

A Living And Lasting Legacy

It's Memorial Day Weekend, a time we pause to honor the lives and memories of those who have gone before us. It is also a special weekend here at Carbondale because we are celebrating Margie McQueen's 80th birthday. We are so pleased to have all of her children and grandchildren here with her as well as other family and friends that have come to town for this special occasion.

For those of you who don't know, Margie McQueen and her late husband, J.L. McQueen were the pastors of this church from 1975 until 1985. Allow me for a moment to tell you a bit of Sis. McQueen's story this morning. And forgive me for being so familiar, but I'm probably going to call her Margie part of the time and I mean no disrespect when I do. It comes from sincere love and affection.

Margie was born and raised in Texas. She was saved as a young girl and felt God had a call upon her life. In 1947 she married Jack Manley and some time after that they had an encounter with God, were baptized in the Holy Spirit and Jack felt called into the ministry. He was a postman when God called him and he quit his job and they began to pastor churches in Texas.

In 1968, while pastoring in Whitehouse, Texas, Jack and another pastor flew to West Africa to preach and to dedicate a church they had helped to build. Trying to land at night in Sierra Leone the wing of the plane dipped into the ocean, the plane went down and Jack and the other pastor and the missionary pilot were all three killed. Margie was suddenly a widow at 39. Her son Jack was a freshmen at SAGU and her daughter Jeannie was 12. Suddenly widowed with a family to support, she eventually moved to Dallas and got a job working in a bank. After about 3 years she said she felt God begin to speak to her that it was time to move on with her life. Uncertain of what that would mean, it was about that time a pastor friend told her he wanted her to meet a friend of his who had been recently widowed himself. That man was J. L. McQueen. He and his wife Faye and their children Loren and Martha were pastors at Lawton First Assembly of God for the second time actually, when she became ill with cancer and died. Loren was married by that time and Marty was still a teenager and living at home.

Margie and Bro. McQueen met and married in June of 1971. She moved to Lawton to once again assume the role of a pastor's wife and to begin that process of

blending two lives and two families into one.

After about 18 months at Lawton, Bro. McQueen's health began to fail and in 1973 they were forced to retire from pastoral ministry and moved back to Dallas. They were preaching on weekends and came to preach here at Carbondale several times, but in 1975 God touched Bro. McQueen and enabled him to pastor once again. They came to Carbondale as our pastors in August of 1975 and served so faithfully. In January of 1976 they hired us as their youth pastors and we were privileged to serve under Bro. and Sis. McQueen for over 9 years. They have had a tremendous influence upon my life and ministry.

Bro. McQueen suffered a stroke in January of 1985 and retired in March of that year. Not long after his retirement, and as his health improved, he and Sis. McQueen were able to rejoin our staff working in the area of pastoral care and hospital visitation. Bro. McQueen outran us to heaven in the summer of 1988 but Sis. McQueen agreed to remain on staff with us, continuing to make visits to those in the hospital and to pray and pastor those in need. She retired from that position after about 14 years I think. Retired doesn't mean she stopped serving and praying and encouraging folks, however. She continues to mentor others, to pray and bless the members of this church. All in all she has been serving this church one way or another for almost 34 years. We are so grateful for Sis. McQueen and for her love and support and prayers given to this church. We love you and thank God for you and we plan for you to be here with us until Jesus comes!

I've been thinking about this weekend for some time – thinking about Memorial Day Weekend and about honoring Sis. McQueen. Thinking about memorials and the legacy of faithful servants of God.

Memorials and legacy. Webster defines a memorial as **Memorial – “anything meant to help people remember some person or event.”** Legacy is defined as **Legacy – “anything handed down from, or as from, a predecessor or ancestor.”**

Something that helps us remember a person. Something handed down from a predecessor or ancestor. I've thought a good bit about how people remember others. Time begins to blur memories, tiny details begin to fade. I found a cassette tape this week of my mother talking. I was so thrilled to hear her voice again, to listen to her

laugh, her voice break with emotion as she spoke of her love and pride for her family. The tape helped me remember her voice, but as I listened, I realized her tender spirit and her love for God and her family – all of that is part of her lasting and living legacy that she passed to me.

I attended Wayman Tisdale's memorial service Thursday and listened to the tributes paid to this outstanding athlete and musician. Everyone commented, not just about his athletic abilities and his musical talent, but about his love for his wife and his family, his genuineness and kindness shown to others and his faith and trust in God. Marcus Miller the musician said "Wayman had a light he would shine on you...to me that light is Wayman's legacy." John Klein's headline for his column Friday morning read, "Wayman's character is his true legacy." Basketball and jazz music may be the memorials we have of him, the way we remember him, but the true legacy he left is found in his character, his faith, his love for his family. That is a lasting and living legacy.

How can you know what people will say about you after you are gone? What kind of memorial will you leave behind? What kind of legacy will you leave? I can tell you. It's simple really. **The kind of legacy you leave is determined by the kind of life you lead!** The kind of memorial you are hoping for when you are dead and gone, you are building that memorial right now by the life you are living! How folks speak of you when you are dead is determined by how you live and how you treat them right now.

I remember reading a passage in the Old Testament that really stopped me in my tracks. It's found in 2 Chronicles 21. In speaking of the death of one of Judah's wicked kings, the bible says, "**Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one's regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.**" **2 Chronicles 21:20.** Can you imagine that being your legacy, your epitaph when you die? "He passed away to no one's regret." How sad.

Let me say it again: How you are remembered is determined by how you live your life. Right now, this moment, by your choices and actions, you are creating the legacy you will leave behind. Let me suggest some things that lend themselves to a

powerful legacy – and not just a legacy left after you are dead and gone, but these simple things will lend themselves to a powerful and lasting, living legacy.

Long obedience in the same direction. Years ago Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. (With the subtitle - *Discipleship in an Instant Society*.) The title is taken from a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche who said, “The essential thing ‘in heaven and earth’ is that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.”

The essential thing in building a legacy to be honored, to be remembered, a legacy to be lived and celebrated is obedience to God and his word. Long obedience in the same direction. The bible talks about Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem, meaning that he was determined to obey the Father, even though it meant the cross. He was determined to be obedient, to remain obedient, regardless of what happened along the journey. The essential thing is to be obedient to Christ and his word.

I’ve watched Sis. McQueen choose the way of long obedience in the same direction for 34 years. I watched Bro. McQueen and countless others faithfully and consistently choose to serve God, to obey him, regardless of the sacrifice, regardless of the cost. I’ve watched as God’s faithful people chose obedience, even when it looked like the harder road to choose. The bible speaks of Moses choosing obedience to God, choosing to suffer with God’s people rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Obedience may require sacrifice, but I can tell you it’s the only way to leave a lasting and living legacy to your children and grandchildren and to all those who come after you. Say yes to God and walk in obedience all the days of your life.

And understand what I mean when I talk about long obedience. It’s not just about starting strong, it’s about remaining obedient and faithful throughout the journey, about daily renewing your commitment to Christ and your determination to run the race and finish strong.

Don’t let anything detour you, don’t allow the burdens of life to distract you. Obeying God is your best option. It should be your only option. To live a life of obedience to God is to leave a lasting legacy for all who come after you. They have a testimony that encourages and inspires and continually challenges them to remain

faithful as you have done. Long obedience in the same direction. Finish strong.

Faithful trust in the God who keeps us. One of the essential ways to build a living and lasting legacy is to commit your ways to God and trust him, through all of the circumstances of life, through all of the changes that life brings, your faith and trust in God and his purpose must remain steadfast and certain.

How can you do that? How can you trust him when nothing about life seems trustworthy? How can you trust him when your whole world seems to be crumbling? How do you keep on trusting when like Sis. McQueen you are a widow at 39 with two children and no job, no income. You were planning on being a pastor's wife and all of a sudden everything changes. A widow at 39 and once again a widow at 59. What do we do? How do we make it? Sometimes the bottom falls out and you have to decide whether you are going to trust God and remain faithful and obedient or whether you are going to give up and call it quits.

What do you do? You keep on trusting. You keep on obeying God. You keep on believing. You keep on listening to the voice of God and remain open to the leading and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You recognize that life's challenges are often the means by which God reveals his greater glory and purpose. You realize that people are watching your life, your reactions, your response to the good stuff and the difficult stuff of your life. Your children and grandchildren are watching, your non-believing spouse, siblings, parents, friends, co-workers, they are watching to see how you respond. How do you live when things go wrong? How do you feel about God and about life when life is so unfair?

And what do you do? You show them that once again, when you put your faith and trust in God, you have no reason for fear. You rest in the word of the Lord. The writer of Proverbs declares, **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6**

I can assure you there were plenty of times in those months after Jack Manley was killed in that plane crash that Sis. McQueen had to wonder “How Lord? How are we going to make it? What Lord? What are you asking of me? What do we do now? Where do we go? To what have you called me?” None of it would make sense. Why

a young pastor with a young family - struck down in the prime of life? But you determine that you will trust God with all your heart and you won't even try to lean upon your own understanding. If you know Margie McQueen at all, you know she is a woman of prayer. You do what Margie did, you pray and commit it all to Christ again and again. You look to him as the source of your life and your strength. You trust him and his ways. It may not make sense, but in the process you find God's peace and he makes your path straight. Which brings me to the next point. To have a lasting and living legacy, you must learn to have:

Contentment in the midst of change. Part of our mantra around here is that "change is here to stay." Nothing stays quite the same. I heard a pastor recently say that if you don't like change you'll like being irrelevant even less. Change has to come because life brings change. We have to learn to adapt to the changes. And if we are wise, we find a place of contentment in the midst of change.

A lot of us don't care much for change. We just wish things could stay the same, but life doesn't work that way. Life goes on. People come into our lives and sometimes they leave. People live and then they die. It's reality.

But knowing what we know about the faithfulness of God. Knowing what we know about trusting in him and acknowledging him in all our ways, we can have contentment. We don't have to be afraid. He has promised to keep us in perfect peace. His presence is a place of rest and peace in the midst of sudden change, violent change. The peace he gives us is not like the peace the world offers. His is a peace that issues from his eternal nature and his unchanging character. It is based not upon changing circumstances but upon his steadfast mercy and grace. He is the unchanging God. Even if everything else changes, the psalmist said even if the earth gives way, we can remain still, at peace, contented in Him for He remains the unshaken, unmoved constant in our lives. We don't have to be afraid of change because we are intimately related to the eternal, unchanging God. We are anchored in Him.

Margie has been a stalwart in the sea of changes that have come to her life. I've watched her remaining confident and content in the will of God, in the hand of God at work in her life. Through the passing of two husbands, through all of the upsets and

changes and pressures of life, she prayed and found that place of contentment and rest, satisfied in Jesus.

It's not just something for Margie McQueen, it's for all of us who walk with God in obedience, in faithful trust, who commit our lives to him in prayer. If God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble, then we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Instead we can hear him say, "Be still and know that I am God." We can find contentment even in the changes of life. What a legacy to pass to others.

Oh to be able to leave that legacy of peace and contentment for those that follow us. The days are growing more difficult, wickedness is increasing, change is all around us, but we can remain at peace for our trust is in the Lord. Know the contentment that comes with knowing Jesus and trusting in him. Share that peace, show that contentment to your children. Let them see that you have found a place of peace and rest in Christ. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

Hopeful perseverance in the seasons of life. None of us know what the future will bring. All of us have had some unexpected things happen to us, good and bad. But regardless of all that comes, we can be hopeful in every season of our life. We can decide that we will press on, we will persevere, regardless of where we are in life. Young, old, just starting out or approaching the end of our days. We have every reason to persevere, every reason to continue to give it all we've got, to make ourselves useful to the kingdom of God. Keep running the race, persevering in hope.

I'm thankful for the example we have in Sis. McQueen, and so many others. Life may knock you down, but don't let the events of life keep you down. Where there is life there is hope the bible says. So be filled with hope and keep on going. Even at 80 or 90 or 100.

At the Tisdale memorial service they played a video clip of Wayman singing these lyrics, "It's alright...it's okay...keep your head up... keep the faith." Stay filled with hope, keep the faith, keep your head up, keep on going at every season of your life. Finish strong.

I don't know what the future will hold for my children, for the younger generation of this church, but I want them to know by looking at my life that they shouldn't ever give up on life. They shouldn't ever give up on God, regardless of their age or their

circumstances or what they are going through. I want them to see me going through the seasons of my life with hopeful, hope-filled perseverance. I'm not going to let anything keep me down. It's too important that we press on.

Someone has been thinking of giving up. Stop and think about the legacy you are leaving for your children. They need to see long obedience in the same direction. They need to see faithful trust in the God who has promised to keep us. They need to see you finding a place of peace and contentment in the changes of life and they need to see you persevering with hope. Don't quit. Too many others are depending on you.

I want everyone 65 and older to stand. See these people sitting around you. They need to see you living for God. They need you to hand them a godly legacy, a lasting and living legacy. Would you commit yourselves to living your life in such a way that the legacy you leave behind is truly a living and lasting legacy of obedience, trust, contentment and hope filled perseverance in Christ.