

A FAMILY'S GUIDE TO CREATING AN INTENTIONAL LEGACY

What Is Your Legacy?

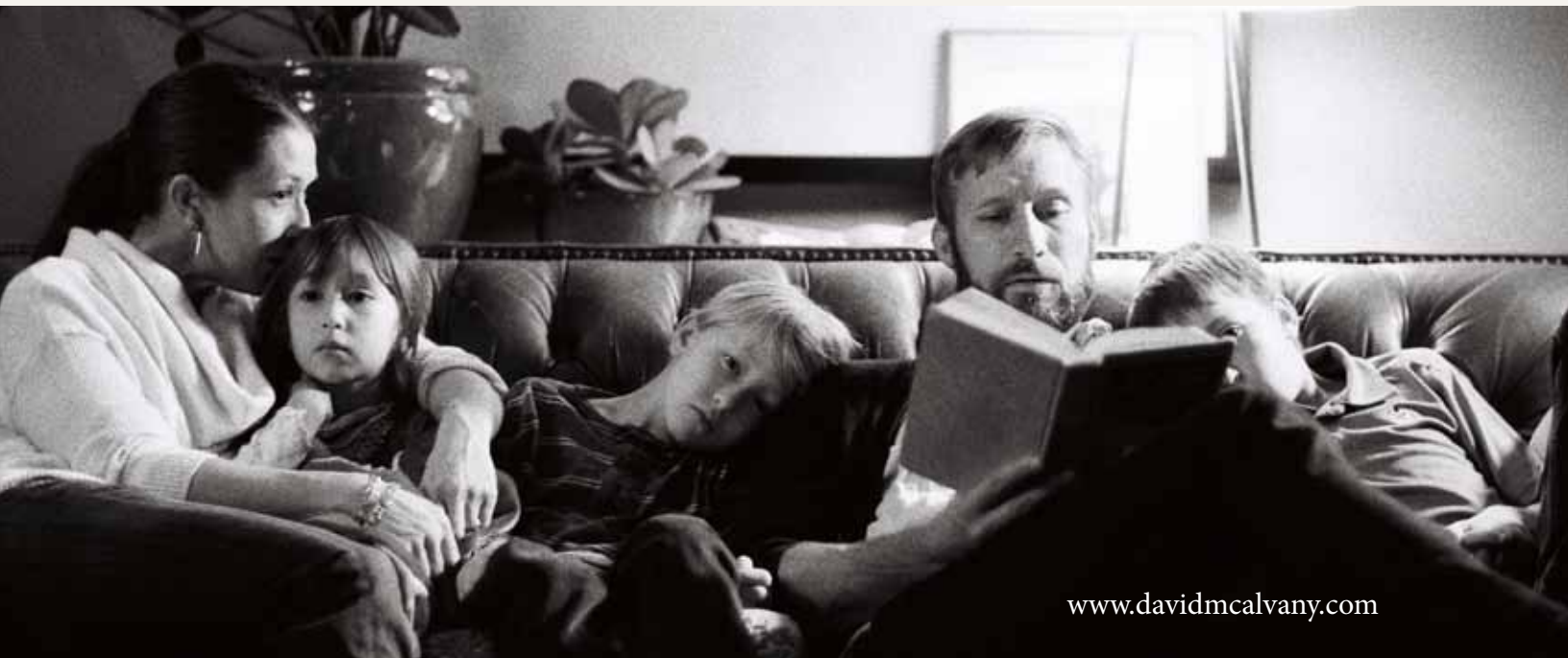
I was one of those little boys who could not get enough of my father.

I wanted to be with him. I dressed like him. I memorized the business speeches he gave and was able to recite them when asked. His vision for life, his faith, values and culture were a legacy that I instinctively embraced.

My father was a Christian with contrarian political views and a passion for thinking, writing and teaching. Ideas mattered to my dad, and so did family life. Dad exposed us to great ideas and great people.

As I grew up, life became complicated and I lost my way. So did my dad. We both made really bad choices when it came to our relationship with each other. Tragically, when all was said and done, I almost jettisoned the idea of legacy forever. Small tensions began to become volcanic. I wanted to escape my life, and even tried to run away. I felt alone and I felt abandoned by my dad. He was one person who deep down I wanted to be loved, accepted and known by.

Ultimately, I ended up in a camp for troubled teenagers where my daily task was slopping pigs. (Not kidding.) I felt distanced from my father, and things could not seem worse.



But something changed. Just when things looked particularly bleak and hopeless, my dad and I had a conversation at the Waffle House that changed our lives and our relationship forever. We genuinely forgave each other and decided to have a new beginning. When that happened, I began the journey of looking at legacy in a way that I never had before.

Legacy is far more than assets on a balance sheet. The pains we experienced and the truths we stood for, fought for, worked for, waited for—these are the things for which we will be remembered. All of this is the stuff of legacy.

Legacy is our life message — it's what our life represents, the values and vision we stand for, and then leave to others in the form of family, home, heirlooms, experiences, values and faith that define our character and the imprint we leave on the world.

Legacy is inescapable. We may choose to invest in our legacy, or we may choose to neglect it. Either way, you and I will leave one to our children's children. Legacy is inescapable: We may prove ourselves grateful recipients of the life work and values of those who came before us, or thankless legatees who like Esau in the Bible despised his birthright, preferring a "mess of pottage" instead.

Legacy is not that we live perfect lives or all our relationships are perfect. In the end, how we respond to what we have inherited—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and what we leave to others will commemorate our time on this earth. We either take what has been dealt to us and allow it to make us a better person, or we allow it to tear us down.

Legacy is something we cannot see with the eyes or touch with the hands, but it is as real as the lives of our children, who represent one dimension of our life's work. Building a family legacy, cultivating it and protecting it, is one of the great privileges of life.

Today, my dad and I live on the opposite ends of the world. We sometimes fly to halfway points to discuss business, but our conversations always return to what matters most to us: family and legacy.

More than two decades have passed since my father and I reconciled, and we think of ourselves as custodians of a generational story. Today, I am married to my dream girl and a father to four children. I can see the next generation before my very eyes. Our lives are but one chapter, positioned somewhere in the index of a book of indiscernible length. The narrative began long before we were born, and continues further into the future than we might imagine.

I believe that each lifetime gives us the opportunity to answer a higher calling: To step up to being the trustees—the caretakers—of a future which is bigger than even our own lives. A future which can even touch our great grandchildren's future.

We Are Living in the Midst of a Legacy Crisis

I am a wealth manager by profession. So was my father. Collectively, we have about half a century in the financial planning business. We have witnessed hundreds of families who have excellent bank accounts but troubled legacies. I have witnessed and seen in my own life how every choice matters, each one affects those that I love and how each of us can so easily create a legacy we didn't intend to leave.

There is a saying in cultures around the world: "shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations." The first generation rolls up their shirtsleeves and works hard to acquire assets. The next generation does not appreciate them. They spend them. By the third generation, wealth has dissipated and the family is back to square one.

Why do so many family financial legacies fail?

Lack of vision and planning. The simple answer is that legacies dissolve for lack of vision and planning.

Little buy-in from the next generation. The kids just don't care. They have little incentive to connect.

The family environment lacks grace and redemption. It's hard to get excited about a family legacy when we don't feel included in our family, or we feel judged by our family, or we struggle with feeling "not enough." These negative emotional patterns, when unresolved, pass from one generation to the next.

We are living in the midst of perhaps the largest legacy crisis in history.

What is the meaning of a family?

What does it mean that we have an increase in our aging population and a decrease in births?

How will we care for the elderly when our financial systems are teetering on bankruptcy?

And what about the children who are growing up in a virtual social media world, detached from physical flesh-and-blood relationships? What legacy will they embrace?

Finding answers to these problems and recovering a healthy vision for legacy is one of the great responsibilities of our generation.

LEGACY

Intentionality

I remember the smells of my mother's kitchen.

Today, I love to cook.

I remember the way my grandfather walked me to his garden and told me stories.

Today, I love to grow plants and experiment with every type of spice and condiment available for cooking.

Those moments doing life with my family shaped me forever.

Every choice we make shapes the future of children, even those unborn. David Mitchell put it this way: "Our lives are not our own. We are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future."

There are no areas of neutrality in your life when it comes to legacy. And there are no perfect families, perfect parents or perfect legacies. There are imperfect, needy families who give up and despair, and there are imperfect, needy families who see beyond challenges and persevere.

The single most important common denominator of these persevering families is that they have experienced grace in their lives. Somewhere or somehow, they needed hope. They have experienced loss or tragedy within the family, and they have learned to forgive each other. They have learned that their relationships as family members are based on who they are, not what they do. And for those who come from a legacy of brokenness -- which is so many of us -- the great news is that you have the ability to start fresh, to build your own family legacy from the ground up.

Broken marriages, absentee fathers, deaths of loved ones, financial ruin, moral failure and every stripe of personal and familial tragedy are not the end to the story. Rather, each represents opportunities for sharing grace, mercy and rebirth. In the end, there is no crisis so great nor tragedy so painful that you should be left hopeless and disconnected from a meaningful legacy.

LEGACY

How to build a family legacy? What Does a Family Legacy Look Like?

Want to build your legacy intentionally? It is important to know the scope -- the principle areas of intentional living. Here is my personal list:

1.) The Faith of Your Family - The spiritual beliefs and living faith of your family is the foundation for any intentional legacy. What you believe and why, your prayers as a family, the life of faith in your household, and a personal relationship with your Creator all define the values and culture of your family.

2.) Your Generational Heritage - You are more than just a collective of individuals living under a roof in the present. You are an heir to the past and ancestor to the future. The history of those who came before you shapes your identity and can be a source of both heartache and happiness on your journey of intentionality.

3.) Your Family Culture - Your culture is the way you live as a family, how you communicate, your ethics, values, passions, idiosyncrasies, pastimes, traditions, rejoicings — what it means to be a Smith or a Jones.

4.) Your Intellectual Tradition - Whether you realize it or not, every family has a view of the world which is at the heart of your intellectual tradition. Nurturing the thought life of a family is vital to building an intentional legacy.

5.) Your Financial Building Blocks - Hard work, stewardship, savings, investments, giving an inheritance are each building blocks of a robust, intentional legacy. The proper balance and management of a family's financial affairs requires intentionality. Failure to do so can cause stress and legacy disintegration.

LEGACY

Every day is a gift. It happens once, then never again. I think about that as I am gathered around the table each morning with my wife, Mary Catherine, and our four children. We start our day singing, reading, praying - the simple patterns of life.

As they ask questions, or laugh, or cry, or tell their own stories around the table, I feel as if I am tasting my dream of a future legacy right now, in this moment through these present realities. I love that, even as I know that these experiences won't be forever. Circumstances change. Children grow up. They start their own families. Life has ebbs and flows, which is why I want to be intentional not merely with the planning, but with the enjoying. I want to drink in these moments and experiences, for all of us to be anchored by tomorrow.

I hope you will do the same.



Resources Matter

For more information on building a family legacy make sure to read [The Intentional Legacy](#), and to follow us at davidmcalvany.com and social media for updates, tools and tips about intentional living.

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