
Please Listen!©
by Robert E. Alderman, Jr.

This article provides general principles of law only. Specific problems or fact situations should be referred to an attorney for interpretation and advice.

It was March 1997 when Lois and Buddy came to my office to pursue their estate planning. Lois had graduated from a local Christian school a few years earlier and Buddy was finishing the last semester of his post graduate studies at a nearby seminary to become a minister.

Though married less than five years, they already had three children - and were expecting their fourth in April. It was their hope to eventually have eight children and serve the Lord in missionary service overseas. Their whole future awaited them and they radiated excitement for what they thought life would surely bring their way

What had brought Buddy and Lois to my office was a seminar I had given in November at their church teaching the principles of estate planning and the basis of loving trust planning in the Scriptures. Though I had visited with them a little after the seminar, I was surprised when they later called to set an appointment, because as college students they had no financial estate of any substance. In fact, during our appointment, I told them the \$12,000.00 total size of their estate (consisting of one car, a few pieces of furniture and a small bank account) did not need a comprehensive estate plan.

Although they acknowledged that fact, they also realized that such would not always be the case. They also told me that during my seminar, two statements, in particular, hit home with them:

- “You can never put an estate plan into place too soon, but... you can wait until it’s too late!”
- “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of man... people were eating and drinking... they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.” Matt 24:36

They then proceeded to tell me that after Buddy’s graduation in June, they would be moving to Philadelphia where Buddy would begin his ministry with a church in that city. It is there they would acquire life insurance, buy a house and add other assets to their estate. Rather than procrastinate on their estate plan until after those assets are acquired (and possibly then be too busy to get it done), they preferred to have their estate plan already in place to receive and protect their assets as they acquire them in the future.

For a young couple, Buddy and Lois had incredible vision and common sense. But after we worked through their goals and objectives to determine what they would like to accomplish for their own protection as well as that of their young family and what it would cost, we found they were not financially able to go forward with a full estate plan at that time. Thus, we initially completed only Wills for each of them with the option to return and receive a 50% credit on the cost of their Wills toward a full loving trust plan when their finances would allow them to do so.

Within a few short months, they did return (with all four of their children - what a wonderful family) and completed their full estate plan before moving to Pennsylvania.

We kept in touch with Christmas cards this past December, and exchanged newsletters as to their ministry and my law practice. Buddy's first sermon at his new church was on Father's Day - very appropriate for a young man with four children under age five!

Occasionally, Lois would also call to receive guidance on how to put assets into their trust or have me direct them to one of my colleagues in Philadelphia for assistance on local matters. Everything seemed to be going as they had expected.

Then, on February 25, I received an early morning phone message from Lois telling me: "Buddy was killed by a drunk driver on Friday!" - and I cried.

It is exactly because of tragedies like this that I give seminars, write these articles and otherwise try to make people realize that death is a reality of life that could and does happen at any time! And, it's never at a good time.

At least Buddy and Lois had the foresight to complete their estate planning while both were living and able to do so. Although their estate planning will not bring Buddy back and could not prevent his untimely death, it will be of great assistance financially and legally for Lois and their four children.

I often ask the Lord, "Why, why, why, do some people ignore the inevitable and choose, instead, to treat their affairs as though they and/or their spouse will live forever?" The benefits and protections of estate planning can be put in place only while people are living and competent. Nothing can be done for them after they die or become incompetent.

If only more couples and individuals - regardless of age - would have the maturity and overcome procrastination as Buddy and Lois did. Tragic, tragic, tragic!!

Whether you are reading this report of Lois and Buddy when first published in the Spring of 1988, or years in the future, please take a moment to say a prayer for Lois and her four children. Wherever they may be and whatever their circumstances at that point in their lives, your prayer will give comfort to them. Also, please listen to this story; share it with others - and learn from Buddy and Lois' experience!

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THINK ABOUT IT CORNER

"Lord, help me as I practice law to do the best I can, to always use it for the good to help my fellow man."

- Romona K. Cecil -

