

The Roots of Legacy

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Today's Treasure

And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.'"

Joshua 4:21-22

*One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.*

Psalms 145:4

Our pastor son and friends officially launched Stone's Throw church, a new congregation in Middletown, Delaware, and I am suddenly whisked down a tunnel of memories. God is opening my eyes to something I can barely get my mind around. Legacy has an even deeper meaning as I consider the beginnings of this new work. Sadly, many who meet Jesus through this congregation will not know the roots of this vision. Yet this congregation is the fruit of prayers prayed that started over 100 years ago.

The new congregation is located in the same town where my grandparents lived in a house my father built, where my parents raised my siblings and me until I was twelve years old. My parents were childhood sweethearts who attended the local high school. My father built many of the homes on the east side of town as well as a housing development he named after me, Sharondale. My mother and her mother, Grandmom George, were charter members of one of the local churches. Grandmom believed Sundays were meant for rest so when my two girl cousins and I went to her house after church, we spent at least part of the afternoon sitting on lawn chairs in the backyard, reading our Sunday School papers. Grandpop George, who didn't attend church while Grandmom was alive, was inside, listening to the Phillies on the radio, smoking his cigar and falling asleep to the drone of the announcers (all activities which led my grandmother to conclude her husband was hopelessly lost).

Childhood in Middletown was idyllic. We played in the woods, and built dams in the "clean stream" so we could cool off during the lazy, hazy summer days. On hot afternoons, we played board games on the porch or looked for the perfect turtle to enter into the Vacation Bible School turtle race. My siblings and I held Fourth of July parades

and performed puppet shows for our parents. We walked into town, sometimes balancing ourselves on the stone wall surrounding the old cemetery along the way. We visited the old fashioned five and dime and bought genuine cherry cokes at the soda shop - you know the kind, with real cherry syrup and maraschino cherries at the bottom of the real glass. There is an old Methodist Church in Middletown, where my mother led the Brownies and Girl Scouts and I was one of her girls. I walked the streets of this little town, all by myself, and sold more boxes of Girl Scout cookies than anyone else in my troop. Sometimes we attended movies at the old Everett Theater. Twenty-five cents to see *Tammy*, starring Debbie Reynolds, definitely my all-time favorite childhood movie!

We attended the same little church where my mother grew up as a charter member. No nurseries, no kids' church, nowhere to take crying children, unless you were my father. I remember well Daddy taking me out of the service, applying discipline and carrying me back to the pew. I learned early how to sit in church. How much of church actually soaked into my little mind? Frankly, I can't remember one sermon I heard. I do remember my best friend and I timed the pastor's prayers, giggling on the back row during Sunday evening services and the pastor reprimanding us for our bad behavior. I remember the hymn sings and how we always picked the most upbeat songs as our favorites, you know the ones: *Nothing but the Blood and Wonderful Grace of Jesus!* This little church helped build a rich heritage of hymnology that has carried me through dark, dark days. When the church doors were open, my parents made sure we were there. Sunday School teachers, Vacation Bible School programs, Sunday night services along with Sunday worship - every piece of church life impacted my worldview in a way I recognize anew has influenced the way we raised our children and long for our grandchildren to embrace. Every time I enter an old church, the scent and feel of the building remind me of my childhood church life.

I think that's what I'm trying to get my mind around these days. Sometimes we think teaching is only through speaking or reading or preaching. But there is such a legacy of faith in my own soul that comes from relationships within my covenant family, I long to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

I want them to be captured by the joy of knowing Jesus because they are watching their parents and grandparents live lives that reflect His love and grace. I have to admit I wasn't really impressed with my Grandmother's way of expressing her faith. She seemed rule-driven and I wanted freedom. Yet perhaps it was her prayers that helped turn my heart back to Jesus when I strayed off the path of intimacy with Him. Perhaps her prayers, prayed before our children were born, contributed to our son, her great

grandson, leading a congregation in the very town where I first remember those strong family connections and experienced church life.

Last week our three church campuses celebrated the birth of Stone's Throw with a joint dinner, worship and communion. All three worship bands led the music. It was loud! It was joyful! It was moving! Little children clapped and moved their bodies in time with the music, literally dancing in the aisles. Seeing our young people and children embrace church life as a place of joy and fun is perhaps one of the best parts of worship for me. During one of the songs, Chuck leaned over and laughing said, "If your grandmother could see this, she would be turning over in her grave!" And I thought, "If she can see it, she is seeing through the eyes of Jesus, and I think she just might be dancing in heaven as she recognizes God is answering her prayers by sending her great grandson to proclaim Jesus in her hometown." Yes, the roots of legacy run deep. What a gift to see the sweet fruit of generational praying and worship.

Update: Ten years later, Stone's Throw Church changed their name to The Town and moved into their new home – the first Protestant Church built within the city limits of Middletown, Delaware in fifty years. The last one built? The little Orthodox Presbyterian Church my father helped build and where my grandmother and mother were charter members, the same little church where my parents took my siblings and me from the time we were born. Some might drive by that little church and conclude nothing significant ever happened there. Yet, God planted seeds in that church almost 100 years ago that are growing sweet eternal fruit. The roots of legacy grow deep.

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