

Legacies come from what we do and how we live

Some people find that the holiday season gives them time to reflect on the past year and what will come in the new year.

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During these days of waning light as we look forward to faith, family and holiday celebrations, I am inclined this year to reflect upon the idea of the notion of our legacy. Moving toward the winter solstice makes me pause for reflection, more so this year than in the past.

This is because a friend of mine I knew passed away in September from pancreatic and liver cancer. He was gone within two weeks of his diagnosis. This caused me to think about my friend and what "leaving a legacy" is all about.

There are four criteria that I've come up with, which I thought I'd share with you.

- 1. What we have done.

What we do each day is our lives. This is a simple truth I try to remind myself of. Often we think our lives are something to look forward to if we can just find the right person, the right job, perhaps move, a little more money. Many things come to mind. But what we do each day is our lives.

When I think of my friend, I recall that he helped start an international relief organization, helped start a company that built affordable housing, helped start two magazines, founded a company that helps students prepare for the MCAT medical school admission tests and helped start a private high school. This is astonishing.

He had new ideas and we were going to get together soon to talk and share. But his sudden illness and decline intervened.

- 2. Whom we have become.

Not everyone has a great legacy of external accomplishments. And our internal development is hard to notice and is often most fully displayed by simple and ordinary people. The rich, powerful and famous may emulate this, but they rarely have a corner on living lives of integrity. And integrity I define as, "the ability to tell yourself the truth, to listen to that voice and to do your best to live in accordance with that truth."

My friend was a great and trusted friend, a willing mentor and loving husband and father and a son of God.

- 3. Those we have loved.

The measure of the quality of our lives is not just external accomplishments nor internal growth, but it is determined by those we have loved. It means those whom we're close to or who are easy to love, but it also means those who were not so easy. It means being faithful to what we have become and maintaining that compass of direction toward love in the difficult times.

My friend loved many and loved well and maintained a levity and sense of humor that helped me and others through difficult or confusing times.

•4. What others do because of us.

Another aspect — and perhaps the final measure of a legacy — is what others do because of us. It is not up to them, but is up to us to determine their legacy. We always remember people who have accomplished great things, have become people in integrity and internal growth and those who have loved deeply and broadly. But we don't often think that the legacy of anyone is really up to us.

Let's all think of those we know who have accomplished great things in their lives — not just the Michael Jordan or Mozart types. No one starts with the same gifts and talents. Life throws us different pitches; we face different challenges. The measure could be a Michael Jordan-type of accomplishment, but it could be a special needs child who learns to talk and walk. It could be a single mother or father who shows up in that role every day, to the best of their ability. Which is greater? I'll leave that to you to answer.

Let's take pride in our work but also in the roles we play each day, large and small, in the things we do each day, and in seeing the beauty in every moment.

Let's be honest and dedicated to our own internal growth. No one can do this for us, and it is what brings us real satisfaction and provides us with the emotional tools to live well.

Let's love deeply and broadly. This is something we all can and should do. It lifts up others, provides meaning to our lives and connects us to those whom we share our lives with.

Let's take the lessons we have learned from others and embody their values as part of our lives. By doing so, they live with and through us. It is how civilization learns, grows and improves as well.

Robert Sayre