

Good morning!

Here we are... The first day of 2017, all here together. It's pretty cool, when you think about it. Knowing **the first** thing you did, the very first day of this year is gather with friends and like-minded folks to worship, to pray, and to set apart this year as the best one yet.

How many of you **LOVED** the year 2016? ...Not many of us. I certainly didn't. **It was a pretty brutal year.** We had a cut-throat presidential election, wars across the globe, terrorist groups, our hearts breaking with the people of Syria.

As a community here, we walked through transition, which is never easy, no matter how healthy it is, with sending **Jeff** to lead a church plant in Quincy, and **Kelly** stepping into an Executive Pastor role, and you've bared with us as our **Teaching Team** took shape (4 of us: 2 men, 2 women. Me and Mike, Kelly and Emma.)

Personally, in our family, we had quite a rollercoaster of a year too. We had our newborn son, transitioning from one kid to two (any parents know how crazy that is), on top of that, my two remaining grandparents passed away (within a few months of one another), lots of close friends of ours walking through very difficult medical situations... Pretty crazy year, to say the least. **And yet, we're still here!** God still has something to do with us.

One of my mentors jokingly says, *"If you're not dead yet, you're not done yet!"*

So whether you feel like you just barely crawled across the finish line of 2016, or if, **somehow**, you're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning... **We have an opportunity today to look at our year ahead and hear what God wants to say to us.**

As I thought of this morning, and what I wanted to share, I was struck by a word... **LEGACY.**

At the risk of being too forward, I'd venture to say that far too many of us are obsessed with our own **destinies**, to the neglect of our **legacies**. What I mean by "destiny" is our own futures, our **experiences**, our **goals, dreams, hopes**... And what I mean by "legacy" is what is left of us after we're gone; what parts of our **lives** and **influence** live on, beyond us.

If I'm honest, I probably spend about 90% of my day thinking about myself (**my destiny**), 10% thinking about my family, this church, the work I do (**my legacy**). My thought-life is filled with ambition; but mostly self-centered ambition; and I see my world through that lens. Always thinking: *"How can this person help me achieve my goals? How can this situation make me feel better about myself? How can I get ahead?"*

And my hope for 2017 is to see that percentage flip, to care far more about **LEGACY** than **DESTINY.**

What if, (and here's the big question of the day)... What if instead of spending every moment of our waking life **trying to secure our futures**, we shifted our focus to try to **secure the futures of those who will come after us?**

A few weeks ago, I was sitting on my back porch at 10-o'clock at night, smoking a pipe, completely FREEZING, and I was listening to a podcast of a sermon from Erwin McManus, a pastor out in Hollywood. He referenced Psalm 102 briefly, and as soon as he said it, it sunk deep into my heart, and I knew it needed to be the core text of this morning...

PSALM 102:18, 27-28 NLT

18 Let this be recorded for future generations,
so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.

...

27 But you [Lord] are always the same; you will live forever.

28 The children of your people will live in security.

Their children's children
will thrive in your presence.

Now, we don't know exactly who wrote this Psalm, some think it might be David wrote it (as he wrote nearly half of the 150 psalms we have), but we don't know for sure. What we **do** know is that the writer has **an amazing, larger-than-life perspective**. The consideration of the future generations; the care for the children; the honesty and the hope in the midst of trouble... You know, now that I think about it, this Psalm was probably written by a woman... Speaking on behalf of men, I know that this kind of selflessness and care for future generations is **RARE** to come by in a guy.

Who knows! I certainly don't, you certainly don't. **Regardless of WHO wrote it**, what does this text stir within you this morning?

PSALM 102:18 NLT

18 Let this be recorded for future generations,
so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.

Grandparents today understand what this Psalmist is getting at with this beautiful, prophetic word in verse 28, "*Their children's children will THRIVE IN THE LORD'S PRESENCE...*" It's amazing. Maybe you already see that, maybe your grandchildren attend this church, maybe you're already seeing this first-hand.

In your years on earth, you've been given the gift of **perspective**. You understand that fulfillment in life doesn't come from **achievement**, but rather **investment**. When we worship our personal destinies, we are incapable of hearing God's hope for us to leave a faith-filled legacy.

Do you find yourself more interested in **ACHIEVEMENT** or more focused on **INVESTMENT**? (and I don't mean financial investments, necessarily... All you guys are like, "Yeah! Investment! I do that!" But I mean personal investment, eternal investment, pouring yourself out into others...)

With all of the **drive** that we have, especially as Americans living in the year 2017, far and away the most productive and efficient culture in the history of the world... What if God gave us this passion, and pursuit for something much larger and rewarding and eternal than just ourselves?

Living for yourself is boring. I can tell you first-hand. It makes achievements boring; it makes dreaming about the future boring; and it makes your relationship with God boring.

Ever wonder why celebrities get into such ridiculous trouble? Why they jump from marriage to marriage? Why they fill their garages with more cars than there are days to drive them? **They're bored.**

Instagram has this new feature where people can "GO LIVE" and stream video of whatever they're doing to their followers. It's like an automatic video conference call with thousands and thousands of people.

The other night I opened the app and it gave me this little pop-up that said, "Here are some popular live streams going on" and I clicked on Floyd Mayweather's...

He's the boxer that beat Manny Pacquiao in 2015, and subsequently won just shy of \$180 million, for that fight alone. Which means, over the 12 rounds they fought, Mayweather made \$5 million dollars **per minute** for the fight.

I proceeded to watch this live stream for probably 15 minutes, watching him walk around his mansion, by himself, talking about how great he is, stopping by big-screen TVs to watch some basketball, all while a woman followed him around with the phone filming him.

Now, I don't know Floyd Mayweather, and I'm trusting that he won't watch this sermon online or listen to the podcast... But this was a picture for me of how BORING success can be. I'm sure Floyd Mayweather is a nice guy, and he does seem to be very generous with his bazillions of dollars... The fact remains: **Living for yourself is boring. Living for yourself is boring.**

What if God is calling us to have impact beyond our own lives? What if God is less interested in the American Dream and more interested in a Kingdom legacy we leave for the **"people not yet born, so that they'll know Him and thrive in His presence?"**

Here are two questions I want to ask this morning:

What will our church's legacy be? // What will my personal legacy be?

1. What will this church community's legacy be?
 - o If we were to close our doors tomorrow, what would this community of Christ-followers be known for? Would the people of Chelmsford even notice? Would the people of Lowell notice? **This church isn't going to be around forever.** We might have another 25 years in us. We might have another 250 years in. We might have 25 days in us. They are hundreds of influences outside of our control that could affect that. (Like God himself: If He wanted, for whatever reason, to close these doors and start something new, He can.) We can't forget that.
 - o **This was something that struck me when Jed, our lead pastor that I grew up under, decided to move back home to the midwest.** When I was in my early 20s, I was ALL IN! I felt like we were all going to be here until we died. I was ready to get a LIVE LOVE GIVE tattoo on my forehead. But with moments of transition, (and, I believe, God-orchestrated transition), we're reminded **that nothing gold can stay.** (And it's not our job to preserve things exactly as they are.)
 - o **As Christ-followers, we're not called to be taxidermists, we're called to be disciple-makers.** And being disciple-makers means that EVERYTHING IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING.
 - Some of you hate that. I know. I'm married to one of you. My wife **despises** change, because it means **unpredictability.** And with that comes uncertainty, and with that comes lots and lots of little cracks for seeds of anxiety to be sown.
 - o It's a cliché, but it's cliché for a reason: The only constant is change. Nothing we depend on here on Earth will be around for ever. Not things, not money, not the latest iPhone, not your new car, not your spouse, and... Not you. It's a big part of why we wrote that song "Neverchanging Everchanging..." **And THANK God for Scripture to remind us that:**

- **HEBREWS 13:8**
NLT: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
 - **ISAIAH 40:8**
NLT: The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”
 - **MALACHI 3:6 NLT: “I am the LORD, and I do not change...”**
 - **PSALM 90:2 NLT: “Before the mountains were born, before You gave birth to the earth and the world, from beginning to end, You are God.”**
 - We are given the gift of God’s word to be reminded that through all of the transition and change and unpredictability of our lives, God is unchanging. He is our rock. He is our refuge. He is our constance. **When we have nothing left, we still (and always will) have Him.**
 - So what will our legacy be? I pray that we’re known for “Helping people find their way back to God.” I pray that we can help people grow to live lives that are fulfilling, to love others deeply, and to give freely of our time, talent and treasure. And by God’s grace, we’re seeing that happen.
2. What will my personal legacy be?
- I don’t have to convince you that we’re “here one day and gone the next.” Many of you have experienced that first-hand in the last year alone. In the past few years, my family has lost a half-dozen loved ones to cancer, heart-attacks, old age... This church has lost members of our community that we loved dearly.
 - The Bible is very transparent about these things:
 - **12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. PSALM 90:12 ESV**
 - **11 My days are like an evening shadow; I wither away like grass. PSALM 102:11 ESV**
 - **13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—
14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. JAMES 4:13-14 ESV**
 - I believe we often live as though **we** will be the last generation on earth. We don’t consider what our actions today will do for our children (or their children) in the days to come. This has implications from as broad as global warming to as personal as our family culture and legacy we’re imprinting on our children.
 - It’s a weird thing, isn’t it? That we have more things keeping us focused on the PRESENT, and **immediate, instant gratification**, like Amazon Prime, or streaming movies to our phones, or 3D printing... And yet our minds are constantly a few hours ahead of us, thinking about what’s NEXT, and we’re never truly present.
 - What’s even worse is that we don’t allow that future-focus to actually be PRODUCTIVE by jumping a few months or years or decades out... Where we could think about our legacies and caring for the *for future generations, so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.*
 - **It’s like we get stuck in this middle, unproductive, future-focus...
Worshipping whatever’s next.**
 - Today is a day to pause and consider, especially with a year of fresh slate ahead of us: What will my personal legacy be? Will I be remembered as **a person of influence** or **a person of self-promotion**?
 - Will my life be lived building monuments to myself?

- Or will I be remembered as a person whose life pointed others toward God?

These texts we've read this morning were written by the Psalmists, and they were written in a day and age that **could never conceive the world we're living in today.** Cell phones, grocery stores, heart transplants, the Internet, FaceTiming with someone across the globe while we're traveling in a car or bus or train... It's completely inconceivable.

And yet, **THEY** had the wherewithal to write these things down for a future generation... And that future generation is us.

Today. We are reading these words, written thousands and thousands of years ago, by people who never knew Mother Teresa, the Beatles, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther (or Martin Luther King!) or even Jesus... These words written down centuries before Jesus was born.

Yet their words have been preserved. **For what purpose?**

PSALM 102:18 *Let this be recorded for future generations, so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.*

And here we are. A community of faith, thousands of years later, thriving because of the FOUNDATION our spiritual ancestors built. A foundation not threatened by the erosion of time, or of tyrannical leaders, or of any amount of spiritual misdirection or darkness.

Here we are... And the question is: **What are we going to do with it?**

Let's look at a master of Legacy: **Jesus... Jesus was a master of legacy.** Most biblical experts conclude that Jesus lived about 33 years before He was killed. And of those 33 years, He spent 30 of them in relative obscurity. But in those 3 years... Those 1,095 days... He changed the course of history.

Here's what legacy looks like: *"Jesus' impact was greater a hundred years after his death than during his life; it was greater still after five hundred years; after a thousand years his legacy laid the foundation for much of Europe; after two thousand years he has more followers in more places than ever."* **JOHN ORTBERG**

When Jesus walked the earth, the population of the earth was somewhere around 300 million. In 2011, the Pew Research Center said there are 2.2 BILLION Christians on earth. There are 7 times more Christians today than people that were alive during Jesus' time. That's legacy. It's dumbfounding.

Jesus is history's most familiar figure. His impact on the world is immeasurable, but here are a few signposts of His impact:

- **You look at a map:**
 - Philadelphia – Named after a city mentioned in the book of Revelation
 - Sacramento, CA – Named after the Holy Sacrament, or Communion, that we celebrate here each week
 - Over 1,000 cities in the US have Christian / biblically derived names.
- **Look at a calendar:**
 - Every time we write a check or celebrate a New Year like this, we're reminded (chronologically at least) of our relation to the brief life of this peasant carpenter.

- **Look at education and intellectualism:**
 - Jesus never wrote a book, yet His movement would give rise to the creation of libraries and then guilds of learning, and eventually Oxford and Harvard and Yale (virtually the ENTIRE Western system of education and scholarship with arise because of His followers.)
 - The insistence on universal literacy grew out of an understanding that Jesus, who Himself was a teacher, told his followers to enable every person in the world to learn.
- **Look at medicine:**
 - One of Jesus' teachings, when He said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me..." An idea slowly emerged that the suffering of every human being on earth matters and that those who are able to help ought to do so... Hospitals and relief efforts of all kinds have emerged from this movement. To this day, many hospitals carry names that reference Jesus and His teachings of Grace, Mercy, Good Samaritans...
- **Lastly, and most importantly, look at the Animal Kingdom:** The Jesus Lizard (because it can walk on water). There are even LIZARDS NAMED AFTER HIM!

H. G. Wells marveled that after two millennia:

"A historian like myself, who doesn't even call himself a Christian, finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this most significant man... The historian's test of an individual's greatness is 'What did he leave to grow?' Did he start men to thinking along fresh lines with a vigor that persisted after him? By this test Jesus stands first."

Jesus showed us how to live with purpose... How to break our fruitless navel-gazing and bring us up above the tree-line to see: Our lives are about so much more... **We have so much more opportunity than we think.** But it requires a shift in thinking.

And that shift comes when we confront what Henri Nouwen calls our **"illusion of immortality."**

Jesus knew, either by intuition or by His own divinity, that He wouldn't have long on earth. He knew His days were numbered. And we all know that OUR DAYS are numbered too... **But we refuse to accept that truth.** We don't let it become real to us, because without grounding in faith, it would cripple us. I think, psychologically speaking, our ability to forget the fact that we're all going to die someday actually allows us to function... If we spent every day of our lives in fear, like "Welp! Today's the day!" we'd be useless.

But, counter-intuitively, and many of you have experienced this, being confronted by our mortality actually reminds us how precious our lives are.

A little over a month ago, during an annual doctor's appointment, we discovered that our 4-year old daughter, Lily, has Type-1 Diabetes. She had very few symptoms, still very healthy, but we caught it because a friend of ours that's a nurse told us what to look for. And sure enough, her Pancreas is slowly decreasing its' ability to produce insulin. And that day, while we waited in the ER at Boston Children's... **We were confronted with our daughter's mortality.** Our perfect, healthy, precious daughter had something wrong inside of her, and if we didn't act, and learn how to care for her, we would eventually lose her.

Now, praise God, because of the medical advancements in diabetes treatment people can live full, rewarding lives managing this disease... **But that moment stands as a signpost in my**

mind, a reminder that our lives are fragile and fleeting. If we refuse to recognize that, we'll waste our lives.

A selfish **destiny** is embarrassed by a selfless **legacy** every time.

Harbor, may we be a people that live with a Christ-like perspective of our lives. And may we love one another as if we're losing our lives... Because we are.

I'd encourage you to take some time today, either over lunch or later this evening, to ask God to give you a picture of LEGACY in your life... To be bold enough to dream that your life might have eternal impact. To see your remaining years with the same intentionality that Jesus viewed His with... And to have the faith to believe that, despite our flaws and self-centered nature, God will use us for His glory and for the good of those around us.

so that a people not yet born will praise the Lord.

Let's pray.