

LEAVING A LASTING LEGACY BY LIVING YOUR CONVICTIONS

Isaiah 40:1-8, Romans 16:17-20, Matthew 24:3-14

June 30 & July 1, 2018

“A bodybuilder was visiting an African tribe, and the tribal chief was just amazed at his physique. So the tribal chief asks the muscle builder, ‘What do you do with all those muscles?’

“The bodybuilder said, ‘Well, it’s probably easier to show you than to explain.’ So he went into all these different presentations of his physique to show off the different muscles – the biceps, the triceps, the back, and the obliques. He just stood there, changing poses. After the presentation, the tribal chief said, ‘Now that’s impressive! But, I have a second question. What else do you do with all of those muscles?’

“Well’ the bodybuilder said, ‘that’s pretty much it. I work out to pose.’

“The African chief said, ‘What a waste. What a waste.’

“Many Christians work out spiritually only to pose. They don’t work out to use the spiritual muscles they have developed. They carry their Bibles, stand during praise and worship, raise their hands in praise to the Lord, and absorb the Word of God from the sermon, only to leave the church and never use what they’ve learned.”¹ They build their Christianity only to POSE as a Christian, but they don’t really LIVE as a Christian. It is such a waste.

That’s why I’ve been leading us through this series of “Leaving A Lasting Legacy,” so that we might begin using our spiritual muscles and live in such a way that we pass on our faith to the next generations in order for them to grow in their faith. It is of no use to us to simply come to church, get close to the Lord, give ourselves over to the commands of the Lord only to sit around and never use them in our life. What is the use in coming to church if we are not preparing ourselves to use those spiritual muscles of faith, hope and love in our ever- day life?

To be REAL Christians, we must not only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but we must LIVE FOR HIM, too. We must put our faith, hope and love into action. And we do that by living out our convictions. Living our convictions is the integrating of our faith, hope and love into what we do, what we think, what we

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishing, 2009] pg. 39, #87

say and how we interact with those around us, especially when we are put to the test and challenged by those around us as to what we believe. Our convictions are the only thing that will last in our lives as we put our daily lives in the hands of our Savior, Jesus. Convictions are deeply held belief that guides your life. It's more than an opinion. An opinion is something you'll argue about, but a conviction is something you'll die for.

With every conviction we have, there will be implications and oppositions to that conviction that we need to be aware of so that we might not begin and then get discouraged and give up. So I want to give you six convictions that I have that I bring to this congregation, and I hope that you will begin to share them, too.

#1. The first conviction that I base my life upon is **IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD!** This life is not about me. It's not about you. It's not about politics or anything else. This life is all about God! This is important for us because if we miss this conviction, our life will never make sense. Our whole life is a waste if miss the importance of God being the all-in-all.

And we see this in Romans 11:36, *"For everything comes from God alone, everything lives by His power, and everything is intended for His glory."* God is the creator of the whole universe. He is the One who has given everything life, so It Is All About God! God created everything *"for His glory,"* not for ours.

The implication to this is that since all things have their life and being from the Lord our God, **LOVING GOD IS MY VERY FIRST PRIORITY.** We see that in Jesus' response to the Pharisee who asked Him what is the greatest commandment. Jesus said, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment"* (Matthew 22:37-38).

This is the most important thing! If a person misses this, their life becomes just a waste of time and energy. The most important thing in life is to get to know and love the God who created you! Without Him, life is just a waste.

Personally this is so important for me. I love Jesus and I trust Him to guide me and direct me and lead me so that I might accomplish His purposes. He died for me so that I might have eternal life with God when this life is finished. If He does nothing else for me, I owe Him the rest of my life for all that He's done for me in that one act of Salvation. That's what life is all about for me, Jesus loved me so much that He gave Himself for me so that I might be with Him for all eternity in heaven.

But if I become distracted by the stuff of this world, I begin to lose my first love and start seeking lesser things. And I can spend the rest of my life searching all the other religions, all the pleasures of this world, all the riches that I can amass, all the powers this world could afford me, but if I give up this one thing, making Jesus my first priority, nothing else will satisfy me or bring me joy that my soul craves.

But if we truly live with Jesus as our first priority, there will be opposition against us. Jesus said it best in John 15:21, *“People will do to you exactly what they did to Me. They will do it because you belong to Me, and they don’t know the one who sent Me.”* People then didn’t understand Jesus, they judged Him, lied to Him, lied about Him, tried to trap Him, harassed Him, made fun of Him, and even killed Him. If we start living for Jesus as the first priority in our life, WE WILL GET THE SAME REACTION.

PEOPLE WILL OBJECT TO US AND REJECT US. They will do it a.) because of materialism. They will love money and possessions more than Jesus so when we come putting Jesus first, that will offend them and irritate them and remind them that that’s not what life is about. They will oppose us b.) because of an immoral life style. There will be some people who love sex more than they will love God, and when we put Jesus first, it will call them to change their lifestyle, and that will offend them and irritate them. They will oppose us c.) because of peer pressure. Some people will love being popular than they love doing the right thing, so they will oppose us and reject us.

#2. The second conviction that I build my life upon is **ONLY THE CHURCH WILL LAST FOREVER!** Nothing else in this whole world will last forever. Not business, not government, not nations, not hobbies. Only the church is going to last forever. And Jesus tells us this in Matthew 16:18, *“I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.”*

The Church is God’s family, composed of those who profess their faith and love of Jesus Christ. God created everything here on the earth so that we could rejoice in being a part of His family. God gives us free choice to either choose or reject Him, so those who choose Jesus are a part of His family that He’ll take to heaven with Him. So nothing here on the earth will last forever. Nations come and go, businesses come and go, even Christian ones, people will come and go, but only the Church will last forever because it was made to last forever for the children of God to enjoy. God wants us to share in His glory, so it is through the church that

He shares His glory with those who follow Him.

The implication for this is that **WE NEED TO GET ALONG AS THE CHURCH**. Since we are going to be together one day in the household of the Lord God, we need to start getting along together while we're here. There will be people in heaven that we will be surprised to see; and there will be people in heaven who will be surprised to see us! We don't have to believe exactly alike because we are all different. There are imperfect people populating the church around the world, but when we have Jesus Christ in common with one another, even though we disagree about a variety of things, we will be together with Jesus. So even though there is no perfect church, no perfect church member, even though we disagree about a great many things, if we have Jesus Christ in common, we need to begin to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

That means we need to stop criticizing other churches and other church members. Love is more important than personal differences in the family of God. Love is more important than political differences, personality differences, even doctrinal differences. If you love Jesus we're on the same team. We're not in competition with other churches. If they love Jesus, I don't care what the label is, we're in the same family. We're all together. God hates it when we argue with each other.

Paul states it well in I Corinthians 1:10 when he says, "*Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose.*" He says we are to be of one mind in purpose. It's the purposes of God and the purposes of the Church that will unify the church. When we can work in unity to accomplish the work of God, God rejoices. He loves it when His children love each other, and when they are in harmony with each other. In fact, He judges people that cause division and conflict and criticism and arguing in the church.

So the opposition we have in being together with each other in love is **ANYONE WHO CRITICIZES THE THURCH AND CREATES DIVISION**. Romans 16:17 says it clearly, "*Look out for those who cause people to be against each other and who upset other people's faith. They are against the true teaching you learned, so stay away from them.*" Those who are trying to divide the church are to be given two chances to stop, and then, if it continues, we are to release them from our midst in order to keep harmony with Christ.

Matthew 18 guides us through a process of confronting the person doing wrong in order to bring them back into the church and begin working together again for the sake of Jesus Christ. And this leads us to our third conviction.

#3. The third conviction I hold dear is **GOD EXPECTS ME TO LOVE EVERYONE!** Life is about loving one another, no matter what. Life is not about the acquisition of things. It's not about achievements. It's not about popularity. It's about learning how to love. God is love, so as His followers we are to live in His love as an example to everyone.

Jesus lifts this up clearly in His response to the Pharisee. *"The second most important commandment is: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. There is no other commandment more important than these two"* (Mark 12:31). So the question is, "Who is my neighbor?" The short answer is "Everybody!" There is nobody you're allowed not to love on the earth. So sometimes your neighbor is the one you are least likely to love.

It's the people who are different than we are in language, background, religion, faith, culture, and beliefs. It's the people who are difficult to love; those who are rude, who monopolize conversations, who are selfish, or impatient, or disrespecting or demeaning, those who even take advantage of you. It's those who are dangerous; the abusers, the rapists, the molesters, the terrorists, the criminals – in essence, the enemy. Yes, we are to love even the enemies.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:3, *"Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God. For He is good to the ungrateful and the wicked."* God is good to the wicked and the ungrateful. God's love is not based on what we do, but His love is for everyone. Even for those who have different values and views than you do and those who don't like your values or views. We all have plenty of enemies. It's those we totally disagree with or that don't believe like you do. It's those who hate you, and want to hurt you, and want to harass you and harm you. These are the ones we are love, **ESPECIALLY THE DIFFICULT ONES!** Because when we love our enemies, they see the drastic difference and they find that you are more than they expected and they end up wanting what you have – great faith in Jesus. So God is glad to reward us for loving them. He is also glad to call us His own children. That reputation is something that I could live with; how about you?

So the implication to all of this is if God wants me to love everyone, **I MUST SHOW RESPECT TO EVERYONE!** This can be hard, but remember Peter's words to us in 1 Peter 2:17, "*Show respect for everyone. Love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show respect for the king.*" It's pretty clear. We are to respect those in leadership positions, even though they are against us, even if they want to harm us and eliminate those who follow the faith.

Remember, when Peter wrote these words, he lived in the time of Caesar Nero, the one who put Christians on stakes, poured tar on them and burned them as lamps for the city of Rome. Yes, even the enemy, we are to love them and respect them, as wacko as they might be.

Now this is tough for me, because I find it hard to respect all people, especially when they do really far out stuff. I go to some conferences of so called intelligent people and I hear an idea set forth and I'm going, "That is the stupidest idea I've ever heard. You can't possibly believe that. It's not rational. It's not logical. It doesn't make sense. Follow it to its logical conclusion." Some people are so open minded their brains fall out. They think they're being open-minded, but it's like they've lost their brains somewhere back on the track. You go, how could you be do dumb? When people are running from God it's amazing the mental gymnastics they go through to avoid Him. There are some people I just don't want to respect. But God says I've got to. I have got to treat them with dignity, respect, and even love them. For our example may be the first real expression of love and respect to them, and they may come to love Jesus because of the example we set.

But we have to remember the opposition to this act of love for everyone. **WE HAVE LOST CIVILITY** in our culture and as a result **HATE GROUPS ABOUND** all around us. If you live by your convictions, there will be others who genuinely hate you because your life exposes the darkness that they are living in. But even if we don't agree on everything, in fact, disagree on so much, can't we at least join together to make the world a better place? Can we work to eliminate illiteracy in the world? Can we work together to end poverty? Can we agree to work together to find a cure for diseases like AIDS? Let's show respect to each other, no matter what political party we belong to or how much we disagree.

Unfortunately, no matter how much love we give out, we will always have opposition. After all, they did the same thing to Jesus, so we should expect the same thing for us. Jesus forewarned us in John 15:18-19,

“When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you. The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don’t.” Jesus was perfect love and they still killed Him. Yet, even when we show respect and love and the world rejects us, God still gets the glory in it. It’s a test for us to see how much like Jesus we really are. We are to keep loving, just as Jesus loved, even in the face of death. And that leads me to the fourth conviction:

#4. **THE WHOLE WORLD NEEDS JESUS!** We have these wonderful verses of Matthew 28:18-20 to remind us of our calling, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”*

Now there are 5 truths in this statement of Jesus that are for each one of us. 1) Our assignment is to GO. This is not the Great Suggestion, but the Great Commission, so this is a command for all of us. We are to go into all the world. 2) Our task is to make disciples of all people, teaching them to be like Jesus. 3) Our authority is in Jesus, who is over all governments, all agencies, over ALL. 4) Our responsibility is to go to all the nations, even those nations that would love to blow America off the face of the earth. So we are to go to North Korea, Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria and all the other countries that hate us. 5) And we do all of this with the promise that Jesus will always be with us as we go for Him.

So the implication for each one of us is **I MUST SHARE THE GOOD NEWS!** It’s up to each one of us to take the great Good News to the world around us, to our own sphere of influence. We have the cure for the human heart. We know the cure for the deepest needs of mankind. They need a savior. They need forgiveness. They need their past forgiven and a purpose for living and a home in heaven. We cannot hold it back. We have to share it.

2 Corinthians 5:14-16 tells it rightly, *“Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all...And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.”* When we accept the love of Jesus, our priorities change and we no longer live for ourselves but for others. And then our perspective changes so we no longer see others the same way. They are not enemies any more, but they become

priceless souls that Jesus shed His precious blood for. They're worthwhile and they are valuable. Jesus loved them enough to die for THEM, TOO, so as we begin to see them as ones that Jesus loved, they become precious to us, too. They are worthy of hearing the Good News of Jesus so that they might repent and find the Salvation of the Lord our God, too.

The problem is our opposition **SOME WILL TRY TO MAKE IT ILLEGAL FOR YOU TO SHARE YOUR FAITH.** This is Satan using everything and everyone he can to keep us from sharing the Good News of Jesus with the world. So they will make laws restricting any expression of love or respect or kindness from Jesus to the people. They will try to make it impossible for repentance and transformation from the darkness of this world to the Light of Christ Jesus. Yet, there are billions of people who still need to hear about Jesus and know that Salvation comes through Him alone.

Jesus wants us to be encouraged, however. He says in Matthew 5:11-12, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" We are in the battle for the souls of billions of people, so we cannot sit on the sidelines waiting for someone else to do the work that God has for us. We are to share Jesus to the people, yet with gentleness and respect. And when you are harassed, celebrate, don't hate. When you are put down for being a Christian, celebrate, don't hate. When someone makes fun of you for being a follower of Jesus, don't hate – celebrate! Stand up for the convictions you believe, for we are in the most exciting time in history. Revivals are happening all over the world.

Right now, one out of every three people on earth is a believer in Jesus Christ. 2.3 billion people claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Churches are growing by the thousands each week. In fact, in China every week about eighty thousand people give their lives to Christ? Eighty thousand a week! We are on the verge of an enormous spiritual awakening. So you are a world changer, sent out by God into the WORLD to tell others about Jesus. Don't let anything stop you!

#5. My fifth conviction that I cling to desperately is **EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH GOD!** When we think it's impossible, Jesus tells us, "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are*

possible.” There is nothing that God cannot do. So when people ask you who you think you are as a Christian, that’s the wrong question. The real question is “Who do we think God is?” Our view of God determines what we are able to do.

The implication to this is, **GOD IS WAITING ON YOU TO TRUST HIM.** Jesus said to the two blind men seeking Jesus to give them sight, “*According to your faith will it be done to you*” (Matt. 9:29). Nothing is impossible with God, but we are limited only by our faith in Him. So the words, “I can’t...” should not even be included in your vocabulary, no matter how big the problem or situation is. Philippians 4:13 tells us, “*I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.*” ALL THINGS! Since Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, we can accomplish whatever He calls us to do. That’s why I keep pushing you to do more, to dream bigger and to pursue greater things. God says “I want to use you, according to your faith it will be done unto you.”

So the opposition to getting the things of God done in our world today is **OUR OWN UNBELIEF.** You are the biggest problem in your own life. Believe in God more, and trust in Him with your whole life and watch what He can do, no matter how small you may be, how limited you are, how confined you are, or how weak you are. According to your faith in Jesus Christ it will be done for you.

Jesus tells us in Mark 6:5, “*Because of their unbelief, He couldn’t do any mighty miracle among them.*” Lack of faith puts all kinds of limits around us, so start believing! Just start believing.

#6. Finally, the sixth conviction that I have, and hope you share is **HISTORY’S CONCLUSION IS INEVITABLE!** It is done! It is finished! There is no doubt about the end of this world – Jesus promised that one day this world will come to an end and He will come again and take all His followers with Him to be in His Father’s house. The final chapter of this world has already been told, and the Bible already tells us how it’s going to end.

Matthew 24:14 tells us clearly, “*The good news about God’s kingdom will be preached in all the world to every nation, to every people group, and then the end will come.*” It’s a promise! It will happen just as God said it would. As soon as all the people of the world hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, read it in their own languages and have the opportunity to either receive or reject Jesus, then this world will come to a close and

God's kingdom will come. That's why I support the Langteau family in their work of Bible translation. That's why I go to Russia to start new churches. I want to do my part of populating the kingdom of God with people who come to hear and trust in Jesus as their Savior. I want as many of the people of the world to find their place in the kingdom of God for all eternity as they place their trust and faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It's not about me, but about me doing the work of God for the glory of God in the world so the people of the world might receive Him and find Salvation through Him.

That's why these six convictions are so important to me and to this church. The Bible tells us in Philippians 2:10-11, "*...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" There WILL BE a reckoning among the people of the earth and we will be united in front of God and He will separate the sheep from the goats; those who trust Him and those who don't.

This is the glory of God I'm talking about. God gets the glory when I love Him with all my heart. God gets glory when I love you and other people in the family of God. God gets glory when I love my neighbor and the people I'm least likely to love. God gets glory when I love my enemy and when I treat them with dignity and respect even though they disrespect me. God gets glory when I share the Good News with everybody. God gets glory when I trust Him with problems in my life that cannot be solved except through a miracle. And God gets glory when I know and trust that the end is inevitable and God wins. Those are my convictions, and I hope they are your convictions, too, for I will stand by them as long as I live, to the glory of God in Jesus Christ my Lord. AMEN.