, I went to a dealer to buy a car. As the car salesman showed his inventory of new cars, he began asking me questions about my life. I shared how our church was ministering, how we were caring for the sick, the homeless, the boat people, and others who were in need in our community. He became withdrawn and sad. He dropped his head as if he had fallen into grief, shame or even despair. I asked, "Are you ok?" He looked up and said, "I thought I was a pretty good person and was living a good life until I started listening to what your church is doing." Our conversation had caused him to reflect on what type of a life he was living, who he was living for and what that meant. In the Old Testament there is a Psalm where the Psalmist reflects on the issue of contribution in the life of a believer. He ponders a life of service and faith in God; a life worth living.

Psalm 112 - The Legacy of Serving God

*This Psalm promises that God will reward those who serve Him. Not only reward, but make them happy and blessed as a consequence of serving Him. The life that flows from knowing and loving God will bring blessing to him and those around him, through abundant grace. We as believers often miss the significance of living a life in relationship to God and the difference it makes, because in our lives many of the things we do are "invisible sacrifices" that prevent evil and bring good. It is not always obvious that making good and right choices is heroic. In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* the legacy of George Bailey was unknown even to him, until it was revealed by the Divine (Matthew 25: 31-46).*

Your life as a believer is so much more significant than you know without a peek through a divine fence hole. I hope this Psalm helps provide some of that perspective. This Psalm is reworded to help personalize it in a New Testament context and to allow for easy memorization.

Psalm 112

Praise the Lord!

Happy am I because I fear (and love) the Lord.

Yes, happy am I because I delight in doing what he commands.

My children will be successful (mighty, noble) everywhere;

An entire generation of godly people will be blessed.

I will be wealthy, and my good deeds will never be forgotten.

When darkness overtakes me, light will come bursting in.

I am generous (gracious), compassionate, and righteous (as Christ is manifest in me)

All goes well because I am generous (gracious),

I lend freely and conduct my business fairly. (I am just)

I will not be overcome by evil circumstances. (I am strong and mighty)

I am righteous (in Christ) and will be long remembered.

I do not fear bad news:

I confidently trust the Lord to care for me.

I am confident and fearless and can face my foes triumphantly.

I give generously (graciously) to those in need.

My good deeds will never be forgotten.

I will have influence and honor.

The wicked (those living against God's purposes) will be infuriated when they see this.

They will grind their teeth in anger;

They will slink away, their hopes thwarted.

REWARDS OF SERVICE

This is a very practical Psalm that asks the question, what do I get out of serving God and then it answers that question. This is a Psalm of legacy which is in the context of a lifetime of service, which comes from knowing God and doing His will.

Verse 1, WORSHIP

This Psalm, like many other psalms starts with a call to worship – “Praise the Lord!” Then, “Happy are those who fear the Lord.” The word for fear is really about a position of worship where the believer bows before God in a position of awe and from that position of worship rises up to serve Him and do His will. His heart “delights” in service, which then brings God’s abundant blessings upon him.

“Happy are those who delight in doing what He commands.” What does it mean to delight? It means to take pleasure, enjoyment or joy. So this is not a duty but a desire that gives meaning and pleasure in the believer’s life as they serve God.

Over the years I have met many believers who are passionate and over-joyed with serving God. I met a woman who after raising her own six children, along with her husband, then raised fifty foster children. Her face shined from the joy she received from this divine purpose. She found her purpose in worshipping and serving God and she absolutely glowed with joy from the blessings she received from God. I felt humbled to be in her presence!

What are these blessings, what are these rewards that come from serving God?

Verse 2, FAMILY LEGACY

The first blessings mentioned are children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, the believer's seed, their family legacy. Children bring joy to our lives! They are meant to be a blessing as the godly serve the Lord and our children. My children and grandchildren are one of the great blessings of my life. The Lord made the family central to the well being of us all and when there is a godly family all of us benefit.

This is a "pay it forward" Psalm in that when people are blessed they want to bless others. It is a natural and godly desire to want to "give back" especially when our parents loved us. Children, who are well cared for, tend to take good care of their children. "We love because He first loved us," is the law of indebtedness that flows from a grace-filled family. In a healthy social system or family, people want to give and make contributions to others because goodwill is created (a world view) and that is the position of this Psalm.

One lady I talked with this year said, "My mother adopted me and gave me more than I could have hoped to receive. I want to help others and give like she did, because I want to honor her." When children receive they want to give as they grow to maturity. This is the most natural "pay it forward" part of life; we are blessed so we bless those in the next generation. The Psalm goes on to describe these children. They will be successful, mighty, and noble, people of substance.

As the life of Christ flows through the believer and they make choices every day for righteousness, grace, justice, compassion and other aspects of the Divine nature, a life of substance flows to the next generation. This is not a life of appearances, flash or worldliness but one that makes a difference through everyday choices of service on the long road, "the road less traveled." The family will be blessed and will bless those around them. God made the family the most basic unit of society to meet the needs of family members and then others outside the family. Of course these promises are in the context of each believer's life and struggle.

In many of the families I have worked with suffering with addiction, alcoholism has played a major part in negative family legacies. Addiction steals from all relationships and brings destruction, negative consequences, and bad legacies. It is difficult to believe that a positive family legacy can be achieved.

The negative consequences of sin block the hope of a positive legacy and bring shame. Many believers have struggled to see positive promises materialize in their lifetime (Hebrews 11:35-40). They get discouraged and jealous because others seem to have children who turn out wonderfully while their children are a mess. There is great temptation to just give up on the faith that promises a positive legacy because we all get weary in doing good, when we do not see tangible results.

One man I worked with struggled to get sober for twenty-five years, he finally found Christ in prison and exercised God's power to gain sobriety. When he came to me his children were struggling with alcoholism, drug addiction and homosexuality, and he was discouraged. His battle to keep the faith was hard because his core belief was that his children will not turn out well, so it was very hard to continue to invest his time and love in them. God knows that and sees his struggle. Why try, why invest if there is little honor, reward or positive results? Seeds of the Kingdom take time to grow, sometimes the results promised here do not show up until the grandchildren become adults.

Seeds of faith do come to fruition. For many believers it is difficult to believe that God's promises are real and to keep serving and contributing when they are experiencing the results of negative legacies. "So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time. Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone" Gal 6:9. Families take a lot of investment, but pay dividends for years to come.

INVISIBLE RESULTS

Three times in this Psalm the issue of legacy is raised, the believer and his good deeds will be remembered and celebrated. One day I was reading this Psalm and realized it is the Psalm of legacy. About two weeks later I had a week where I experienced the fruit of my own legacy. First, I was visiting a church when we were asked to turn and greet those around us. A man introduced himself to me. As I introduced myself to him he said, "Are you the FAMOUS Randy Reynolds?" I was embarrassed and sheepishly said, "I guess so." He asked, "Did you start the Vineyard Church?" When I said, "Yes," he looked me in the eye and said, "It's because of you that I'm saved." I was taken back, surprised and blessed, even though it had been decades ago that my friends and I had started the church. I had no idea this man had been affected by my life.

A little later on in the week a woman called the office. She said, "I found your book on parenting at a carwash and read it." It had been published twelve years ago and was out of print. "It changed my life, so I had to find this author and was surprised to find out that you live in my city. Can I come see you?" she said. As the week wore on I had a couple other encounters, less dramatic that caused me to reflect on a life of service.

I went back to this Psalm and thought about how true is God's word and what a blessing it is in my life. You never know what the results of your service to God will be and how far reaching simple acts of faith and obedience will go, over time. Look at the life of Abram and how his every day issue of faith, believing God for a family and having a child, influenced billions of people of faith, Jews, Muslims and Christians.

Verse 3, WEALTH THE SECOND BLESSING

How can wealth be a part of the blessings of God? This Psalm focuses on generosity and it is difficult to be generous if you do not have anything to give. In the Old Testament you see that God's heart was to bless the believer in every area of their life

"They themselves will be wealthy," There was no division between the sacred and secular, religious and personal; all of life was a part of faith. Does God want to bless you and provide for you abundantly? Is this also part of serving Him and walking in faith?

Years ago when I started a little counseling practice, a lady came to me and said that she could not afford the bottom of our sliding scale, which was \$25 a session. I was anxious and struggling with whether I could make it in this new ministry financially. Could I be generous and gracious with her? I decided to charge her \$15 an hour and for a year she worked hard on her issues. After she finished counseling she started donating \$90 a month to my new non-profit. I asked why she wanted to do this and she said that she wanted others who were hurting and couldn't afford counseling to be able to receive a scholarship, and my little agency began to prosper. Over the years donations increased to \$150,000 a year. Many counselors and clients benefited from the generosity of those in our community.

Taking risks, working hard, and contributing something of value, brings prosperity as a natural consequence. This Psalm is also connected to the biblical principle of sowing and reaping in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. "Remember this, a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants GENEROUSLY will get a GENEROUS crop." 2 Corinthians 9:6. It is also the Psalm that shows the theological foundation for New Covenant giving. It is quoted in relationship to the New Testament tithe, but really relates to giving in life not just giving to the church. God loves the person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scripture says, "Godly

people give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will never be forgotten.” 2 Corinthians 9:9 (taken from Psalm 112:9)

Why are some able to be generous and give themselves so freely? God has blessed their efforts. One of the heroes of our faith who is now remembered and honored is William Wilberforce.

William Wilberforce who was called the greatest moral reformer in the history of England was enabled to serve because he was wealthy. His parents and family were successful merchants and left him a great estate. Wilberforce used almost all of it to serve God for forty some years: abolished slavery, reformed injustice in England and served God for the common good. He could not have done this without favor, the wealth he inherited from his family and God. He was who he was because of his family’s legacy of wealth and because of God’s grace in his life. Legacies are empowered through the grace of others.

STABILITY COMING FROM FAITH IN GOD

Verse 4a, “When darkness overtakes me, light will come bursting in.”: Verse 6 & 7, “I will not be overcome by evil circumstances. I am righteous (in Christ) and will be long remembered:” and verse 8, “I do not fear bad news: I confidently trust the Lord to care for me. I am confident and fearless and can face my foes triumphantly;” the believer is becoming a person of stability. He is secure because he trusts that God will take care of him. We have a strong sense of inner security even in the face of adversity, because we know that God will deliver us from darkness. We will not be overcome by darkness; we won’t fear bad news, because of our faith in God’s love for us. His unfailing covenant of love embraces and surrounds us. We reflect constantly on His faithfulness and goodness and so we are confident, fearless and approach our problems with the assurance that we will have victory.

Our faith is what makes us “mighty and successful”, people whose lives are substantive. Healthy spirituality moves people towards confidence and empowers them to face difficulties in life. It does not produce passive, dependent people, but competent believers who can push through their own anxiety and find creative solutions to problems. The consequence of difficult life experiences is that believers become more secure in their lives as they press into God. Confidence, security and triumph are not because there is certainty in life, but because there is certainty and security in our faith in God.

Faith, true faith helps produce a sense of certainty, because “God works all things together for good.” Some translations for stability, are steadfast, firm, enduring, and “his heart is upheld.” I don’t believe this means that the believer does not have emotional reactions to problems, threat and loss. It means that as we work through our anxieties by trusting God, yielding to Him, and praying for deliverance our faith will increase. A believer becomes stable and secure as they reflect on God’s presence and promises in their life. This process of faith, deliverance, and problem solving brings stability in the believer’s life.

Verse 5, GRACE AND JUSTICE

“All goes well for those who are generous, who lend freely and conduct their business fairly.” In the last couple of years I have learned a lot about the Old Testament concepts of lending freely to the poor and those in need. As I got involved with the hurt and pain of those exploited by predatory lending, the scripture Deuteronomy 15:1-11 took on a whole new meaning. I saw the need to be generous, lend freely, and be fair in business unlike sub-prime lending and payday loans which exploit the poor. As believers found out about this exploitation they would often rethink the treatment of their own employees.

Several business owners I met with began helping their employees get out of debt and encouraged them to develop their own wealth; like buying their first homes. Justice came from knowledge and concern for the struggles of those who have less. Compassion moved them to care about justice and to be just. They had relationships with their employees but did not know about APR's of 400% that were trapping people in an addictive cycle of loans. So, knowledge brought about responsibility, which is the Hebrew concept of knowledge.

Verse 6, THE LEGACY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Those who are righteous will long be remembered." When someone does the right thing, it affects the lives of many, and they don't forget it. Like the stories in *It's a Wonderful Life*, when we do things that are right it makes a difference, it prevents evil. Mathew 5:14-16. When George Bailey stopped his employer from putting poison in the prescription he was filling, he was not rewarded in fact he was struck in the ear. No good deed goes unpunished. Young George's honesty, courage, and strength kept Mr. Gower the pharmacist from going to prison and being marginalized from the community. We discover the Divine perspective when Clarence the Angel shows what life would have been without the "good works" of George Bailey. George, who feels that his life of service has been for naught, finds that he is much loved and "long remembered" for his righteous life as the community comes to his rescue.

The life of Christ is manifest in the life of the believer even when they are not aware of it. "Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God." 2 Corinthians 2:15. That fragrance may be beyond our senses. We cannot smell the perfume we applied only minutes before, but others can smell it. We are righteous in Christ and as His life is lived out in us it will bring good to the life of others who will remember us.

Verse 9a, BEING REMEMBERED FOR GIVING

"They give generously to those in need. Their good deeds will never be forgotten." The word for generous can be translated gracious. So legacy is about grace that is given to others. Others do not earn these benefits, they are handed down by those who have done good deeds and have contributed to the greater good.

Have you ever thought of all the ways that we have benefited from those who came before us? We benefit from all the things we use that we did not create or manufacture, but that someone else labored to create. It could be a car, telephone, surgical procedure, a road, water line, electricity, our freedom, democracy, a church, a hospital, a school, or our salvation, received as a gift in our lives, but often taken for granted. There are so, so many things that have just come to us and help meet the needs in our lives that others have made sacrifices to produce.

Legacy is about the common grace that comes to us which we can be thankful for. It is also about the special grace that comes to us from our relationship with Jesus Christ when God gave us His Son. All of it is intended to be a blessing from a God who loves and desires to share His abundance in our lives.

Verse 9b, THE COST OF HONOR AND INFLUENCE

Legacy has to do with honor and glory! Over the years I have seen that many people want honor and glory and are very attracted to it. Some are almost seduced by the desire to be important and valued, others have aspired to be powerful and have positions of power and wealth, and others are moved by the glory of achievement. The apostles James and John said to Jesus, "In your glorious Kingdom we want to sit in places of honor next to you, one at your right and the other at your left."

Mark 10:37 NLT. Jesus does not attempt to discourage them from seeking honor and glory, it is probably a large part of their calling; He confronts them because they do not know the cost of honor and glory. "Are you able to be baptized with the baptism of suffering I must be baptized with?" Mark 10:38 NLT. You don't know what you don't know. Their desire for glory was adolescent. Glory has to be earned through costly service and sacrifice. Children do not know the cost of honor and glory.

Sometimes adults can lose sight of the reward because the price they are paying feels like it is not worth it. Oscar Wilde said, "The cynic knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing." Jesus kept his eye on the reward even in times of great sacrifice and suffering. "He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy (reward) He knew would be His after His resurrection." Hebrews 12:2 "You know that in this world kings are tyrants, and officials lord it over the people beneath them. But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader (have position, power, honor or glory) among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even I, the son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45 NLT. Honor and glory become a consequence of a heart that is right with God.

"The fear of the Lord teaches a person to be wise; humility precedes honor." Proverbs 15:33. Motive is very important in the issue of legacy. It is not self-seeking significance, but the desire to humbly submit, obey God, and serve Him. God is a rewarder and knows our needs for significance and esteem; he is not stingy but gives in his timing "beyond imagination." "And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory." Colossians 3:4.

Verse 9c, INFLUENCE AND HONOR

People who have given much in their lives often have great influence (power) and honor. This verse is in contrast to verse 10 because it is about being vindicated. The wicked see faith as foolishness, especially when it relates to generosity and often mock believers for their beliefs and unselfish behaviors. Verse 10 says, "The wicked will be infuriated," why? Because they thought life was mainly about them and their pleasures, comforts and desires.

The great paradox of the Kingdom is that the "first will be last and the last will be first" and that really ticks people off. The logic of the wicked is, "happiness should come from serving myself, not God!" Blessed and happy are those who delight in serving God. Service benefits the servant as well as those served, what a paradox.

When I started sharing my faith boldly as a young man one of my professors one day said to me, "I stopped believing in fairy tales and the Bible when I grew up." He was inferring that it was about time that I quit being so childish or foolish. The godly are vindicated before God; He will give them honor and glory at the appropriate time.

They may be shamed here, but they will be rewarded eventually. This will happen both here in our lifetime and in heaven as we stand before our Maker. People who make great contributions to the common good in this life are often mocked for their level of risk and sacrifice. That can be as simple as your teenager disrespecting you as you pour your life into them. It can be the invalidation of faithfulness by a husband or wife and having the one you are faithful to be unfaithful to you.

People mocked inventors like Thomas Edison who literally failed thousands of times before inventing the light bulb, or Henry Ford who raised the salaries of his employees three times the level of the average wage earner so they would have a better life and could afford a Model T. He was called a bad business man who should have been a minister. Their honor came after the sacrifice and struggle. My father died this year of Alzheimer's. When he first got the disease I decided that before he lost

touch with those he loved, that we would honor him. When I told him that I was going to throw a party to honor him and mom he said, "No, you are not, I don't need it." He did not serve to be honored; he just loved us and did not want me to spend money on him. He was from the depression era. I brought it up again and he said, "No party." The third time I brought it up he said, "Your mother and I think that you need to do this, so we will accept it."

We threw a dinner for about 45 people and had a video of mom and dad's life. Friends and family got up and shared what they meant to them. Dad and Mom made a difference in their lives and they came to show their lives had been touched. I wrote out four pages of memories and thoughts to honor them and ended it with this quote from Spurgeon, "A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you. So carve your name on hearts and not on marble." The morning after the party he called me early and said, "Best party I ever had."

I think a lot about Dad's legacy to us as a family and appreciate him more because I continue to realize the depth of his contribution to our lives. They were truly acts of grace that even benefit my children and grandchildren today. He would agree with Sarah Grove's words about legacy that I quoted in the beginning. "Remind me of this with every decision. Generations will reap what I sow. I can pass on a curse or a blessing to those I will never know." We remember you, Dad!

CONCLUSION

There are no insignificant contributions in the Kingdom of God because they are all connected to God. As this Psalm says, "Blessed is the man who delights in the Lord's commands." Doing His Will gives great meaning and reward in and of itself. Besides, in the Kingdom every choice is significant in the context of the individual and their relationship with Christ. Like in the story of the widow's mite; what the religious leaders of the day thought was an insignificant contribution was the greatest sacrifice in the context of the widow's ability, faith, and obedience to God. Your life counts eternally, every decision will leave a legacy; you are a work of God's grace. Everyone may not see that today, but it will be made known, and we will give God praise.