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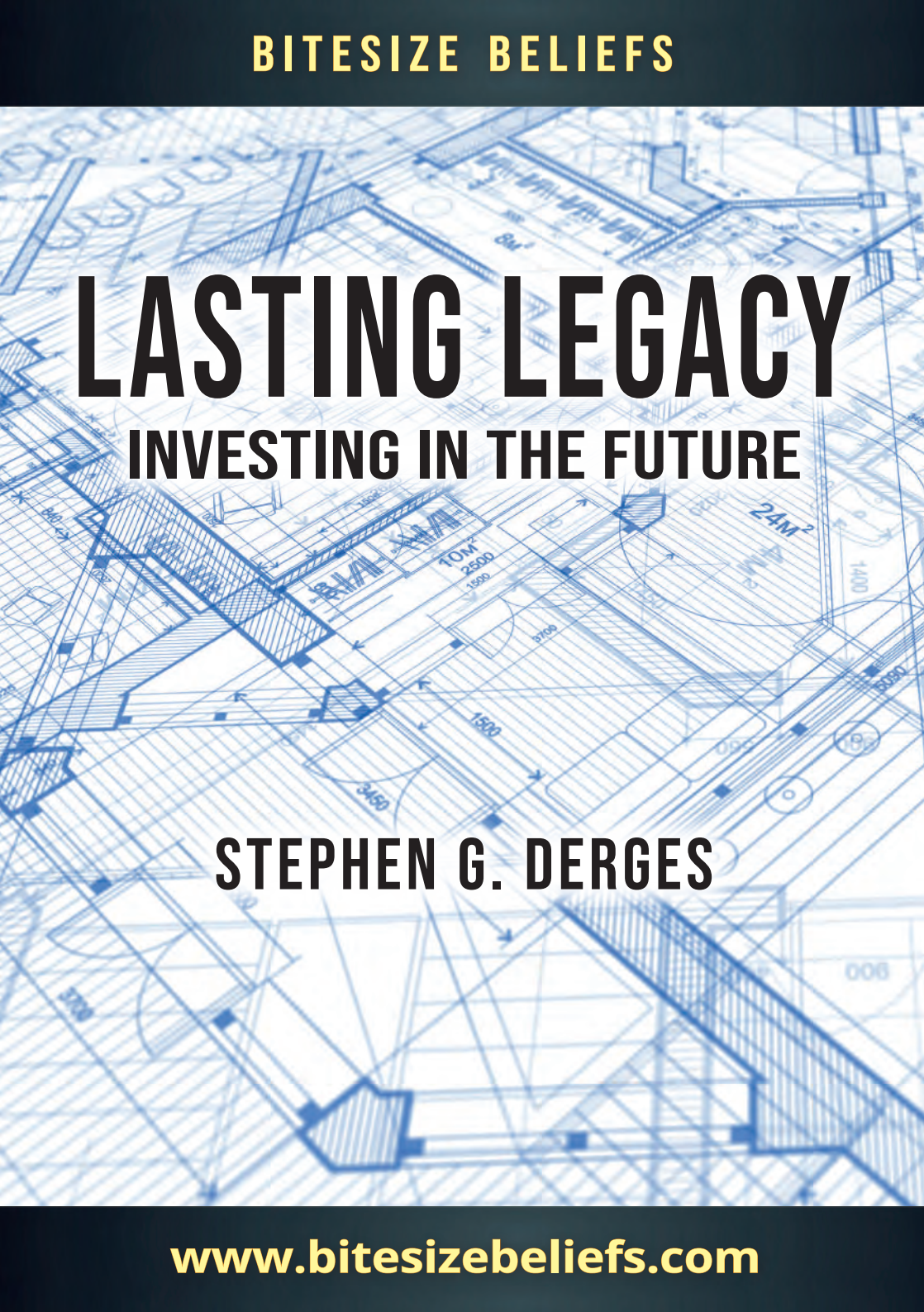
BITESIZE BELIEFS

LASTING LEGACY

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

STEPHEN G. DERGES

www.bitesizebeliefs.com

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BITESIZE BELIEFS

LASTING LEGACY

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE





Dedication

The whole **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** series is dedicated to my wonderful wife Rosalyn – thank you for believing in me, trusting in me and loving me. I know that I'm a better man with you than I would have been without you.

Acknowledgements

Many people have had a profound influence on my life and it's not possible to list everyone here. So, apologies if you are not specifically singled out – your reward will be in heaven!

Countless leaders, speakers, authors – many of whom I've not met personally – have inspired me and helped me develop and I'm profoundly grateful for the books, video and audio recordings and other materials they have shared.

I'm especially indebted to Carl Brettle, CEO of Neighbourhood Prayer Network (NPN), and his wife Rebekah who had the vision for NPN and launched the ministry in 2013 at Wembley Stadium.

Carl was the catalyst for me to re-edit the original editions of **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** and make this publication a reality – I appreciate your advice and faith in me. Do check out NPN's vision and ministry

www.neighbourhoodprayer.net

Introduction

This is one of a series of 'pamphlet type' books I've written over the years to help people grow spiritually and, as you can see, it's not very long. It's not because I haven't much to say, but in this age of 'soundbites' and 'instant makeovers', I thought short, easy-to-read books would be more accessible. There are too many books on my shelves that I've started but not finished, so I've kept **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** condensed because I want them to be read.

Although I didn't attend Bible College or study for a theological degree, over many years I've been involved in various leadership roles in church, charitable, community and business settings. As Pastor of a Baptist Church and more recently, Chair of the Trustees and Leadership Team of an Independent Evangelical church, I've learnt a multitude of lessons – some painful – as well as known God's gracious favour.

'SELAH MOMENTS'

In every **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** book there are references to **'SELAH MOMENTS'** – let me explain.

'Selah' is often used in the Psalms where the writer wants us to meditate on what's been written. The Amplified Bible translates *'Selah'* as: *"pause and calmly realise what that means!"*

Often what we hear and read impacts us just in that moment, so throughout this book there are opportunities to reflect on the personal implications. And please don't skip over the Bible passages – God's word has power – take the time to genuinely meditate on them.

So, find a comfortable chair, sit back, get a cup of tea (or your favourite beverage) and you'll be through this book before you know it. But hopefully the thoughts and challenges will last a lifetime.

Stephen G. Berges

LASTING LEGACY

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

We make an impression on everyone we meet and everyone we meet makes an impression on us – it's a fact of life. Sometimes it happens subconsciously – but it happens. Either way, those impressions will be positive, negative or indifferent. I'm now forming mental images of people who fall into all those categories. The problem is others feel the same way about me!

Many people have had a beneficial impact on my life through their characters, actions, abilities and talents, passion, wisdom or generosity of spirit. Sadly, I've not always fully appreciated the richness of those associations.

The sobering truth that mortality creeps up on us hit me many years ago and I began to recognise I'd better use my remaining time wisely.



I was extremely fortunate to have been raised in a Christian home. My parents weren't perfect, but neither was I. As the eldest of five children, I always believed they made all their mistakes on me! But having experienced parenthood, and now grand-parenthood, I appreciate I undoubtedly sorely tested their parenting skills. I am indebted their prayerfully faithfulness was instrumental in me accepting Jesus as my personal Saviour.

They taught me a great deal – not just spiritual values but life skills and were the major influence in my early character development.

I went (more correctly, was taken or sent) to church four times on Sundays – morning meeting, afternoon Sunday school, evening Gospel meeting, after-church youth meeting. It was the busiest day of the week and yet supposedly a day of rest!

It was scary for the uninitiated too. When I began dating Rosalyn, she found the church I attended daunting. Her experience was in Anglican and Methodist churches, but our '*chapel*' – an Open Brethren Assembly – was supposedly '*led by the Spirit.*' Actually, only the men were led by the Holy Spirit – women didn't contribute as they were required to attend in silence.

Strangely, ladies were permitted to speak at the midweek Women's Meetings – because no men were present. It was also acceptable for female missionaries to share the Gospel with men whilst abroad, yet they had to remain silent

when men were in a service here in the UK. Work that one out!

There was no organ, piano or other musical instruments. We sang '*a cappella*', so my Dad, as the '*presenter*', was required to know the most suitable tune and pitch it in an appropriate key.

To protect the innocent, I'm not going to '*name names*' (apart from my best mate Andy) as I'm conscious some of these characters may be recognisable in parts of Devon.

Invariably, Andy and I could predict the outcome of the Morning Service. We'd sit at the back and take bets on who would take part next. Please note, no money literally changed hands – we needed to ensure we contributed to the collection, known as an '*offering*' in other churches.

There was an unwritten law, if Brother X – one the more senior men, called '*Elders*' – opened in prayer, Brother Y, another elder, would close the service. At some juncture, another more elderly gentleman (but not an Elder!) often suggested we sang the hymn with the refrain '*Hallelujah, what a Saviour*'. Yet another contributor, who had an unfortunate lisp, regularly prayed. If the prayer had too many '*S's*', it sounded similar to a bout of whistling, akin to a kettle boiling softly nearby.

Apologies if this appears disrespectful, but a miracle occurred every Sunday – the Holy Spirit always led us to have Communion at exactly 11:40am. Woe-be-tide anyone who started to speak at that time or made us late if they were already speaking. Communion was known as '*The Lord's Supper*', but when we questioned why supper was in the morning, we were assured it had traditional (and no doubt, deeply doctrinal) significance.



When the church was full, Andy and I sat on the upstairs balcony until this high-rise facility was condemned as being '*unsound*' (not theologically, just dangerous). The notice sheet sometimes became either a form of confetti which mysteriously dropped over the balcony edge onto the poor unsuspecting worshippers below or converted into a paper aeroplane.

We'd watch the dust particles in the sunlight coming through the windows or if it was raining, count the raindrops falling down the plain glass panes. No stained glass here – that would be idolatry.

We sat in silence, in theory contemplating the Lord, until someone read a Scripture, prayed or '*brought a word*'. There were no flowers because that would adversely affect our worship, although the women wore hats – a source of both distraction and amusement and a conversation topic post-Service.

Talking of dress code – Sunday best suits were compulsory because we were meeting with God. It was as if He was absent whenever we weren't in a meeting! Strange really – the God who created the universe only turned up on Sundays when we were in '*meeting mode*.' At other times He must have been missing or busy at another meeting somewhere else.

Evening Gospel Services focused on the perils of ignoring Jesus' sacrificial death and the consequences of an eternity without Christ, all spelt out in graphic detail – to people who'd already made a personal commitment. Fearing embarrassment, because most of us young people thought our '*street cred*' with friends would be diminished, we never dared to invite anyone to these

songs (slightly derogatorily termed '*choruses*' as opposed to proper hymns). I desperately tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, because if any of my school friends were playing football in the park, it could lead to potentially problematic discussions on Monday!

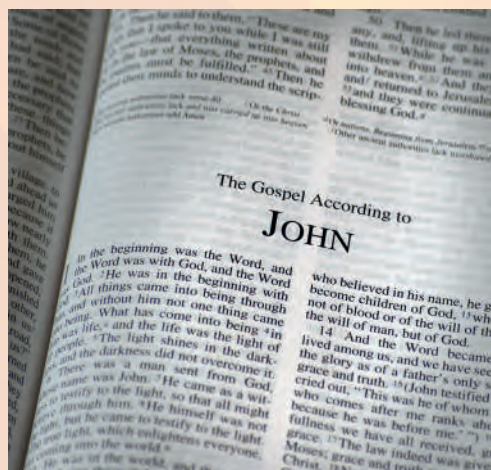
Again, I'm not trying to be disrespectful or cynical. This type of church helped shape my spiritual formation.

At the tender age of seven I'd asked Jesus to become my Saviour and was baptised in water aged thirteen. I recall I was the last of around twenty people baptised that day and when my turn arrived the water was filthy! You should have seen the scum on the top – ugh!

However, the church provided a range of activities for young people. We attended afternoon Sunday School until we became teenagers, when we '*graduated*' to the 'Young People's Rally' after the Sunday evening service. During the week we had a vibrant youth club – run by my Dad, who regularly banned Andy and me for disruptive (I'd argue, exuberant!) behaviour.

On Saturday nights, there was an excellent youth-orientated coffee bar with often a hundred plus crammed into small room listening to Christian bands and a short talk. These evenings were special because they were geared for our age group and organised by older young people – i.e., those between twenty-one and thirty!

I learned the Bible by rote and still remember passages today – usually in the Authorised Version. Before my baptism I faced an intimidating ordeal – an interview with the Elders plus the '*initiation test*' to recite the first fourteen verses of John's Gospel chapter 1 thus showing my commitment.



meetings. But then few, if any, adults invited their friends and neighbours either!

Summer Sunday evening services were held outdoors in the local park. Personally, this was a cause of embarrassment as I was one of the young people who knew the four guitar chords necessary for '*modern*' Christian



Despite the foibles, I'm extremely grateful for the faithfulness of the leaders and congregation, who were undoubted pillars in the community. Even non-church goers in the town respected them and although they had many idiosyncrasies (which I'm not going to go into here) they were God-fearing and God-serving people who genuinely made a positive impression on a more than slightly rebellious young man.

Many of us who grew up in that environment are still *'going on faithfully with the Lord'* and several of us have become church leaders in various settings. I'm sure their faithful and continual prayers made a massive difference to the way we turned out.

But, rightly or wrongly, as I grew up, I formed the impression that Church wasn't rooted in real life experience and didn't really prepare me to live victoriously in the world. Yes, Scripture was dissected and expounded, but it was more doctrine and head knowledge than practical tools for daily living.

We were instructed on what had happened in the past – God's love demonstrated by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – and exhorted to look forward to our future hope – Jesus' triumphal return when we'd be with Him for eternity.

But where was the relevance to my life now – today? Visiting missionaries coming home on furlough (for the uninitiated that's *Christian-ese* for holiday

or R&R), brought stories of miracles and answers to prayer, but that was because they had given up everything to serve God abroad. They were the super-Christians of the era, and we were just the ones who supported them. They would see God at work, but to us He was more inactive than dynamic.

I'm not denying there were occasions when I genuinely felt the amazing presence of God and for sure, there were times of spontaneous, heart-felt praise which helped bring comfort and dispel people's sadness, worries and fears. But most of the time I was left wondering where the awesome, supreme God, who wanted to have an intimate relationship with us, was.

I guess the amateur psychiatrists and psychologists reading this book are beginning to think I'm a nutty as a fruitcake whilst any social workers are questioning whether there are any churches like this still damaging impressionable youngsters. I'm taking the Fifth Amendment on that one!

By now you're probably beginning to get bored with my personal history lesson, so here's the punch line to the point I'm trying to illustrate.

We're greatly affected by the environment and people around us, especially in our formative years. These impressions have lasting consequences and indelibly influence us. Not to put too fine a point on it, they can make or break us if we choose to let them. Sadly, others who had a similar supportive family and church upbringing to mine, have decided to *"deconstruct their faith."*

I've already said how grateful I am for my upbringing, together with my three brothers and sister, in a Christian environment. It's vital that Christian parents help their children understand Biblical principles and values. It's not about indoctrination but more a daily living out of our faith, so our children see it in action, rather than mere words.

Because my parents and grandparents were Christians, I started out in life with the benefit of their accumulated experience and our two children get the benefit of Rosalyn's and mine. Our fervent prayer is because they've learnt from our lives, Lucy and Michael and their children, will go on to achieve greater things in God's Kingdom than we have.

The Bible says, ***"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."***¹

I don't believe this is a 'cast-iron guarantee' – we all have freewill to choose the outcome of our lives – but as Christians, Rosalyn and I have an aspirational ambition our family will follow Christ.

This is how the Message and Amplified Bible interpret this verse:

- ***"Point your kids in the right direction – when they're old they won't be lost"*** (MSG)
- ***"Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it."*** (Amplified)

But what does it mean in practice?

We train our children in everyday life skills until they become second nature. Few of us need to *'remember'* to clean

¹ Proverbs 22:6



our teeth – we just do it naturally after a meal or at least a couple of times a day. Similarly, we can pass on our wisdom to those succeeding us. It's unwise (and usually impossible) to build a house on unstable foundations. Those early years are vital in imparting lifelong qualities, attitudes, and values.

People often talk about *'impressionable youth'*. On reaching their teens, there's a fertile ground for various influences to inform behaviour and decisions. Peer group pressure resulting from television *'soaps'*, pop stars, sports personalities and other *'teachers'* are all involved. Social media *'influencers'* weren't a factor

in my youth (they didn't exist – I'm that old!) but it's a major dynamic for young adults today. It's always a wise move to establish life principles before those teenage hormones start to kick in.

The Bible also says, ***"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts."***² King David, who wrote this wonderful Psalm, was saying in effect, *"I'm trusting God for my future because of what He's done for me in the past – and I want to share my experiences with you, so you can benefit too."*

As an aside, please note that it doesn't say *"older generations commend your works to younger generations."* We can



learn from people of all ages. We're much poorer if we don't recognise the value young people impart to those of us who are more chronologically challenged.

HEROES AND HEROINES

Have you ever walked through a graveyard and read the epitaphs honouring the lives of our predecessors? The memorial inscriptions revere and venerate individuals who have dedicated themselves in service to their community and remind subsequent generations of the heritage and privileges they now enjoy.

We're going to take a **'SELAH MOMENT'** here. If this is the first time you've come across **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'**, you won't be familiar with what I'm talking about, so have a look at the Introduction and find out. We'll start off with some reasonably easy questions but don't be fooled – they'll get tougher as we go along!

To start, here are some personal questions to consider:

- **Who has had the most influential impact on my life so far?**

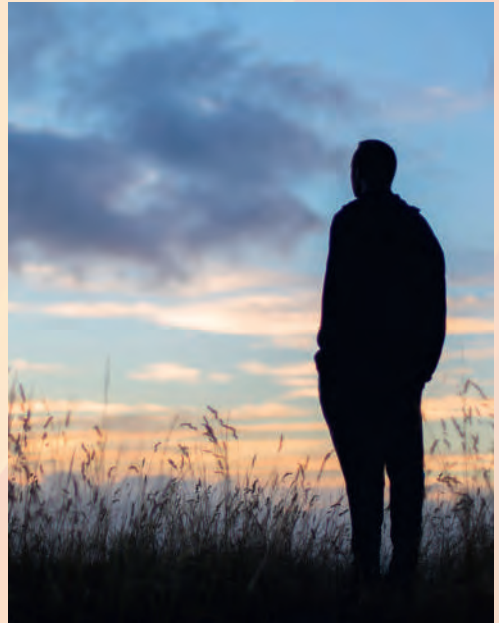
They may or may not be a Christian, and may not even be someone known to us personally, but how have they been important in my development?

- **Why do I feel this way about them?**

It could be a character trait, an achievement or something else. Try and identify something specific though.

- **How am I emulating them?**

What's changed in my life through their influence? How have they motivated me?



That wasn't too difficult, was it? But here's supplementary:

- **Have I told them how much I appreciate them?**

As a practical suggestion, if that person (or more than one) is still alive, take some time to visit them, or failing that, telephone or write and thank them. We all need encouragement and it's important to show our appreciation to those who have had a beneficial effect on us. It will build them up to know how valuable their input has been.

Most of us have heroes or heroines – people we look up to. As Christians we sometimes don't like to admit we admire others because we may think it's inappropriate – that we could be guilty of covetousness or some other sin!

Sure, we're all unique with different abilities and we need to remember we can't be someone else. But we can learn from others and appreciate aspects of their personality, temperament,

reputation or make-up, to help us develop.

I love reading books about people who've achieved great feats in their lives or who've overcome obstacles and difficulties. I find it inspiring when someone rises above adversity, even in supposedly "secular" situations.

The Bible details the exploits of many Biblical heroes and heroines. Their stories often involve the acquisition of wealth and power as well as the development of their faith. These accounts have a purpose – to enable us to learn from the experiences of people like Joseph, Daniel, Esther, Job, Peter, Thomas and others. But I'm also grateful the Bible talks about people's weaknesses and misadventures as well as their strengths. Virtually all the characters we read about in both the Old and New Testaments had '*personal development areas*', and yet were still used for God's Kingdom purposes.

It's time for another '**SELAH MOMENT**' – in fact, a whole series of them – as we look at three qualities I've identified as key areas.

Even if someone is not a Christian, I hope these are principles to which everyone could sign up, and the Biblical references confirm they're on God's agenda too.

The three areas are interlinked and may lead to some tangential thinking. Try looking at the Bible references in different translations – both the '*Message*' and '*Amplified Bible*' versions will help bring fresh perspective and understanding. At the end of each section there are questions to think through.

SELF-WORTH

All too often people are told they aren't good enough or they haven't achieved the required standards, possibly told they aren't (or weren't) even wanted. It happens in families, in schools, in work and in all types of relationships.

Remember the picking of teams at school when everyone desperately hoped they'd be one of the first, rather than the last, to be chosen? I was extremely fortunate, as in sporting situations, I was usually the one choosing, but I still recall the look on the faces of those who knew they weren't going to be wanted in anyone's team. The damage done to people who've been told that they are failures – whether explicitly or not – is incalculable.

However, this is what the Bible says about our value to God.

- **We're chosen by God and are precious to Him.**

1 Peter 2:4 says He accepts us. Yes, we have a high calling but we're given the tools to achieve it.

- **We were chosen before the world was created.**

Read Ephesians 1:4 and 1:11 in The Message Version – it puts a whole new perspective on this vital truth.

Take a few moments to meditate on the phrases: '*We've always been on His mind*'; '*He determined we would be the focus of His love*'; '*He had His eye on us!*'

- **There's a plan for us.**

Psalm 139:13-16 confirms, even before our physical birth, God was already aware of the totality of our lives.

Reflect on the statement: "*all the days*

...continued on page 18...

"Selah"





"Know therefore that
the **LORD YOUR**
GOD *is* **GOD**; he
is the *faithful*
GOD, keeping his
COVENANT of **LOVE**
to a *thousand*
generations of
those who **LOVE**
him and **KEEP** his
commandments."

DEUTERONOMY 7:9



ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”³

Earlier this wonderful Psalm incredibly claims we’re never out of God’s sight wherever we made be.⁴

There’s also another factor at work here. Our Heavenly Father hasn’t given up on us – and never will.

There’s always more to come; more we can achieve and consequently more we can pass on to others.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Philippian church, affirms: ***“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”.***⁵

We’ve been created to be a blessing to God and those around us. We serve our

Heavenly Father as we serve others. Romans 15:2 (MSG) makes interesting reading: ***“Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, ‘How can I help?’”***

The original Greek words used in the New Testament for ***“service”*** and ***“ministry”*** are synonymous, as are the words ***“servant”*** and ***“minister”***. When we serve other people, we are ministering to their needs and when we minister to someone, we’re serving them. This isn’t just semantics – it’s God’s way of telling us we’re all in this together and we all play an equal part in building people up – even if we don’t have a title or wear a dog-collar.

So here’s the key question to consider.



Bearing in mind God knows us even better than we know ourselves and He considers us to be valuable, why is it we often put ourselves down, think we're not good enough and sometimes act as if we're worthless?

Work through the implications and ask whether any re-evaluation of understanding the value God has placed on us, is required.

Remember, we may fail at a task but that doesn't make us a failure.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTEGRITY

We're all required to make choices in life and owning up to our responsibilities is essential. How many times have we've heard a child say, *"So and so made me do it"* or *"It wasn't my fault"*? And it's not just children either who try to avoid accountability for their actions!

Integrity is not just about honesty. It includes being honourable, authentic, acting with decency and demonstrating moral veracity in our relationships with people.

Here's what the Bible teaches:

- **Empty promises are worthless.**

Matthew 5:37 and James 5:12 both refer to saying what we mean and meaning what we say.

- **What's inside eventually gets out.**

Psalm 51:6 and Mark 7:20-23 assert inner attitudes lead to outward actions. For a longer exploration on this subject have a look at another 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' book, 'INSIDE JOB'.



- **Obligations should be fulfilled.**

1 Peter 2:11-18 contains some of God's benchmarks for righteous living, including legal obligations and standards. I guess we should contemplate whether these verses include observing speed limits or submitting accurate business expenses and tax returns!

When committing to an activity or course of action, do we *'over-promise and under-deliver'*, or do we accomplish what is required? Naturally, a change in circumstances may require a re-negotiation of what is expected. Openness and honesty will be necessary so all parties understand what is, and what is not, acceptable and achievable.

When considering areas in our lives where we feel the need to improve, it may be appropriate to apologise to someone we've let down in the past. If so, let's do it – for their sake, and our well-being.

3 Psalm 139:16

4 Psalm 139:7-12

5 Philippians 1:6b

FAITHFULNESS IN RELATIONSHIPS

This is a huge area and we can only scratch the surface here. In addition to those areas relating to integrity, other aspects such as respect and tolerance come into this category, as well as *'stick-ability'*.

I'm convinced restoring faithfulness in relationships is the remedy for resolving many societal and community issues. It's not just about marriage and family relationships, even though these are significant aspects, especially absentee father syndrome, that have profound implications for those facing the fallout from these difficult situations.

Think about relationships between employers and employees and their trades' unions, or politicians and the

electorate for example. How many of these difficulties would be minimised if we all recognised our inter-dependence of one another?

People talk about the world as being *'one big village'*. So how come we discriminate on religious, gender, race and ethnicity grounds?

Here are a few references from the Bible to consider.

- **All forms of discrimination are unacceptable to God.**

Colossians 3:11 clearly states this to be the case, and James 2:2-3 warns us about favouritism based on wealth and perceived status.

- **God loves us all equally.**

Recently I was behind someone in a Post Office queue as they purchased foreign



currency and talked to the cashier about holiday plans. I was intrigued overhearing them talking about the *“sun shining on the righteous”*. I didn’t have the heart (or regretfully, the inclination) to tell them Jesus said in Matthew 5:45, ***“He (your Father in heaven) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”*** – in effect, God enables everyone to benefit from His amazing creation.

Think it through. This verse clearly implies Christians are not the beneficiaries of preferential treatment. We all know Jesus-followers endure similar difficulties to everyone else, including sometimes tragic, heart-rending circumstances. Don’t get me wrong here. I’m not saying as a Christian I don’t enjoy God’s blessing and favour on my life. But often the blessing and favour results from the struggles we face because He gives us the strength to overcome them.

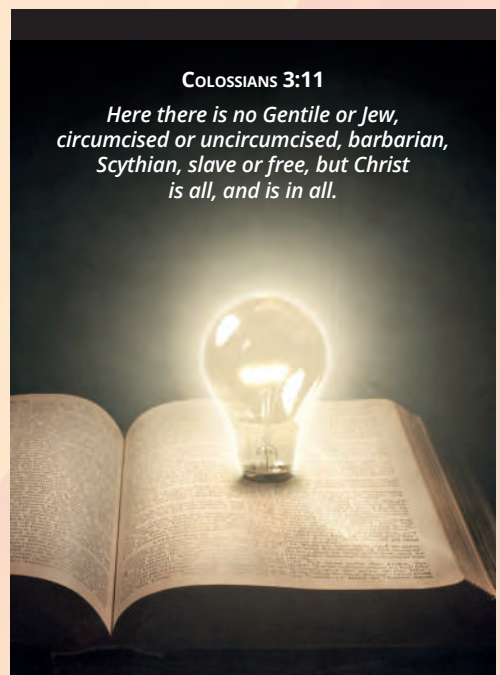
- **God expects us to show equal love, concern and friendship to everyone.**

Take a moment to read Matthew 5, particularly verses 38-48. Note what it says about not taking revenge, giving without expecting anything in return and loving our enemies. The Message Version of verse 42 says, ***“No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.”***

How do we respond? How can we show faithfulness in our relationships – at every level? Look at Ephesians 6:1-9 and ask what the implications are if:

- **We’re married.**

Both husband and wife have responsibilities in their relationship together. And Ephesians 5:21 says that both husbands and wives should ***“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”***.



The subject of submission has always been contentious, but, whilst accepting husbands and wives have different roles and functions, both are equal in God’s sight. It’s about mutual respect and humility, rather than power struggles and rights.

- **We have children.**

Remember every one of us is a child of someone and the Bible doesn’t give a time limit on when we stop being our parents’ child!

Again, there are potential difficulties especially when there’s been previous abuse or neglect in a parent/child relationship. Forgiveness may need to be extended and although God’s standards are high, He promises He will be with you.

Isaiah 43:2 (NLT) provides words of comfort we can claim: ***“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.”***



When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.”

- We employ others or are employed.

Employers and employees have responsibilities towards one another. Employers should provide fair treatment and rewards and employees should commit to doing an honest day's work.

Are there any aspects we need to consider? Hopefully that extended **‘SELAH MOMENT’** will help pinpoint some of the issues that are relevant. It's good to regularly review how we're doing in these areas and continually identify new aspects for development. Maybe confide in a trusted friend to help assess any issues rationally and realistically.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

This is an area in which I have a particular interest. Throughout my working life I've been in positions where I've been passing on my expertise to others and I've watched and hopefully, learnt from other people's experiences.

For several years, I advised people facing career transition challenges and changes, including redundancy or corporate restructuring. My role involved identifying their experiences, skills, and qualifications and how these could form the basis of their future direction.

The concept of coaching and mentoring is not a new dynamic. Moses learned important lessons from his father-in-law

Jethro, and later devoted virtually the last third of his life training Joshua to succeed him, whilst Joshua committed himself to learning from Moses' wise counsel.

In effect Joshua *‘shadowed’* Moses. He was the only person to accompany Moses' climb up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.⁶ He virtually lived full-time in the Tent of Meeting where God spoke to Moses *“face to face, as a man speaks with his friend”*⁷, and probably overheard the conversations! Deuteronomy 34:9 documents, Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom when Moses laid his hands on him. Other passages record he was commander of the army and one of the warriors Moses trusted to spy out Canaan.

But it seems Joshua didn't take everything on board, because at the end of his life, there was no ready-made successor to take over the reins from him. Judges 2 says, the people followed God during Joshua's lifetime, but sadly the succeeding generations went their own way – with disastrous results. Twice we read, *“everyone did as they saw fit”*⁸, or as The Message Version puts it, *“people did whatever they felt like doing”*.

Both coaches and mentors focus their attention on aspects that maximise future potential on both an individual and collective level. This may involve remedial activities (including rectifying problematic areas) or developmental situations (i.e., how to improve or innovate). The methods used tend to place emphasis on questioning, challenging, stimulating, supporting and facilitating, rather than being directive.

A coach may not be as accomplished or technically competent as the person he/she is helping (sports coaches for example), yet their emphasis is

⁶ Exodus 24:13

⁷ Exodus 33:11

⁸ Judges 17:6 & 21:25

still involved with 'real life, on-the-job' situations. They concentrate on 'how to' questions rather than abstract scenarios, so enabling their protégées to find their own solutions to the problems they are facing.

Typically, a mentor helps the mentee develop competencies and skills that will become useful in future situations. This is particularly useful in succession planning, where a junior manager is included on a project to tackle responsibilities they wouldn't normally come across in their day-to-day role. Often the mentor is outside of the trainee's line management structure, enabling them to advise in a more strategic manner by offering a broader range of views and understanding, especially in career development and advancement.

I really could 'go off on one' here so here's a New Testament perspective. The Apostle Paul told his trainee leader, Timothy: ***"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."***⁹

In this four-generational process, Paul passed his wisdom and experience on to Timothy so he could identify others with whom he could share. These people needed to have the capability (and presumably, willingness) to instruct yet another cohort.

This may sound somewhat contrived and possibly complicated to put into practice, but even though we don't always realise we're doing it, often it's a natural outcome.

To enable me to become confident in leading services, from around the age of

twelve, my Dad informally coached and mentored me. I regularly accompanied him when he was taking services in other churches, announcing the hymns, leading prayers, and reading the Bible passage on which he was going to preach. It was an invaluable experience – I guess it was an apprenticeship program.

Having an appropriate effective strategy to develop aspiring future leaders (Christian or otherwise), it's vital. Differing approaches can be valid because there is no 'one size – fits all' approach.

It's not just about developing leaders in the conventional sense though. Because to one extent or another we're all leaders, as any form of sharing what we've learned helps lead someone else. Think of a parent teaching a child how to cook, demonstrating how to decorate or change a car tyre.

We're all capable of sharing our expertise – even if it's informal or unstructured. Coaching and mentoring is appropriate at all levels and for everyone because we all have the potential to improve through learning.

Winston Churchill aptly quipped, *"I enjoy learning, but on the whole I hate to be taught."*

Many of us may feel the same way typically due to the methodology employed. We all learn differently but when we start applying what we learn, usually the results are beneficial.

Think about this quotation for a moment: ***"If we're told, we may listen but not hear what's being said. If we're shown, we may look but not see the implications. But if we're involved, then we'll learn, understand, improve, and apply."***

This is relevant in relation to church. It

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:2



shouldn't be a place where the few (often just the leader standing at the front) serve the needs of the majority. It's the place where everyone can and should be involved; where we all belong and each person contributes their unique abilities.

Jesus chose twelve very different characters as his first Disciples. They weren't academic theologians, skilled orators or leading businessmen. Some of them were rough diamonds, but as Jesus worked with them, teaching them His Father's ways through life experiences which challenged their misconceptions, they were welded into a dynamic team that changed the world.

The comment is often made that "*no-one is indispensable*" – yet I'd contend everyone is *invaluable*. We ignore the vast array of talent available to us at our peril if we fail to recognise an individual's ability to contribute. The best leaders facilitate the outworking of other people's specialisms and

provide the supportive atmosphere and environment where they can blossom. Invariably, the teachers we most fondly remember are those who enabled us to learn experientially, encouraging a practical, hands-on approach instead of mere theoretical understanding.

As we're fast approaching our last '**SELAH MOMENT**', here are a couple more thoughts.

- **Willingness is a key requisite.**

It starts, as most things do, with our attitude. Many people feel that they have nothing (or not much) to share but believe me, we all do.

Our accumulated wisdom is immense but will be wasted if we lock it up within ourselves. Let's have the confidence to believe our experiences and expertise will be useful to others. Go for it!

- **Life is a training ground.**

We often hear the phrase '*on the job*



A COUPLE OF FINAL THOUGHTS!!

training'. Life is the ultimate on the job training course. Our brains have an infinite capacity to absorb new concepts, information and experiences. And what we learn in life, we can pass on to others. People have invested in us in so many ways and, in turn, we can invest in others as life unfolds around us.

• It's a risky activity.

I know from previous experience that I'm often reluctant to let go of my responsibilities. It could be because I don't have the faith to believe someone else could do the job as well as I could, or because I want the credit for doing it. In both cases, it's what the Bible calls pride!

Letting go involves risk. Enabling someone to learn a new skill also involves risk. But unless we're prepared to take a step of faith in sharing our talents and experience, and give other people a chance to shine, what we've learned will die with us.

Now here's that **'SELAH MOMENT'** I promised – just two questions to ponder:

• **What stops me from believing that I can positively influence others?**

• **What development areas are there in my life and who can help me?**

Be honest in answering these questions – the answers will have a significant impact. If we can identify what prevents us from sharing and take appropriate action to address the issues, others will benefit.

And when we realistically assess where we can improve and find someone who can help us, we'll all reap the benefits.

I don't want anyone thinking they haven't done enough in the past to help their children or other people develop – so don't finish this book with a guilt complex.

Okay, so none of us is perfect and we all make mistakes. But I'm so grateful that God is in the reclamation business.

Ever been to a reclamation yard in search of an item that can't be purchased new today? The item may be required as a replacement or to match in with an existing piece. If you look up reclamation in a thesaurus, there will be other 'R' words – recovery; retrieval; renovation; renewal; restoration.

It is possible to make up for an unfortunate start in life – God can and does redeem situations that may appear hopeless. Please don't feel guilty if, as a parent, a child turns their back on our parenting skills. Remember, even God, as the perfect parent, had rebellious children in Adam and Eve.

And there's the Parable of the Prodigal Son.¹⁰ I know it's only a story, but this headstrong young man had a graphic '*real-life*' learning experience and many of us, through our mistakes as well as our successes, have benefitted from numerous valuable lessons. Jesus told the story partly to illustrate God's willingness to welcome us back when we make mistakes, and to also warn us not to have the older brother's hardened heart attitude.

Just like the dad in the Parable, our Heavenly Father is actively waiting for us to return to Him. He picks us up, dusts us down, helps us recover our self worth, renews us and restores us like

¹⁰ Luke 15:11-32

new. The renovation process is on-going and dependent on our willingness to allow Him, directly by His Holy Spirit and indirectly through other people, to help us develop and change.

As this short introductory book draws to a close, please look at the back cover again and think about these four questions:

- In what are we investing?
- Will it last the test of time?
- What will be my/our enduring epitaph?
- Who will follow our example and benefit from our experiences?

"What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?" George Eliot poignantly asks in *'Middlemarch.'*

Isn't that a great question? It's time to review how self-centred our lives can



be and instead of looking to promote and benefit ourselves so much, let's begin to consider how we can pass on to our successors the benefits of our experiences – good, bad and ugly.


At this stage I don't know how my life will be remembered. I'm not expecting to have a blue plaque erected in my honour saying *"Stephen Derges lived here"*, but I hope my family will have benefited from my love and care for them and that the folks I've had the privilege of helping in the various churches in which I've been involved, will have grown more spiritually mature.

My prayer is the readers of these **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** books – most of whom I'll never meet – will have been stimulated by the questions I've posed and the comments I've made. I'm hopeful too that the people I've worked with, met socially or with whom I've been a neighbour, will have seen something in me that demonstrated my faith.

I know that I have not always been the greatest advertisement for Christianity, and I trust that despite the times I've made mistakes, God will fulfill His promise to forgive me and not remember my sins.¹¹ With His help though, all of us can positively impact the people around us. The only question left is, will we take that risk, go out on a limb, and be confident that we do have something beneficial to share with others?

I pray we'll all blaze a trail for those who come after us – because they need us to leave behind a worthwhile **'LASTING LEGACY'**.

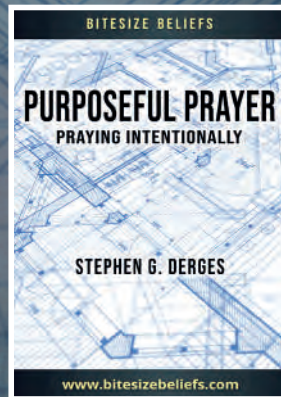
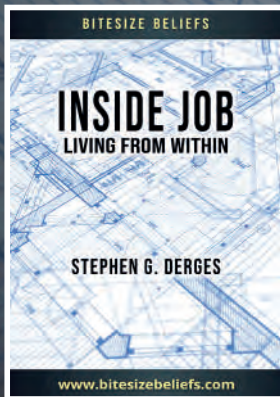
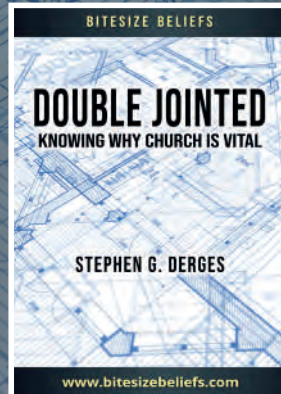
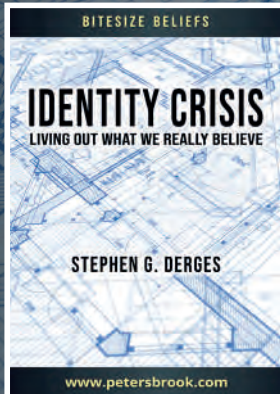
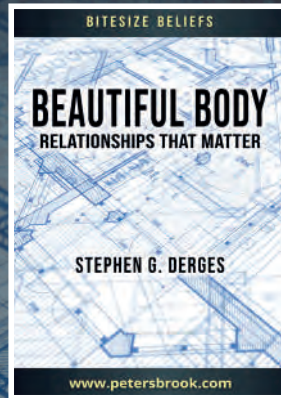
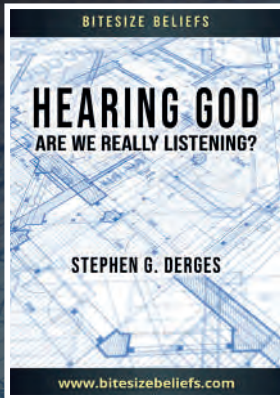
¹¹ Jeremiah 31:31



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HOW WILL
MY LIFE BE
REMEMBERED?

OTHER **BITESIZE BELIEFS** TITLES



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We spend our lives investing in different ways – building reputations and careers, accumulating money and possessions, developing personal, family, and social relationships. But what will people say about us when we finally leave this planet? It seems morbid, but what will be written on our tombstones?

'LASTING LEGACY' explores the impact and influence of our lives and what, if anything, we leave behind. Will our footprints on Earth mark a trail for others to follow? Our lives are meant to be purposeful and should provide a launch pad for those coming afterward. Wisdom can, and should, be imparted from generation to generation.

Yet it will only happen when we consciously decide to allow others to benefit from what we've learned and experienced. Invest now – the future depends on it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Stephen Derges was previously Pastor of a Baptist Church and now a Trustee focused on leading an Independent Evangelical church in Devon.

He writes for various publications and websites, speaks at churches and conferences and has broadcast on local radio and television on faith and business leadership. Both he and his wife are certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioners.

More information at: www.bitesizebeliefs.com



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