

LEGACY

Shortly after my dad became a Christian, at age 62, he began looking around for things he could give away. Although he had been successful in his Florida business and in citrus agriculture, and had accumulated many things, giving became more important than getting. He spent the last 26 years of his life giving things away. He once told me his goal was to be like Job, also a successful businessman, who left this world as he entered it—owning nothing.

He came close to meeting that goal.

The afternoon after he died, at the age of 88, I went through his remaining possessions. Everything was within reach of his bed—either on or in his little nightstand. He had been wearing most of his clothes: a pair of khaki pants, a tan dress shirt, a black bow tie and a pair of fuzzy white socks. He also owned two other pair of socks, two sets of underwear and a pair of pajamas. On top of the nightstand were his dollar pocket watch, glasses, a soft hairbrush and his worn, dog-eared Bible. His final possession was a narrow-bladed grapefruit knife, which he loved to pull from his pocket in the citrus grove to show us kids how to peel a grapefruit in a circular fashion so the peeling never broke.

He indeed left as he arrived—owning virtually nothing.

Other possessions—house, properties and money—had been given away before he died. I suspect what he inherited in heaven, apart from his salvation, was in direct proportion to what he gave on earth.

He had been very direct with his five grown children. He would wisely give money when needed: when we were getting started in life and career. But he was specific: There would be no money for us in his will. He left an inheritance to take care of our mother who, now at 93, is continuing to use it. But he knew that money or property left to children often divides families. All his possessions—and they were considerable—had been given ahead of time or were willed to the churches and mission organizations he believed in and loved.

We kids agreed. It was his money and he was following God's direction. He had given us college educations, helped us in times of need and blessed us with an example that continues to change our lives.

His initial experience with Jesus—which started this change—came during a time of personal anguish and shame. I had just graduated from high school and had done something that embarrassed the family. Consequently, he felt he had failed as a father.

In deep despair he left the house one October afternoon in 1950 and walked into the citrus grove on the back side of the property. Kneeling between two big grapefruit trees he began crying—and God came rushing to meet him in great and powerful glory.

Daddy had been a churchgoer all his life. He had taught the men's class in the local Methodist church for many years. After he met Jesus, the Bible became his most precious possession. Prior to this he had never read anything but the ancient King James Version. But the week after his "born again" experience, he purchased a copy of J.B. Phillips' new translation of Paul's epistles, one of the first modern-language translations. It was the beginning of a love affair with the Bible that lasted until the day he laid the written Word aside and entered the Writer's study.

Fifteen years after his conversion I went through my own "dark night of the soul." My sense of personal failure overwhelmed me. I had failed as a minister, a father and a husband. I went to see my dad in Florida. He told me of his own spiritual pilgrimage, then took me out behind the house and showed me that spot between the two grapefruit trees.

At the end of my visit he reached up on the shelf of his study and gave me his much-marked copy of Phillips' translation. A prized possession.

I took it with me, intrigued over my dad's underlines. I didn't have to read far. In the preface the translator wrote of his own spiritual struggle with radical Christianity. Daddy had underlined Phillips' conclusion: "*Perhaps if we believed what they [those early Christians] believed, we might achieve what they achieved.*"

In the margin my father had written "Ah ha!"

That sentence, which had started my father's search for spiritual power, now started mine. It climaxed a year later with a life-changing baptism in the Holy Spirit.

What a wonderful legacy. ■

Jamie Buckingham is an award-winning columnist and popular conference speaker



BY
JAMIE
BUCKINGHAM