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Making Your Mark Using Permanent Ink

by Matt Hook

12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

13 This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Selah

14 Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions.

15 But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. Selah

16 Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases;

17 for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.

18 Though while he lived he counted himself blessed-- and men praise you when you prosper--

19 he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life.

20 A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish. NIV

A few years ago, the Gallup Organization surveyed top CEOs of businesses in America, asking them "What is your greatest fear?" Among the top of the list was "Not making a difference." One of your greatest needs as a human being is to make your mark on the world. It's what many of us live for. It's a huge part of what I live for. But I lost some hope this week. When?

When all in the same week things in Iraq go from bad to worse.

When prison abuse and decapitation get broadcast in our schools.

When the president of Chechnya is murdered.

When a few days later the head of the Iraqi Governing Council is also killed.

When major changes are happening in the fabric of America without many people noticing.

When the average gas price tops \$2.00.

When mainstream media wear their biases blatantly on their sleeves.

When Ted Kennedy pointedly insults his fellow countrymen, and nobody seems to care.

As bad as all that is, there are two things worse. First, what is really scary is when the pollsters begin to say that a growing majority of Americans don't see much point anymore in resisting or opposing all this. Nobody seems to care. It's a mindset of apathy, and it's the most dangerous enemy you will ever face.

Francis Schaeffer used to refer to this mindset as a fixation with "personal peace and affluence." He said it had already become the dry rot not just of our culture in general, but of committed Christians as well. The mindset of Americans and even of Christians seems to be that we're tired of the fight. We experience direct conflict when we want to make a difference with our lives at the same time we fixate on personal peace and affluence. I feel called to point out that there is a direct connection between our attitudes of apathy, boredom, and disconnect and the direction of hopelessness of the world today.

Our society, our health, our justice, and our way of life are being affected on every side. I don't know about you, but this week I've really been struggling. Maybe you're being hit from all sides too. It sure seems to be going to the dogs. Interesting that in The Message version, Psalm 49:20 says, "*We aren't immortal. We don't last long. Like our dogs, we age and weaken. And die.*"

Second, as much as we can experience the evidence of this mindset from every side, as bad as many things appear, what's more important is how this mindset will play out in the next generation.

We have handed this mindset over to the next generation. Do you know what else is being handed off? Over the next 10 years, the greatest transfer of wealth in the history of the world will occur. There will be more wealth handed off from the older generation to the younger than ever before. Today there is greater potential for apathy, and greater potential for doing good than ever before. Do you think that's coincidence? The Psalmist wouldn't either. Our present mindset and our present way of spending money will never make a mark that will last.

Why not? Because when we live striving after "personal peace and affluence," (which is basically more and better things for ourselves), we face what the Psalmist says: "*This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves. Death herds them like sheep straight to hell; they disappear down the gullet of the grave; they waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery.*"

When we continue to live above it all, or escaping it all, we're the ones who "*waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery.*" For some, that grave marker is the only mark they make on the world. And many people we know may be headed there. After all, focusing on others and speaking into the world's hopelessness with the world going to the dogs just messes with our personal peace and distracts us from our quest for affluence. Here's where I stand convicted: it messes with my personal peace and quest for affluence.

Listen to Psalm 49:12-20 from The Message:

“This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves.

Death herds them like sheep straight to hell; they disappear down the gullet of the grave; they waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery.

But me? God snatches me from the clutch of death, he reaches down and grabs me.

So don't be impressed with those who get rich and pile up fame and fortune.

They can't take it with them; fame and fortune get left behind.

Just when they think they've arrived and folks praise them because they've made good, they enter the family burial plot where they'll never see sunshine again.

We aren't immortal. We don't last long.

Like our dogs, we age and weaken. And die.” The Message

In Psalm 49, God encourages us to fix our eyes on the things that endure. If eternity is a never ending line in both directions, your life is like a dot on that line. Which do you live for – the dot, or the line? In light of eternity, we cannot become consumed with the temporary. You cannot allow the pursuit of wealth or power to impress you, because the only thing that will outlive you in your life is that which you do that is connected to eternity. The only mark that will last is that made for Jesus Christ. Your connection with eternity is the only thing that will outlive you. It's also the only thing that will fulfill you. “One life twill soon be past, only that which is done for Christ will last.”

Verse 17 reminds us when we die we will take nothing with us, no matter how rich we become. So what will we leave behind that counts? An inheritance? A legacy? A huge difference exists between a legacy and an inheritance. Anyone can leave an inheritance. An inheritance is something you leave TO your family or loved ones, and it also fades. A legacy is something you leave IN your family and loved ones. Consider the differences in the two:

Inheritance Legacy

1. Something tangible you give TO others. Something tangible you place IN others.
2. Temporarily brings them happiness. Permanently transforms them
3. Eventually fades as it is spent. Lives on long after you die.
4. Your activity may or may not pay off. Your activity becomes achievement.

Even after the time when no one remembers your name, your legacy can live on in the lives of people, like a blueprint for life.

Around 40 years ago, Yale University conducted an extensive seven-year study on how a person's actions in life affect the lives of his or her children. This study was focused around the lives of two men: Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards. Max Jukes was an Atheist that believed in the abolition of laws and rules. Mr. Jukes formed an organization called the Freedom Movement that preached free sex, no laws, no formal education and no responsibilities. Jonathan Edwards was known for his self-

discipline. He became a preacher that believed in leading by example. He authored two books on the subjects of physical fitness and kindness. Mr. Edwards later became involved in teaching people to be responsible for their daily actions. Both of these men were chosen for their diverse beliefs, but also because they both fathered 13 children. Here are the legacies they left behind:

MAX JUKES

JONATHON EDWARDS

1026 descendants

929 descendants

300 convicts

430 ministers (iffy at best!) /314 war veterans

27 murderers

75 authors

190 prostitutes

86 college professors

509 alcoholics & drug addicts

13 university presidents

7 congressman

3 governors

1 Vice-President of the United States

So, is God's message in this Psalm that we just be more self-disciplined? Not entirely. Many of us are self-disciplined, but we're not leaving a legacy. Listen again to the Psalmist: *"This is what happens to those who live for the moment, who only look out for themselves. Death herds them like sheep straight to hell"*.

There's our first clue. It's not just about self-discipline, but about who you are serving. Who do you look out for? Yourself? Or others? Jesus said *"No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and money."* (Matthew 6:24). The first half of Psalm 49 says we are spiritually robbed all along by our trust in money when we face death. Those who only look out for themselves, trusting in their resources, are like sheep led to Hell. *"Death herds them like sheep straight to hell"*. It is there that death, that last and terrifying enemy, is their dreadful shepherd.

It's not just about self-discipline. It's about a shepherd. In Psalm 49 the shepherd is death. But there's another Psalm about a Shepherd. Listen to Psalm 23: *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my*

soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

Any one of those in Psalm 49 could have had the Lord as their Shepherd. Instead, they have death. He writes *“They disappear down the gullet of the grave; they waste away to nothing – nothing left but a marker in a cemetery. But me? God snatches me from the clutch of death, he reaches down and grabs me.”* Who? God - the other shepherd.

What’s the problem with the news of our world? What’s the problem we have leaving our mark? I don’t mean to oversimplify, but it’s just this: we’ve lost our shepherd. We haven’t really lost our shepherd; we’ve switched shepherds. We’ve lost God as our center. We live as practical atheists. We say we believe in God, but we serve the other master all week long. We live between Sundays as though God doesn’t exist. We’ve lost our center.

A long time ago, a teacher took a recording of Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus, and drilled a hole just ¼ of an inch off center, and played it for his class. What was once some of the world’s most beautiful music now sounded like the cackling of witches.

When we lose our center, we quickly become no more than the cackling of witches. When the church loses its center, it is much the same. Let me ask:

Are you living with the wrong center in your life?

Do you want to leave more than just an inheritance?

Do you want to make your mark using permanent ink?

Do you want to make an eternal difference?

Write it on people’s hearts. Give your life that thousands come to know the Good Shepherd. (not the “death-shepherd.”) Begin with those people immediately around you.

Jesus himself said *“I am the Good Shepherd – the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”* (John 10:11)

Do you know that Jesus laid down his life for you? For this generation? Do the children in your life know that the Good Shepherd laid down his life for them? That he paid the penalty of death for their sin? Make that your mark that the world may know Jesus the Christ. Make your mark so that even after the time when no one remembers your name, your legacy can live on in the lives of people – speak that they will know the Good Shepherd and let him transform their lives. Use your gifts that there will always be a place where they can come and hear about and witness the Good Shepherd. As we make the greatest handoff in history, make it count for those who come after us. Amen!