

Legacy is a hot topic these days. Every farm magazine and agricultural conference has something to say about what you will leave behind. In this issue of the *Dispatch* we take a deep dive on the concept. Davon looks at a broader notion of legacy while Lance challenges us with the dark side of what we pass to others. And Bill finishes with a Biblical reflection on a positive blessing. We hope you find this issue thought-provoking and, as always, hit reply to offer any feedback or comments.

Legacy—A Personal View

By [Davon Cook](#)

I was raised, metaphorically speaking, by two giants. My parents' legacy includes building a well-known and respected business; significant leadership in influencing their industry; being integral to the foundation and growth of a major agriculture museum; and countless hours donating time and resources to a large number of organizations. In fact, I watched my father receive a prestigious agriculture award this week. They say that perhaps their *proudest* accomplishment was raising three children with college degrees who work in the agriculture industry. And, of course, they love to dote on their four grandchildren. In addition to recognizing these successes, I appreciate the examples and values they passed along to us and others.

So, with that to follow, pondering my own professional legacy is sobering. As you know, I own part of a service-based business (Ag Progress). We care about our clients and hope part of our legacy is helping your families and businesses. But the recognition for that is not often direct. There won't be a big farm to sell or bequeath to someone at the end, or a lot of awards for leadership in a specific sector. There probably won't be a sign on a building with my name on it. I often ask myself what really matters for my legacy. On the personal side, it's contributing to a loving family and raising children who make this world a better place in their own way. But on the professional side, is knowing I gave my all to everything, with few tangible signs like my parents had, enough for me?

Some of you may be clear on your legacy, or some may question it like me. I find it helpful to reflect on three main aspects of legacy:

- How will I be remembered? What characteristics or accomplishments will be noted?
- What, or who, will I leave behind? This includes hard assets and soft assets like relationships and impact on others and my community.
- What are my hopes and expectations for the future? I hope to embed some values and goals that influence my children, business associates, and others through time. Yet my opinions are not guaranteed to carry weight indefinitely. My challenge is to influence by persuasion and example, without an expectation of dictating from the grave.

And with that reflection comes the reckoning: are my actions and behaviors resulting in the answers I hope for each of those questions? Some yes, some no. I see I have quite a bit more legacy building to do...

Thinking About Your Whole Legacy – Even the Not-So-Nice!

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

Davon and Bill have both pointed to some positive aspects of legacy. Favorable remembrances, financial inheritances, a parental blessing—all of these things resonate very powerfully with us. But what we leave behind can cut both ways. While Bill reflects on the positive aspects of Jacob's blessing of Judah, that same chapter also contains some very tough messages for three other sons of Jacob: Reuben, Simeon and Levi. In our day, too, legacy is a mixed bag. Consider whether your family has....



- A legacy of not dealing with difficult family issues and leaving them to fester far into the future among the children. In short, the passing of conflict (in addition to assets) from one generation to the next.
- Or, a legacy of dealing with conflict in a way that further breaks the family apart. I frequently see family members “withhold” time with the grandkids, boycott significant life milestones (weddings and other celebrations), or create intentional hostility in public and private gatherings. *Anger can have generational consequences.*
- A legacy of non-existent, or primarily negative, feedback and interaction that leaves your children feeling like they have never pleased you, have never met your standards, or even that that they were a disappointment to you.
- A legacy of physical, emotional or even substance abuse that gets repeated in future generations.
- A legacy of “equality” that sets up conflict among siblings. An example would be leaving future generations with undivided ownership interests in land or with common ownership in operating companies when not everyone is involved in the business without a process to resolve differences that will likely arise.
- A legacy that doesn’t reflect the unique contributions of family members. In modern times that might be a legacy that favors leadership by sons when perhaps the daughters are more qualified, or a legacy that favors older siblings when younger family members have made a bigger contribution.

As you consider your legacy, think about how some of the less desirable aspects of your style, your approach to problems, some of your blind spots, or your less-than-positive interaction with others might get transferred to the next generation. Take some time to reflect on, and perhaps change, the whole of your legacy.

Faith and Family: An Unexpected Biblical Legacy

Gen 49:8-12

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

One of the greatest early “legacy” passages in the Bible is when Jacob bequeathed land and blessing to his 12 sons when he was close to death. As Lance points out in his article, not everyone received an equal share or even a positive inheritance. What is most surprising to me, however, is how one of the sons rose to such unexpected prominence that his descendants became the line from which the Christ came.

Judah was that son. As the fourth child of Jacob, he probably could have expected minimal land and what was “left over” from some of his older brothers. But Judah showed himself remarkably able to mediate family disputes and, especially, to appeal to his brother Joseph, still in disguise, when it looked very bleak for all the brothers. His impassioned and humble confession of vulnerability to his brother Joseph in Gen 44 proved to be the key to Joseph’s revealing his identity to his brothers in Gen 45. This then led to a moving scene of family reconciliation in Gen 45. All of this was because Judah decided to step out of his role and show leadership when the family was in need.

The result of his action is seen in the blessing of Gen 49. Some of the blessing points to fraternal harmony (“your brethren shall praise you,” v 8); some describes his military prowess (“your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,” v 8). But what is most striking is the prophecy of v 10, interpreted by the Christian Church as referring to the Christ: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes...” (v 10). That is, Judah has now risen from a potentially unimpressive fourth position in the birth order to the stratosphere of inheritance.

We often see legacy as something fixed—by birth, parental expectation, past performance, desire to divide the estate equally. But the story of Judah shows us that special circumstances can sometimes change the destiny not only of one family but of an entire people. We are glad that Jacob was able to see and affirm that in his son, Judah.

