

For some of us, it seems to be one of the hardest things in the world to do. We mean well, but somehow we never get around to it. I'm talking about writing letters. Even with E-mail, somehow we put off putting on paper words of encouragement or words of thanks; words that, in our hearts, we really want to convey. Even with all of our modern communication tools, we often fail to sit down, take pen in hand and say, "thank you". I am the world's worst.

It means so much to me to hear from other people, but for some reason or other, I keep putting off writing letters until what I have to say is no longer relevant, so there is no need to write the letter I never wrote. This is particularly true of thank you notes. They are so important, but I am so lazy. So often I forget to write to just say thanks. So I thought that I would get you to help me. Together we are going to take the time to write a few very important thank you notes to some very important people. The title of this lesson is "Letters to Legends".

First, a quick thank you note to you.

Thank you for your patient endurance,

Some 84 weeks ago, we began a series entitled, "God's Living Legends". Our purpose was to travel together down the dusty roads of Bible times, viewing the lives of men and women who were etched in the fabric of the word of God. The last lesson was the 71st lesson in that series. It marked the close of the era of the judges, with the demands of God's people for a king. "We want a king!" they cried, "like all the nations round about us." That seemed to me to be a likely place to close Volume I of our study of the Living Legends. We need to place this series on the shelf for a few months as we explore new avenues in this exciting, life-changing book we know as the Word of God. Lord willing, we shall return to those Living Legends at another time, and take up where we left off with the anointing of Saul as Israel's king. Keep your finger on 1 Samuel 9 for a few months, as we move on to other things.

Of course, we cannot close this volume without asking ourselves a question. In 71 long lessons, what have we learned? What, if anything, do we do with what we learned? I have three objectives to share with you as we bid farewell to the men and women whose lives have served us as giant-sized mirrors, reflecting life through the eyes of God.

1- To find the common threads of greatness that are woven into the tapestry of each man and woman that please the heart of God. We will look at six of them in this lesson.

2- To look for common words of warning from the men and women who almost tasted the cup of greatness, but instead drank of the bitterness of being also-rans. They have something to say to us as well. We will look at four of them for this lesson.

3-We will ask ourselves how looking at and listening to these Living Legends can change our lives in the days to come.

So I guess what I am asking you to do is to bear with me for one more lesson, as we take a look backwards at God's Living Legends. If you will come along, I will be most grateful. Once again, thank you for being so patient.

Yours in Christ,

Russell

Now that wasn't hard. It is one letter out of the way. That was so easy, I think that we will try again. Let's write some letters to Legends. Let's send some thank you notes to those Bible characters whose lives have touched ours. In Hebrews 11, God defines success for us by giving us a glimpse into His hall of heroes, His library of legends. He names men and women of faith whose testimonies from the pages of the word best demonstrate the reality of faith. It concludes, as chapter 12 begins, this way,

> Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, (Hebrews 12:1a)

Or as the Living Bible says,

Since we have such a huge crowd of the men of faith watching us from the grandstands,

In other words, in all likelihood, Moses and Abraham are interested on-lookers as we live out our Christian lives. It seems only reasonable, then, to say thank you for the part they have played so far. Get out your notepads and let's write a few letters to some of our dearest friends. These are friends that just happen to be Living Legends.

Our first stack of thank you notes goes to those whose lives have demonstrated qualities that turn life into living. This past week I went back in my mind over all these biographies that have passed before us these past 71 lessons and asked myself this question: "What are their common threads of greatness? I came up with six. All the men and women whose lives surfaced to the top of God's word as His kind of success stories had these six ingredients in common.

1- Faith: they had a living faith. They believed God when there was no human reason to believe.

2- Faithfulness: they had consistent faithfulness. They kept on keeping on no matter what.

3-Fellowship: they had a growing relationship with the Father. They were at home in His presence and at ease with His power.

Faith, faithfulness and fellowship are the first three common denominators we see in our Living Legends. Let's go on.

4- Teachability: they did not pretend to know it all. Their minds were not closed for repairs.

5- Willingness to be Tested: God's heroes all passed through the fire or the flood to prove their faith and to prove to the world that their God was able.

6- Time: God used no instant mixes to cure His heroes. They were all put on slow boil until they simmered to flavorful perfection.

Faith, faithfulness, fellowship, teachability, testing and time are the six common threads of greatness that are always there in every life that is under God's total control. Let's keep them in mind as we take pen in hand to say thank you to some of our friends. Let's begin with Letter #1,

Dear Abraham,

Whenever we need faith, we need to look at you. Called to a country you knew not of, called to a people who did not

yet exist, promised a son you thought you would never see, burdened with a nephew who wanted all that you had, sent on a mission to slay the son you had waited for, you believed God. We think we know what faith is, Abraham. We say that faith is confidence without proof, belief with no evidence, the ingredient without which you cannot please God. Sure, you made some mistakes, Abe; you weren't perfect. That gives us hope. But when the lights of the tangible went out, your steps never wavered. Paul could say of you in Romans 4,

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. (Romans 4:20-22)

Father Abraham, thank you.

You showed us in real life situations what faith really is. We need that kind of faith. Sometimes God moves us, Abraham, into a far country with new jobs, new schools, new assignments, new ministries. It scares us. We can look at the Living Legend of Abraham and identify with you. Through your life God gives us faith. Sometimes the promises just seem to take forever to materialize. We just want to give up, Abraham, but you didn't. That helps us to stand and believe that what God has promised, He is able also to perform. Thank you for your life which is always there to remind us that we must continue to believe.

Sincerely yours,

Us.

But even faith to believe is not enough. We must have the will to persevere, which brings us to our second letter. It begins like this:

Dear Noah,

What an encouragement you are. At work, the boss gives us a seemingly never-ending project and we just want to quit. Then quietly from the past, God's Holy Spirit draws you to our attention and says, "What about Noah?" We are ashamed. We know God's will in a certain area of our life, and we are tempted to take just a few short cuts. Surely, God is not that concerned over details, we think. But the we hear it again, "What about Noah?" Our hearts find new hope. We know what faithfulness is, Noah. It is remaining in place without compromise, no matter what. Boy, did you hang in there, hammering, nailing, sawing, sanding on, of all things, a boat, and it hadn't ever rained. But you believed God, and you had faith and exercised it by being faithful day after day, month after month, year after year. The crowd didn't understand, did they, Noah? We have never taken the kind of abuse you took. You remained faithful. You used no short 2 by 4's and no rotten braces. You kept on without compromising. Genesis says of you,

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he. (Genesis 6:22)

The day came, didn't it, Noah, when God rewarded your faithfulness. The rains came. The waters rose. The sky fell. Your neighbors panicked. They were in agony. But you and your family were safe. You were in the storm, yes, but under the water, no. The Scripture says, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord". Noah, you were faithful. So the next time we are tempted to give up or give in to compromise, we are going to remember your life, Noah, so that we, too, will want to be faithful. Thank you, Noah. You, indeed, are a Living Legend.

Love in Christ,

Us.

So there you have our first two letters to Legends. They demonstrate two common threads of greatness. But you see, even faith followed by faithfulness does not guarantee power. Our power comes from our fellowship with Him. So, gratefully, we write this next thank you note. Pen in hand, let's go.

Dear Moses,

How do we find words to thank you? Many men were men of faith. Many men were faithful. You were both. But you put it all in its proper perspective. You were a man who had real fellowship with God. By watching you, we learned that it is possible for God to use a stammering, stuttering saint, if that stammering, stuttering saint spent enough time in

the presence of the King. God would call you to come up to that mountain to be with Him, and each time you went. You beheld His glory and received His word. God keeps calling us, too, Moses, to do the same thing. We need to come apart before we come apart but, somehow, we keep making excuses. Moses, you never gave the excuses we come up with. We turn down time with the Creator of the ends of the earth for a bologna sandwich or an extra nap or a pointless television program, even one we have seen before and slept through the first time. Then, Moses, we wonder why we have no power, no excitement, no wisdom. Suddenly, God speaks from His word and says, "What about Moses, he was a Living Legend because he was never too busy to be with Me."

Moses, our minds race back to Exodus 33 where you came boldly into God's presence and refused to go until He promised that His presence would go with you. We remember God looking down at you saying, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest." Even that was not enough, Moses. You wanted to behold His glory in even greater measure, so you said in verse 18, "Lord, show me Thy glory." God hid you behind a rock, and He passed by, and revealed Himself to you as few men have ever known Him. Moses, your life makes us want to know God like that.

How we would like God to say of us what He did in Numbers 12:8 where He said, "Moses is faithful in My house. With him I speak face to face and not in obscure phrases." Oh, Moses, what a testimony of what fellowship with the Father produces. Moses, you spent so much time with the Father that you had to cover your face with a veil because the glory of God so radiated from your life. Moses, we want that kind of evidence of God's presence. Your life serves as a constant reminder that we can have it, if we just spend time with Him. Thank you Moses. You have taught us by example what fellowship with God is all about.

Sincerely,

Your 20th Century friends, us.

Of course, we are not through. To be used you must be teachable and available. God gave us another life to look at. Let's write him a letter.

Dear Samuel,

Thank you for being so available to be used. A miracle you were from the beginning and a miracle you became when it became apparent that God was calling you. "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth," you answered. These words keep ringing in our ears. So many times, the Spirit convicts us of sin in our lives or calls us to some new task. So many times we squirm and run and avoid the issue as though we could have power without obedience. We avoid the issue, that is, until something within us says, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth." Suddenly we want said of us what was said of you, "And Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and did let none of His words fall to the ground." What a testimony. Oh, God, make us teachable and available and usable so that we might be men and women like Samuel.

Sincerely,

Your brothers and sisters in Christ, us.

So it seems that all of God's men of greatness were faithful and had intimate fellowship with the God who is. They were teachable, available and usable. How we want to be like them. But there were two more ingredients present in every one of their lives. Those ingredients were, in a sense, beyond their control, but their response to those ingredients was of legendary importance. The first, of course, was testing. Abraham, Moses, Noah and Samuel all had to pass through the waters of adversity before they could stand on the mountain of maturity. There was one guy, however, who really stands out in this category. He seemed to have everything in his life go wrong but still he believed. Let's thank him now.

Dear Joseph,

What a life you had. The product of parental favoritism and peer rejection, you became a dreamer until your life turned into a nightmare. You were sold into slavery by your own brothers and wrongly accused by your master's wife; yet even rotting away in a dingy prison, still you believed and still you served. I don't know how we can identify with you, Joseph. All of life's troubles just kept coming at you like the waves on a seashore. But God hadn't forgotten you, Joseph. You were a message in the making. You understood why God tests His children. He had a plan, a deeper plan. Never

will we forget your calm answer to your brothers in Genesis 50, after the death of your father,

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. (Genesis 50:20)

You will never know, Joseph, how that one statement has revived our hearts when the thunderclouds of the storms of life seem to be building up over us without a let-up in sight. Now we know about the sovereignty of God in life's trials, Joseph. We have heard about it and we have seen it in your life. We just want to say thanks.

Sincerely,

Your partners in life's storms, us.

Of course there is one ingredient we haven't mentioned that was common in the lives of every Living Legend. They had faith. They were faithful. They had fellowship with God. They were teachable. They were tested. But none of them to the man and to the woman, could escape the hour-glass of time, the sand which seems to drop one grain at a time. Ever so slowly God seems to move. Ever so slowly His plans come true. For is not character what He is after? And is not the process more important than the plan? So slowly He moves through history. In an age where computers gather data and send it hurling around the world in seconds, and man flies faster than sound and finds himself in a society where his avowed goal is to literally race himself frantically to his own death, even in this age, God still grows trees the hard way. He still grows men the same way. He always will. Still His most precious answers to our pleas for help is, "Wait, My child. Just wait." When the natural man flings his fist at God at the mere thought of waiting more, how good it is to remember how long it took to answer the prayer of one of His favorite people. Let's write a letter.

Dear Sarah,

When we get impatient, guess who we think of? You guessed it. We recall with a chuckle how long you waited for a son. We remember how you tried to help God along, and the mess you made. That time when under your breath your muttered, "Sure, it will" when the angel said it would still come true. God heard it, remember? How we can identify

with you. But that was God's baby, wasn't it, Sarah? You couldn't take any credit for it. How special he was because God made you wait. We are in such a hurry down here, Sarah. It seems that our world is moving ten times faster than yours. Do you know what, Sarah? God still eases along, growing trees and people the hard way. We really get impatient, Sarah, until we think of you. God says to us, "What about Sarah?" We remember God's kind of Legends grow slowly. God's kind of Legends take time. Thanks for the reminder, Sarah.

Sincerely,

Your hurried, harried 20th century friends, us.

That wasn't hard, was it? Somehow I feel better just having taken the time to write. Somehow it helps to remember the common threads of greatness that separate the Living Legends from all the rest. But before we put down our proverbial pens, it might not hurt to scribble a hurried note or two to those other people, the ones who taught us by their disobedience. We will look at four common words of warning from some of God's also-rans. First we think of the high cost of neglect. Let's write a letter.

Dear Adam,

Boy, has your name become a household word, and have we learned a lot from you. Why weren't you content? You had it all going for you. You just weren't satisfied. You had the perfect Father, the perfect home and the perfect job. We have learned by your life that circumstances can't make us content. Why weren't you faithful? Look what it cost you. Look what it cost us since you weren't tending your garden or teaching your wife how to recognize the enemy. Adam, why weren't you strong? Eve listened to the voice of a stranger. You listened to Eve. You were responsible for both of you. Instead of leading, you followed and took us with you. Then, instead of facing up and 'fessing up, you ran and hid. Oh Adam, we look at you and see ourselves and learn a lot.

Thank you, Adam.

Us.

Dear Lot,

We learned a lot from you, too. We learned about the high cost of compromise. We learned that all we have to do is pitch our tents toward Sodom and the magnet of the world takes over from there. You thought you could become a missionary in Sin City, didn't you? But you so compromised, that when it came time for you to say a hasty farewell, even your own family thought you had lost your marbles. Momma's heart was so glued to the world by then that she couldn't take her eyes off what she had left behind. What a salty story. The high cost of compromise. Oh, may we think of you, Lot, when we start to go the world's way. May we pitch our tents toward God.

Gratefully yours,

Us.

Two more before we close.

Dear Samson,

Thank you for reminding us that besetting sins will eventually rob us of our power. Sooner or later, we flirt with the enemy one time too many and the lights go out and we lose our vision and our strength. You taught us that it doesn't pay to play with fire. It costs too much. We pray that we will learn from your mistakes.

Sincerely yours,

Us.

Dear Naomi,

Thanks for reminding us of the futility of bitterness, of blaming God for falling asleep while the world seemed to be crumbling around us. You came out of it, Naomi, and God was gracious to you. Now we are reminded of you when bitterness creeps into our lives and robs us of God's perspective.

With love,

Your hard-headed friends, us.

I don't know about you, but my hand is hurting from all this

writing. But I am glad that we took the time to write because I believe that up there in those grandstands, watching and praying, are some men and women who hope we have at least learned a thing or two by watching them. We know that, for Hebrews 12:1 goes on to say,

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

God has a purpose in sharing these stories in Scripture. He wants us to look at these men and women's lives and then look at Him and learn and live. That, you see, is what the Living Legends are for. Do you get the picture? If your faith is weak, remember Abraham. If you are tempted to unfaithfulness, remember Noah. If you need to understand fellowship with God, remember Moses. If you need to learn to be teachable, remember Samuel. If you are confused by your trials, think of Joseph. If you are weary of waiting, remember Sarah. If you are tempted to neglect, remember Adam. If you are tempted to compromise, remember Lot. If you are tempted to besetting sins, remember Samson. If you are tempted to bitterness, remember Naomi. Remember, and then look at Him. Look at Jesus. Spend your life looking at Jesus, and you, too, can become a Living Legend.

Do you see the bottom line of this lesson? It wasn't simply intended to be a review of the last 20 months. The bottom line is this: Living Legends are not spiritual supermen who come flying out of spiritual phone booths at the drop of a hat. Nor are they some special breed of men and women designed by God to do what the rest of us can't. Living Legends are plain, ordinary men and women who, without God, are destined for the scrap heaps of life. But God comes into their lives and they, and even we, have the potential to one day become spiritual men and women of power. We see at least six things that have to happen and at least four things we have to avoid. The simple fact is that we all

have been called to greatness. You say, "I'm just not a man of faith like Abraham." Neither am I. But that is not God's fault. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. We have the word of God. So if we aren't men and women of faith, it is simply because we are not men and women of the book. We have the cure. If we are too lazy or too unconcerned to use it, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Today is not too late to begin. You say, "I'll never be faithful like Noah." Nonsense. We, too, have a perfect set of blueprints for building an ark, or building a life that will weather the storms, but if we insist on taking the day off or taking short cuts, it is not that we are not potential Noah's, it is just that we have chosen not to be. You say, "I'll never have the kind of fellowship with God that Moses had." Why not? Has not the blood of Jesus Christ given us free access to come boldly to the throne of God? His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear. You and I can spend the same kind of time in the presence of God that Moses did. We can plead, "Lord, show me Your glory," and He will. There is not a NO TRESPASSING sign at the door of His inner chamber. We just get too busy. Teachability is no exclusive of Samuel's either. All Samuel did was humble himself and become a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord and serve. We can do that. The tests allow us to relate to Joseph's life. God is waiting for us to simply relate to Joseph's responses. So there is no excuse there.

Lastly, we have enough time, though we don't know how much time we have. Jesus only had three years, but God knew how much He needed, and He knows how much we need, as well. We just need to learn to relax. We need to grow in faith and in faithfulness and in our fellowship and then relax. We so often are like a forest of newly planted trees squirming to grow as though there were a shortcut or not enough time.

I have a first-hand illustration. I was driving along recently, and the fog and the drizzle made traffic unbearable. As I crawled onto the freeway, I realized I was in trouble. The cars weren't moving, they were inching. So I thought to myself, "Kelfer, show these guys. Get off on the access road and you will zip right by them." So I listened to that voice and got off at the first exit, and boy was I moving along. Those other guys were doing it the hard way, I laughed. Then the strangest thing happened. As I rounded a curve, the access road went one way and the highway went straight ahead, and I found myself heading way off the beaten path. Meanwhile, all those "poor guys" I laughed at were still inching along, straight for their destination. I almost never got to work. You know, I think I learned a valuable lesson. It is easy to get off on life's access roads and think you are beating the clock, but you get so busy getting in a hurry that you don't even realize that the road has veered off and you are not even heading for your destination.

So now I don't care how slow the traffic is moving. I don't care how long it seems to be taking. God is saying, "Just stay on the course and relax." You may think that you are just inching along in this Christian life, but at least you know where you are headed. That is all God is asking of us. Stay on course no matter how bad the weather or how slow the traffic. We know that is true because we learned it from God's Living Legends.

So we just have one more letter to write. It goes like this:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all the Living Legends of Scripture. Thank you for recording life through their lives, so that we can see Your life in real situations like the ones we will face tomorrow. Dear Lord, this is our prayer, that through watching these lives we might gain Your mind and, armed with Your mind, do Your will, letting You take Your time, that we might arrive one day in glory, humbled to hear You say, "Well done, My good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in the few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord." By your grace, may we stay on course 'til then.

Yours in Christ,

Us

OH, THE LIVING LEGENDS

Oh, the Living Legends We've learned so much from you, We've watched you climb life's mountaintops, Rejoicing as you do.

We've watched you fall, and fail to see Life's evils we so hate. We've seen sin reoccur again, And, oh, can we relate.

We've seen the faith of Abraham: God's promise he received, And with no evidence in view, Still Abraham believed.

We followed faithful Noah, No compromise to see, Then came the storm; but there's the ark And safe inside is he.

We followed God's man, Moses, And time cannot erase The words Jehovah spoke of him, "I know him face to face."

We followed after Samuel, And as our hearts drew near, They filled with joy as he said, "Speak, Thy servant waits to hear."

We followed Joseph, knowing they'd Destroy him if they could, But all the blows that fell on him Our God designed for good. We followed after Sarah, And we can hear her voice, "Our God will always keep His word And He is slow by choice."

We followed Adam, too, and learned What happens to God's man When he is not responsible According to God's plan.

We followed Lot, and watching, saw How gradually we stray, We pay the world a visit and Soon find we've come to stay.

We followed Samson as he made The same mistakes again, And learned from him the deadliness Of our besetting sin.

We watched Naomi suffer "God does not care!" she railed, And learned through roots of bitterness How her perspective failed.

Oh, the Living Legends; Through portraits, truth they give, Painted by a sovereign God To teach us how to live.

May we but listen, look, and learn God's message so sublime, That even we, by grace, can be Legends in our time.

For Focus and Application

1- Read Hebrews 12:1 carefully. Who do you think the "great cloud of witnesses" refers to? On what do you base your conclusions? How should your conclusions affect your walk with Christ?

2- Take the six qualities that are mentioned as positives that the Living Legends seemed to have in common. Try to define each, using only the Bible and a dictionary. Then, measure yourself in each of those six areas. They are critical to finishing the course well.

3- Abraham is mentioned in Romans 4:20-22 as a cardinal illustration of a man of faith. Think about his life. See if you can list four things about Abraham that demonstrated faith. Make each situation personal and applicable to your world, and ask yourself how you would have responded. Has God ever made you a promise, and then taken what seemed to be an eternity to bring it to pass? What was He doing? Were you an Abraham?

4- Read Genesis 6:22. What does it say about Noah that you would like said of you? What was there about Noah that demonstrated faith? What was there about him that demonstrated faithfulness? How faithful are you in the daily grind when no one is looking, and no one believes you?

5- What quality did Moses demonstrate to us? What was said about him concerning his meekness? Was it a cause or effect of His relationship with God? Read Exodus 33 again. What was Moses asking for? Have you ever asked God to do that? What was God saying in reply?

6- Samuel was available and teachable. He wasted no time in responding when God called. How do you respond when God calls you to a task? How quickly do you respond?

7- Genesis 50:20 was perhaps Joseph's most memorable statement. What do you think it meant? How does it apply today to your position in the midst of spiritual warfare?

8-Sarah was human. She doubted at times, but God continued to stretch out the parenthesis between the promise and the fulfillment until no one could receive glory but Him. Has He done that in your life? Read Hebrews 10:36 again. What is it saying to you?

9- Adam taught us a lot about contentment and faithfulness, but not from a positive perspective. How can we learn to profit from the mistakes of God's men and women in Scripture? What must we guard against?

10- Review the lives of Lot, Samson, and Naomi. They each fell prey to a different sin. What did they have in common?

11- Satan has said to us, "You can never be a Living Legend like Noah, Abraham, or Joseph". Find as many Scriptures as you can to disprove that lie. Memorize them. Meditate on them. Ask God to make you a "legend in your time".

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