

EDITORIAL

Three experiences have brought home to me the importance of leaving a legacy in recent days: completing my book (co-written with Justin Taylor) *The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived* (Crossway, 2014); working on a biblical-theological commentary on Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus (Biblical Theology of Christian Proclamation series; B&H); and the passing of my esteemed mentor, William J. Larkin Jr.

When completing work on *The Final Days of Jesus*, I was reminded once again of the tremendous legacy left by Jesus. Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. He was also a first-century Jewish rabbi who taught with unmatched authority. Jesus trained twelve close followers (though one, in God's sovereign providence, fell away); left an extensive body of teaching (though he himself, as far as we know, never wrote a book); and earned the reputation of being a man of love, performing countless good deeds, and, being God the Son himself, exhibiting an unparalleled relationship with God the Father.

Jesus demonstrated great reverence for the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures. He prayed before strategic decisions such as the appointment of the Twelve, and later before his arrest and crucifixion. He was a man who knew what it was like to be rejected and to forgive. In all of this, Jesus made clear that he had come to earth not to draw attention to himself but to give his life for others in order to bring them to God. Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived, as well as the pre-existent Word-become-flesh, and we'll never, on this side of heaven, be able to fully grasp the extent of his legacy. It is literally off the charts.

The importance of leaving a legacy was also impressed upon me afresh while working on a biblical-theological commentary (still very much a work in progress) on Paul's final letters in the NT, his epistles to Timothy and Titus. Much ink has been spilled, and continues to be spilled, on the alleged pseudonymity of these letters as well as on their social background and other matters of academic concern, but at least as important is the way in which they attest to Paul's heart for mentoring his apostolic delegates (with possible salvation-historical echoes of the Moses-Joshua relationship).

Similar to Jesus, Paul knew that the way in which he would leave a legacy was by living a life of faithful service and by training a group of committed followers who would continue to engage in the task of spreading the gospel. Leadership training! For Paul, training the next generation of Christian leaders was much more than a magic formula, a tired cliché, or a canned series of steps to follow; it was a corollary of his holy compulsion to see the gospel triumph over all false gospels in this evil, fallen, and sin-sick world.

Paul planted numerous churches; he wrote much of the NT; he spearheaded the mission of the early church and helped ensure the irresistible spread of Christi-

anity, building on the indispensable foundational work of Jesus. Scholars sometimes argue whether Paul was the follower of Jesus or the founder of Christianity; in one important sense, he was both.

On February 19, I received word that Dr. William Larkin, professor of NT at Columbia International University (CIU), had passed away the day before after a year-long struggle with pancreatic cancer. Bill died less than a year after announcing his retirement following 38 years of teaching classes, mentoring students, and serving Christ at CIU. He had given his life to his family, his students, his institution, and his Lord.

I contacted Cheryl Brannan, executive assistant to the president at CIU. “We are all very sad today having heard of Bill Larkin’s passing,” I told her. “He was a great man, a very humble man, and a wonderful mentor to me during my time at CIU and beyond.” Her response was, “Dr. Larkin touched many, many lives. He will be missed but leaves a tremendous legacy.” There’s no doubt that Bill touched a large number of students and others in his years of faithful service at CIU. He leaves an inspiring legacy for those who come after him, in particular the young Bible faculty at CIU that I had the joy of meeting at the occasion of a recent visit to that institution.

When I heard the news of Bill’s death, memories started flashing through my mind: his customary walk from his office across campus to the library, loaded to the breaking point with books; his setup in the seminary library of a thorough walkthrough of Bible study tools for students (including Jewish and Greco-Roman sources, Josephus, Philo, etc.); the time he and I sat in the trunk of a vehicle together, our legs hanging out the back, being driven across the campgrounds on a seminary retreat; the occasion when I went to his office to ask if he could help me boil his 32-step approach to biblical interpretation down to the essentials (he offered no help; all 32 steps, he said, were absolutely necessary; this was also the moment I resolved, Lord willing, to one day write a hermeneutics book with *fewer* steps!); discussions on life’s purpose in our *koinonia* group when Bill asked us probing questions which helped me discern a personal calling from God to teach the original languages of the Bible and to help people understand and use careful principles of interpretation; working with him on his hermeneutics book, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (University Press of America, 1993; repr. Wipf & Stock, 2003) as his research assistant; the priceless moment when Bill in all seriousness, to the roar of laughter in his biblical contextualization class, attempted to carefully and biblically define the word “kiss” (something like, “applying one’s lips to an even surface”); his honest wrestling with the hermeneutical challenges posed by the book of Acts in seeking to determine what is normative for church life today; and his gracious help with my first fledgling attempts to write a paper on the “greater works” passage in John 14:12.

Bill encouraged me in my development as a scholar before I was one; he chose to limit his publishing activities so he could do a good job teaching classes, mentoring students, and helping with the administration at CIU. Nevertheless, he managed to write a very fine commentary on the book of Acts (IVPNTC); an exe-

getical handbook on the letter of Ephesians (Baylor Handbook on the Greek NT); and a book on NT Greek (*Greek Is Great Gain*). As Cheryl mentioned, I was only one of numerous beneficiaries of Bill's kindness and dedication. Those of us who knew Bill Larkin—his unique personality, his dogged persistence, his unswerving faith—will certainly miss him and will never forget him. Bill Larkin left a wonderful legacy.

What do the examples of Jesus, Paul, and Bill Larkin teach us? Among other things, they impress on us the all-surpassing value of subordinating one's personal interests to the mission of God and to God's calling. They remind us to prioritize mentoring others (including our own children!) who can follow in our footsteps. They instruct us regarding the importance of faithfulness in ministry, as Jesus emphasized in his stewardship parables.

What kind of legacy will you and I leave? Let's be realistic; we're all human and frail, and nobody is perfect. Yet as the apostle Paul noted, if we are faithless, God will still be faithful, for he cannot deny himself. With that comforting truth in mind, and by God's grace, let's therefore aspire to be faithful in the ministry God has given to each of us: like Jesus, like Paul, and like Bill Larkin.

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