

P.E.A.R.s™ - Periodic Encouragement And Reminders **Avoiding the Hollow and Heartless Estate Plan©**

There are many legal and structural elements needed for an estate plan to be effective. However, even if all those elements are provided to their utmost, but nothing more is added, the resulting plan will still be hollow and heartless where it matters the most.

Why? Because the greatest element in any estate plan is not an issue of money or legal structure. It's a matter of heart – your heart – and who you are as a person; what you've learned in life and what you can leave as an inheritance of your experience to those who mean the most to you.

Mother Teresa once said: *What matters is not how much you give, but how much love you put in your giving.*

A sense of what she means is found in the following excerpt from Jim Stovall's book, *The Ultimate Gift* - in which he tells the story of multi-billionaire Red Stevens' video-taped last will and testament choosing to leave virtually all his wealth to a 24 year old nephew rather than to his immediate family. The real value, however, of the inheritance was not its monetary aspect, but rather the twelve, separate monthly tasks the billionaire required of his nephew in an effort to teach the nephew that the ultimate gift of life is more than money and things:

Red paused for another brief moment, cleared his throat, and began again, "Jason, I lived my life in a big way. I had a lot of big accomplishments, and I made a lot of big mistakes. One of the biggest mistakes I ever made was when I gave everyone in our family everything that they thought they ever wanted. It took many years to figure out that everything we'll ever do or know or have in this life is a gift from the good Lord. He has a special plan for each of us, and He has provided everything we need to fulfill that plan. ...Only as an old man did I come to learn that all happiness comes from the gifts that God has given us.

Unfortunately, the money and possessions I spread around didn't help people to understand the gifts that have been provided for us. In trying to make up for all the times I wasn't there, I gave them all material things. In doing so, I robbed them of everything that made my life wonderful.

Regrettably, I think they are all permanently ruined. It's like when a horse goes bad. You simply have to take him out and shoot him. Unfortunately, as my lawyer, Mr. Hamilton, advised me shooting the entire family would be frowned upon. Therefore, I have taken steps in my will to provide a living for all these relatives even if they will never experience life.^[1]

To help our heirs experience life and to experience it to the fullest - with whatever wisdom we can share on that subject - is the antithesis of a hollow and heartless estate plan.

There's nothing your kids will remember like the model you leave them, says Charles Swindoll. That will be a magnet that will draw them. That will be centered in their memory. [And] they will want to know, especially as they reach their older years, how you did it. [How you lived your life, what you experienced and what you learned along the way.]^[2]

Sometimes this aspect of estate planning is called an ethical will – based on the practice of the Jews during the holocaust of writing something about who they were, how they had lived their life and what they had discovered to be the reality of God on the soles of shoes, scraps of paper or anything they could find. This was the bequest or legacy of their heart they wanted, and realized was the most important, to leave not only for their immediate family who might survive them, but also for future generations they would never know.

Other terms for this process are “heart legacy” or “heritage legacy” – designed to tell the story or history of your life in the sense of your background, such as: who were the people or events that influenced you when you were growing up; how did you come to know and receive Christ as your Lord and Savior; what strength did you draw from that as you were living; what are some of the regrets and special moments you’ve had in life, and what other lessons of living (as well as maybe something about your relationship with them) do you want them to remember and keep close to their hearts forever?

These are the things of real value and importance in Bible-based estate planning – things that add life to the otherwise hollow and heartless form of legal structure alone.

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About half way through the book, “The Ultimate Gift”, Red Steven’s attorney (from whose perspective the story is being told), makes a comment or observation pertinent to the message of this article.

I marveled at how my oldest and dearest friend, Red Stevens, could reach out from beyond the grave to impact a young life.

That, in a very real sense, is what Bible-based estate planning is all about – impacting others through the stewardship of our lives while living as well as through the wisdom and teaching of our “heart legacy” when we’re gone.

A pastor, appearing as a guest on the radio show I used to host, expressed it this way:

An estate plan is the very last opportunity any of us will ever have to share our heart and convictions of life with the people who mean the most to us.

Or, as I frequently remind and then ask clients or audiences at my seminars.

God, in His estate plan the Bible, has given His children wisdom for living life as it is meant to be lived. Does your estate plan do the same for yours?

Leaving your heart will mean more and last longer than any monetary wealth you could ever accumulate and give away. So, if you haven’t done it, do it!

It’s the only way you can avoid having an estate plan that may be legally sound, but nevertheless still hollow and heartless on the truly important “things” in life.

Have a great week! (and to my family, love Dad)

Bob Alderman

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[1] The lessons or “gifts” to be experienced and received through the nephew’s monthly tasks include the

value of hard work, friends, family, laughter, dreams, giving and others – which together provide the ultimate gift of life.

[\[2\]](#) “Living Above the Level of Mediocrity – a commitment to excellence”