

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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What Will They Say?

It is an enormous assumption, but I'm certain everyone has wondered at some point how they will be remembered once they have passed from this life. What will others say about you? What will come to their mind when you are mentioned in conversation? Perhaps most importantly, how will your family remember you?

As I recall, my first real confrontation with the brevity of life came when I turned 25. Some months prior I had been in Vietnam exposed to enemy fire and feeling very fortunate to still be on this side of the grass. Like most war veterans you do not forget your first exposure to combat. How quickly a life is gone! Snuffed out in the blink of an eye.

My 25th birthday had an impact on me which startled me with just how quickly that first quarter-century had slipped past. Would the rest of my days on planet earth go by as quickly? Is there a brake handle I can pull on to slow down this train of life?

It is not only the suddenness of life's end that brings you up short, but the irrationality of the loss. So often the question is asked, "Why?" Why this person? Why now? They had so much to live for!

However, the most important question, at least for this article, is "*How will you be remembered?*"

Assuming you wish to be loved and valued, and to become a fond memory in the hearts of those who knew you, let me ask you: "*How are you living your life?*"

My youngest daughter, Jenny, is the owner of a really cute little store in Turlock she named, *Rustic Roots*. She refinishes furniture so it has a vintage look, or what is often referred to as "shabby chic." One of her vendors makes wooden signs which I always enjoy reading. One that was recently in the store says, "*If my dog doesn't like you, we probably won't either.*" After chuckling for a moment I had to admit there is a lot of truth in that simple statement.

Epitaphs (you know, the words engraved on headstones in cemeteries) can be very sobering. Because of 34 years of military service, this one grabbed my attention about a soldier. "*To save your world you asked this man to die: Would this man, could he see you now, ask why?*" I must tell you that in light of all that is changing in the United States of America, our fallen warriors would be perfectly justified in asking each and every one of us this poignant question! Remember this as you enjoy Memorial Day on Monday, May 30th.

Both as a pastor and a Navy chaplain I have counseled many people on end-of-life issues. I have also officiated at many funerals in the civilian world and the military world. I can still recall the words of various people who had nothing good to remember about a loved one. The most startling one I ever dealt with was on a ship where I was assigned as the command chaplain. A radio message came in that

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was from the Red Cross notifying the command of the death of the mother of one of our sailors. The sailor was located and told to report to the chaplain's office. When the young man showed up at my door, I attempted to break the news to him as gently, yet directly as possible. After I told him of the report we had received of his mother's death, I attempted to speak words of comfort to someone I assumed would be emotionally distraught. He sat there with a placid face, showing no emotion, in fact, no reaction of any kind. I wasn't sure he had fully grasped what I had just told him. No doubt seeing the expression of curiosity on my face due to his lack of reaction, he said, "Is that all?" I said, "Well, that's a terrible bit of news. Are you sure you're okay?" He said, "I never liked her. She was a terrible person." To which I replied, "I'm sorry you had that experience." Our session ended when he asked, "Can I go back to work now?"

I'm certain that given the chance this sailor may well have had a less than flattering epitaph chiseled onto his mother's tombstone!

As a Christian I take great comfort from the Bible's instruction. On this matter of living a life that will be well remembered, I will share from 2 Peter 3, verses 11 & 12. Peter is writing to Christians about the coming Day of the Lord. "*What kind of people ought you to be?*" he asks. "*You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.*"

I suggest this is the best advice you can receive if you are earnest about leaving a legacy people will cherish in remembering you.

Allow me to leave you with one last epitaph carved into a tombstone in England. "*Remember man, as you walk by; As you are now, so once was I; As I am now, so shall you be; Remember this and follow me.*" A hand-written response was made on the tombstone that read, "*To follow you I'll not consent, until I know which way you went.*"

A favorite saying of mine goes like this, "*Live for God always! The pay isn't always so great, but the retirement benefits are out of this world!*"