

“Guard the Good Treasure”

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For the last four weeks – we are starting week five already – we have had a parenting class. It is called “God-Centered Parenting,” on Wednesday nights. This past Wednesday we talked about an example of how special our ancestors were. But, how sad they quickly are forgotten, and the only lasting thing is their principles and the faith that they passed down from one generation to the next.

The person on the video leading the class asked the question, “Do you remember much or anything of your great-great grandparents?” One person said they remembered, from a genealogy, their name. But, how sad [that] just not that many generations ago, great-great grandparents – they had their dreams, their goals, their ambitions, their laughter and their fun – and yet so fast we forgot who they are; and, in just a few generations you’ll be forgotten, the very same way. They won’t remember the color of your eyes. They won’t remember the way you laughed. They won’t think about so many things about you. But, you can make a lasting difference, *if* you place your faith in God – *and* your values, *and* your faith, can be passed down from generation to generation – even if *all* they know is your name. What you stand for, if it is good and solid and faithful, can live on even after you have ceased to be remembered. I think that is the legacy that we look for.

Now, I ask you to kind of ponder that, while I tell you a story. I want you to be thinking about who was my [your] great-great grandfather, who was my [your] great-great grandmother, and do I know that person on my [your] father’s side, and do I remember them on my [your] mother’s side? Think about that while I tell you the story of mine.

My great-great-grandfather on my mother’s side – his name was Douglas Dickinson. He was a dickens! Douglas Dickinson was from North Dakota, by way of Wisconsin, and we have a book – and gosh, darn it, I am so mad at my relatives, because they never wrote the names on the backs of the pictures. Now, I know now we don’t have names on pictures because everything is on our phone, but I hope there is a way we can write stuff down so we don’t forget.

There is a gentleman standing there in his Union war outfit from the Civil War, and apparently his wife and others all in this book, and I don’t know who they are, but I’m assuming they are the great-great-greats family of that side.

By the time my family on my mother’s side made it to North Dakota, one of the founding members of little towns around there was Douglas Dickinson. Now Douglas was part of the House of Representatives, in the legislature, for the state of North Dakota. He had a really big library, and I remember going to his son’s house, which I think was his before it was his son’s, because it was on the *same* farm, in Alice, North Dakota, and it had a huge library. It had an elevator in the 1800s. Think about that!

But you still – when I went back in the late 1960s or early 1970s – you still had to go to the biffy outside. [Laughter.] It had an elevator and a big library, but an outdoor biffy. But that is how some things change and some things stay the same. That is all I really know about him. But I know other things, by the family that he created.

My great-grandfather was a Christian Scientist – Douglas Dickinson's son – and my mother, when she was three years old; they were in North Dakota and it was this horrible blizzard, and they couldn't get her to the doctor. Her temperature went to over 104 – up to 105 – and they were sure she was going to die. They threw her in cold water in the tub, to try and bring the temperature down. Then she crashed and she was having trouble breathing. All of a sudden her grandfather came bursting through the door and he had his Mary Baker Eddy book from Christian Science, and he was praying and reading; and to this day, they swear that is what saved my mother's life.

Now, it was that kind of prayer and commitment that he got from his father, Douglas Dickinson. That same faith, that same, blind faith commitment to healing and restoration, was carried from one generation to the next. The next generation was my grandfather, Douglas Dickinson Bailey.

Now D.D. Bailey – my grandfather – unfortunately didn't get the library. He didn't get the elevator. He got the outhouse [laughter], because it was during the Depression. He didn't get to go to college, or get all of the opportunities that all of the previous generations had. But he made his way and he followed; even though he never got a formal education, he was a reader, and he had to figure it out without the opportunities of his previous generations.

So, he started in the gas business, and he read about that, and he became a manager for a propane tank company in St Cloud, Minn., and he started there. He went on and became an Elder in the First Presbyterian Church, in St Cloud, Minn. He was the past president of a Lion's Club, and most of my memories of my grandfather – because he died when I was in third grade – were of him in an apron, serving pancakes at the breakfast that the Lions Club always had. And just like my great-great-grandfather stood for three things: He stood for education, learning; he stood for community service; and, he stood for faith. Those three things were what his grandson lived by.

It wasn't a formal education, but that man read everything he could get his hands on. Sometimes I think he was better read, because he felt like he missed out on a formal education. He was involved in community service. He wasn't an official politician, like his grandfather, but he lived out that public service in the Lion's Club, in his church, and other things; and, he lived out his faith in his church, and he lived it out in the way he raised his family.

Now, his grandson is trying to live out the same values, trying to live out what it means to have an education, and to value it; and, even though I wasn't blessed. (I had the outhouse, kind of, too). I never once thought for a minute that I couldn't get an education, that it wasn't an opportunity, that I had the potential, and the ability to receive, that community service wasn't important and, of course, the value of faith.

If my great-great grandfather had not had those values that were passed down to his grandson, I wonder if my grandfather would have passed it down to me? As you think about your great-great

grandparents, you probably don't remember much more, even if you remember their names. But I can almost guarantee you, for better or worse, you are who you are, because of what they stood for, how they lived, and who they wanted their family to be.

You have that same opportunity to do that for the generations you can't even begin to imagine yet. That's what Paul was doing when he was introducing Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:1-14. He was saying, "Timothy, I want to introduce you to the new, young churches, I want you to take my place, because I'm now going to prison; so you need to take my place in Corinth. You need to take my place in the churches in Ephesus. And, you churches, you need to trust Timothy as much as you trusted me."

Now the churches are going, "Why should we bother to do that?" and Paul gives them an answer: "Because he comes from a good family." And notice, in this patriarchal society, that he doesn't mention the men – he mentions the women. He mentions, and Paul knows all the way back to his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. He knows them by name. He knows their faith; and, he is not only reminding Timothy of who he belongs to and why he had better behave and do a good job, "because you don't want your grandma mad at you!" Also, he was telling the churches that you can trust him, because he comes from good family stock.

Now, when I was before the age of 13, I have told you before, I grew up in the military and we moved everywhere, and I didn't know anybody. You moved from one place to another. You always felt like an outsider.

All of a sudden when my parents divorced. I moved back to St Cloud. It was kind of neat, because people would look at me and go, "Oh! We know you." And, I would [shudder and] go, "Oh, I don't know you."

But, it came in handy one time. I was playing football one time – poorly – and it was the end of the year. But, also I wrote a play and it was really bad – it was not Shakespeare – in 8th grade – which you had to do for class, and then the other kids helped you act it out.

In the play, I had to have some glass bottles (I wrote it), and it included glass bottles of booze. Now, of course, I did not have those, and I would never have asked my mother for those, or my grandmother; so, I found them in the dirt, on the way to school one day – polished them up in the bathroom and got them all ready. The teacher didn't care because he was the drama teacher, and drama teachers don't care about that stuff.

I set them out. We did the play and it was great. Then I had to hurry, because right after that I had to go to the last football game of the season. I grabbed them and put them in my locker, got my pads on and played the game, got done, put my stuff up.

The next day, we were going to go and clean out our lockers, because the season was over – except I got a 102 temperature and I stayed home sick. The next day came and, of course, I forgot to take the bottles home after the game – because we were all excited I guess because we won – although I don't remember.

All the teams were there cleaning out their stuff and the coach came through, madder than a hornet, because Scott was sick and his locker was a mess. He pulls it open and he is screaming, “Look at all of this stuff he left in here,” and – crash – two bottles of booze. They were empty, but they were shattered all over the floor of the locker room, and you heard the, “OOOHHHH!”

My friends had too much fun telling me this story later – right afterward – on the phone. So, I didn’t sleep all night. The coach, who I didn’t think knew my family, said, “That’s enough. I know his grandparents. Don’t worry about it. There is a good explanation and I don’t want to hear another word about it.”

So, the next day I went to school and I waited around, and I walked up to coach and I said, “I’m so sorry. I used them in a play,” And he said, “No. I don’t need to hear it.” But I said, “But they are broken. I forgot to take them out of here.” He said, “Let it go. I knew your grandpa.”

I thought, “Wow!” I think that was the first and one of the only times that I remember anyone knowing anyone in my family, and it was as if because they were good, they trusted me. And, in that moment, I realized that trust comes with responsibility. It was in that 8th grade moment that I realized that, “If I screw up, I screw up not only for myself, but also for my grandma and my grandpa.” And, an 8th grader grew up an awful lot in that moment.

That is what Paul was attempting to get Timothy to do. To say, “You belong to your grandmother and your mother. You have a responsibility to live your faith the way they taught it to you.” And, churches (because in the Mediterranean world did not believe in trusting anything new and shiny) only believed those things that were tried and true and ancient had value, So, what Paul was saying to those new churches was to say, “Timothy comes from Old Jewish stock, and the new Christian religion is just a fulfillment of ancient Judaism. So Timothy is old stock, like I am. You can trust him. You can trust him to replace me.”

Isn’t that what all parents do, and all grandparents? They try to teach their children to replace them in the family; to pass on their values, and to pass on the faith. Look at all of the people who have been part of this church, to your great-great-grandparents day – back to 1927 – and the last woman in that picture sitting in the north parking lot when all it was, was a tent and no building. Here was Katheryne Stout – until just a few years ago – who died at 104. We owe it to Katheryne, and to all of the older people who were at the tent that day in 1927, to continue to share the faith of this congregation. For all of the memories of all the faithful, who sacrificed so that this place could be here and share its faith with others. It is our obligation, as that next generation, to lift them up; to call them by name; to baptize them; to ring their bells; to educate them in the faith; and even when we are no longer remembered here, we will have still made a difference in Jesus’ name.

So, sometime this week, take a moment and remember a little bit about your history, and then ask yourself, “How am I continuing to fulfill the legacy of my family?” And, I ask this in Jesus’ name.

Amen.