

CASTING A SHADOW BEYOND THE GRAVE

Mankind is mortal. God has granted us a certain number of days to dwell upon this earth. For some, it may be only days. For others, it may be tens of thousands of days. No matter what our number, there will come a time for all of us when our last day will arrive. Then this life, as we know it, will be over.

At this point who we were and what we did in our lives will be permanently fixed in the minds of those who knew us. There will be no more additions to those memories. No corrections. No modifications. Our relationships with people, our actions, what was important to us, how we lived our lives, and how we used our resources will now be unchangeably etched in the memories of all those who knew us. The final paragraph of the final chapter of our book will have been written and the indelible ink will have dried.

How fondly will you be remembered by those who knew you? Will you be someone people will even want to remember? Will you be someone people will be glad to forget? Most of us hope once our days have played out and we are gone that someone will remember us with gratitude and affection. Something of what we have done in our lives will survive us and serve as a meaningful monument to our brief pilgrimage on this planet.

We are reminded of the gripping story of Ebenezer Scrooge. He was a tight-fisted, cold-blooded, calculating businessman, who had amassed an incredible fortune yet continued to squeeze every penny he could out of everyone with whom he dealt. His goal was to become rich and consequently to become happy. He had achieved his financial goal several times over. Yet, there was never enough money because he was still not happy. So he continued to amass ever greater piles of gold. The means to finding happiness – gaining wealth – had subtly shifted from the means to the end itself.

One cold Christmas eve, Ebenezer is given a gift from his old, deceased business partner, Jacob Marley. His gift was a chance to see his life from a different perspective. Following the visitation of three spirits, Ebenezer faces himself as a broken and empty shell of a man. The most gripping scene in the story is when he is kneeling over his own grave stone after seeing everyone's disdain and disrespect of him after his death. Ebenezer appeals to the "Spirit of Christmas Future" to assure him that what he has seen is not fixed for eternity, but can be changed. If he changes, the outcome of his life might be different than the horrors he has witnessed. After seeing beyond his days, he desperately regrets the way he lives and pleads with the spirit to give him a chance to go back and to do things differently. With indescribable gratitude, he awakens on Christmas morning in his own bed – **alive!**

In one short night, this miserable, stingy, odious man is radically transformed into one of the most caring, generous, self-sacrificing, gracious men ever known by the people of London. Not only did he use his wealth and his life to bless the lives of countless people from that point forward, he also found the true happiness that

had continually eluded him. He had finally come to understand the words of Jesus, *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35).

Sadly, or maybe gladly, none of us will be given the supernatural opportunity to go beyond our grave to see how our life impacted others. Many of us might be greatly distressed if we did. I'm not sure we really need to do that in order to grasp the full scope of the shadow we are casting. If we are honest with ourselves, it should not be too difficult to get some idea of the size and length of the shadow that we are casting and just how enduring it will be.

However, for those who are concentrating on making a difference by "casting a shadow," we will never fully comprehend the length and breadth of our shadow. So often, what we give of ourselves to others ends up getting passed around to still others and often ends up impacting the lives of people we will never know.

The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of this. I am certain that Paul had no idea that tens of millions of people would be eternally impacted by the shadow his life has cast throughout the ages. If we are going to cast a shadow beyond our own days, we must invest our time, our money, and our interest in things and people that are outside of ourselves.

What are you doing with your life and resources to cast a shadow that will stretch beyond your grave? Keep in mind, you will not be remembered by what you have kept for yourself. You will be remembered by what you have given to others!

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E. G. "Jay" Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University's Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.