Leaving a Legacy with "Prof" Howard Hendricks

Part 1 of 1: Leaving a Legacy with "Prof" Howard Hendricks
with
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Mark Bailey: Thank you for joining us on another episode of The Table podcast, where we discuss the connection between God and culture. My name is Mark Bailey, and I have the privilege of serving as president of Dallas Theological Seminary. It's with a deep sense of sadness, as well as a heart of thanksgiving, that I inform you that our beloved "Prof," Howard G. Hendricks, is now with the savior. He was welcomed into our Lord's presence early Wednesday morning, February the 20th.

Prof served the Lord for over 60 years here at DTS. These have been memorable years—memorable years of faithful teaching and mentoring. We're all going to miss him, and I will miss him in more ways than I can describe. For a series of tributes to Dr. Hendricks that you can share with others, please go to <a href="http://www.dts.edu/proftribute">www.dts.edu/proftribute</a>. There you can find more information about him or leave a comment about how his life impacted yours. I ask at this time that you pray for his wife Jeanne and the entire Hendricks family during this time of transition.

This week's podcast is a special one. A few years ago I had the privilege of going to Prof's house, and sitting with him and talking with him about what it meant to live and to leave a legacy. I thought you might like to hear that conversation. It was our Prof, at his proverbial best.

Mark Bailey: ?Prof thanks for taking the time to do this.

Howard Hendricks: ?It's a pleasure.

Mark Bailey: ?Appreciate it very much.


Mark Bailey: ?I've heard it said there’s a difference between living a life and leaving a legacy. When we talk about leaving legacies what does one have to do to leave a legacy?

Howard Hendricks: ?I think one has to make some permanent difference in the life of people. I think we easily forget because we’re so involved in activities and organizations, that we forget the individual. And in the final analysis I think the change that one makes in the life of other people is the thing that delights the heart of God.
Mark Bailey: The impact that people have on those people, there’s a huge difference between leaving a legacy in the lives of people and people having starry eyes toward a celebrity that they may have met or who may have influenced their lives. The difference between a celebrity’s influence and a legacy maker. What would be the difference?

Howard Hendricks: I do not think that celebrity is in any way Christian. Celebrity is something that is attached to you by people. A legacy is something that God produces in your life. He uses you but you’re not the center of the activity. And I find that we’re living in a society in which celebrity-ism is everything. Hollywood runs by it. All of the sports run by it. Politics runs by it.

But in the final analysis that’s just what people think. The truth of the matter is they frequently don’t know the whole story. What intrigues me more than anything is to read the true stories of some of these Hollywood stars. I mean you want to throw up in the process of listening. What’s going on behind the scenes? The utter promotion of an individual with no basis in fact.

But when you are talking about a person who leaves a legacy no one can ever question the impact of it. He or she may not know the true impact. But God does. And it remains permanently.

Mark Bailey: Let me ask you up front here. Whose legacy most impacted you?

Howard Hendricks: I think one of the most gifted phases of my life are the people that God brought across my path. My father used to say to me frequently, “Son, whenever you get around a significant person keep your mouth shut. Except to ask intelligent questions.” And early on I am sure at times I made a pest of myself. By asking the people that God had brought across my life some of the penetrating questions I wanted an answer for. And they gave it to me.

I think for example of a grandmother who took me on and reared me when my parents were separated and ultimately divorced. I mean of all of the things she should have done that’s not one of them. For her age. But she loved me for Christ’s sake. And when I heard the gospel the first time it made total sense to me. Because of what I had seen it produce in the life of that woman.

I’m not sure really that she could work her way out of a wet paper bag in the area of theology. She just knew Jesus. And so it was incarnated by Him that she left a permanent thirst to know the Savior.
Or I think of eighth grade teacher who transformed the whole course of my life. Because she believed in me. Went to seventh grade and the teacher said, “Oh, Hendricks. I understand you’re the worst kid in this school.” And I thought, “If that’s true I’ll guarantee you I’ll never disappoint you.” And when I went in to Ms. Simon’s class in the eighth grade the first thing she said to me, “Hendricks. I’ve heard a lot about you.” And I thought, “Here we go again.” And then she jarred me. “But I don’t believe a word of what people have said.”

And I found the first person in my life who truly believed in me. And I would never disappoint here. I would finish all of my work so I could run all of her errands. Do all of the things that she needed to have done. Remember staying up till 2:00 in the morning working on a project for her. My father came back and said, “What’s the matter son? You sick?” I said, “No. I’m studying.” He said, “You’re sick.” He could not believe that this woman had so motivated me.

Went to Wheaton College. Merrill Tenney the great New Testament scholar of his day. Put his arm around me one day and said, “Hendricks, I believe in you. God has a great future for your life.” And I walked away thinking, “Here I am this kid hardly dry behind the ears. And here’s this eminent Greek scholar believes in me.” I mean what a challenge to life.

I would say that’s exactly what Dr. Walvoord did for me. He believed in me. When I’m sure an awful lot of the faculty didn’t want to take that chance. And over and over again he supported me, encouraged me. Did everything possible to make my dreams come true.

So it’s sort of the story of my life. And it’s the reason that I have spent most of my life. Trying to motivate students. Get them off the dime and into action. Believing God for what He created them to do.

*Mark Bailey:* That leads to my next question. You said that the whole concept of celebrity and obviously our adoration of celebrity is not a biblical concept. But leaving a legacy is a biblical concept. As you think through or over the pages of scripture if someone wanted to see something about the biblical foundation of a legacy where would you take them?
Howard Hendricks: 

“I think I would take them on a tour of the Old and the New Testament. To find out from God’s point of view who are the significant people. And you can’t go by Moses or Abraham or Joshua and say they’re ordinary people. I mean from one standpoint they are. They’re human. They had limitations. They weren’t perfect. And yet in every case God took these individuals and said, “I want them in my book. I want people to spend their life studying the stories of these men, these women, that I chose to use because they were usable. They were available. They wanted their life to count for God.”

And I think you know after a study of that kind you cannot emerge from it without saying, “God has given us all of the illustrations we ever need.”

Mark Bailey: 

“All of those that you mentioned words like to make – to be words like, you used the word motivation. Example. Impact. What is it that creates that legacy? When we think of the life on life and the influence of a life on another life what are some other terms, adjectives, concepts that would describe what a legacy in a person’s life is?”

Howard Hendricks: 

“Well one that comes to my mind is the concept of realism. These were not clay models. These were real people. Who faced real problems. The kind of problems you and I face every day. And yet saw their problems and the solutions from a divine point of view. And dared to believe God for the impossible in many cases. And I think God says, “I love that.”

And here’s a dear woman has no biblical theological background. She’s probably running a whorehouse down in the city. With all of these guys coming through. These jockeys. And they overhear her conversation. She’s talking about God is going to come. And when push comes to shove she throws all of her coins on the table and goes for broke. And then I see Pharisees who spend all of their life studying the word of God. But not one of them, one of them ever shows up at the time of the report of the Messiah. They won’t even walk 5 miles down a road to check it out. Do they know more than she does? Obviously. But she believed God for what she did know. And God said, “I love it. I’m gonna put her in my hall of fame.”
Mark Bailey: All of those people you mentioned in your life and that biblical example there’s a lot of people who know a lot. And there’s a lot of people who are skilled to do a lot. But it seems that what marks another person’s life more than their skill and more than their knowledge that may impress us is that character factor. And the influence of that character. Whether it be compassion, acceptance, motivation, encouragement. Would you agree? Is the character the foundation of a legacy?

Howard Hendricks: I am absolutely convinced that that’s what constitutes the ultimate legacy. And I think you and I see it with people we love and respect. The closer you get to them the more you see them in their intimate life. Not just their professional life. Up front with everybody. But behind the scenes there is that consistency, that pattern. That demonstrates their life is one of reality. It’s not something put on. It’s not something that’s trying to impress you. It’s not about them. It’s all about God. And to me that’s the heart of leaving a legacy. Do they remember you? Or do they remember the God that you believed in? And served.

Mark Bailey: It seems for me that the people who have marked my life in that real way and the closer I’ve gotten to know them I’ve not only learned more about their weaknesses, you know and more about their strengths. But it really seems that those weaknesses aren’t nearly as impacting as what God has done through their life in character and strength, encouragement, etcetera. And I think for me there is a – the difference between the adoration of a celebrity and the legacy of a leader’s life in your life is that with the celebrity you’re almost looking for you know when they’re gonna fail. With a legacy maker in spite of their failures I mean love covers a multitude of sins. There’s almost a deeper love and respect because they do have clay feet. But God is still at work in their lives. And it seems that that almost, it’s not an excuse and it’s not ever a condoning of sinfulness by any means. But there’s an endearment that it’s like Elijah of old. He was man of life's substances like we are. But what God did through him. And I look at you and I look at others who have impacted my life and that same type of a thing. There’s not the mystery of the perfection you know expectations. There is a genuine love for real life lived out. Because there’s a heart that evident and there’s a passion that’s evident. And a commitment to God that just makes God look greater in their lives.
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**Howard Hendricks:**

If I were just to summarize it in one way Mark that’s exactly what I would use to summarize it. That I walk away not just impressed with him. But impressed with what he allowed God to do in his life. And the result is you don’t come up with all of the things that we promote. You know this as a guy who spoke to 46,000 people. You know.

I mean my grandmother never spoke to one other individual as far as I know in any public way. She just incarnated Christ. And it’s a real lesson for me because you know from the standpoint of other people I’m a theologian. I represent the seminary and all that it stands for. But in the final analysis what they’re really saying is, “Who are you? How real are you? Are you simply the person that everybody knows about? Or are you the person that God knows about and therefore He continues to use you?”

**Mark Bailey:**

That’s right. Whether with the biblical examples, some of which we alluded to, or the real life examples I think there’s some people who think that it’s a personality trait, it’s a temperament style. But in those that have marked your life they were all different. They didn’t have the same gifts. They didn’t have the same temperament. They didn’t share necessarily the same passions with one another. They all had a unique contribution but it was from a different personality. Is that – did you find that true in your life?

**Howard Hendricks:**

Absolutely. And in the sense also that I would add every one of them had problems. Every one of them had limitations. And one of the arts of following a person who has a legacy is that you understand they are not perfect. And therefore you have to discriminate in terms of saying, “What do I follow?”

Because you can follow some people you know who are outstanding as an expositor. Just don’t look at their family. There’s a difference in that. And I would have to say that the man who marked me the most was Donald Gray Barnhouse. But I would not use him as an example of many things in the ministry.

The thing he gave me was the size of his God. I have never known a human being whose God was as great as his. And he so implanted that in me that you know when people talk about the sovereignty of God I said, “Friend if you haven’t heard Barnhouse you don’t even know the ABC’s of the sovereignty of God.” I mean he had an enormous God. And infected me with that concept.
And so when I’ve had some of the tests of my life like losing an eye and two occasions of cancer and what I’m currently involved in. The only thing that keeps me going is the sovereignty of God. And what you and I have talked about on many occasions. He’s not only sovereign but He’s good. And that’s an invincible combo.

Mark Bailey: ?I don’t understand His timing.

Howard Hendricks: ?No.

Mark Bailey: ?But I have to rest on the sovereignty. And His goodness. There’s no question. Let’s flip the coin. Over your years of ministry and life what’s been the biggest or quickest legacy breaker that you watched?

Howard Hendricks: ?I think that’s probably the most penetrating question you could ever ask. And probably could lead to a good book. Because obviously I’ve seen too many moral cases in the ministry. People who had a phenomenal ministry. I’ll never forget one of the last experiences I had with Dr. Walvoord.

We’re sitting just like you and I are here. And I brought up a case that we were currently dealing with. He got as silent as I’ve ever heard him. Tears formed in his eyes. And I’ll never forget him looking at me and saying, “Howie, how can a man who has such a phenomenal ministry as this man has had in five minutes blow the whole thing by his disobedience to God?”

Boy I mean that’s etched across the ledger of my life. And you and I have both seen the same thing. I mean the very fact that we have this capability is a staggering thought to think about. And I find that oftentimes the fact that we take so much for granted, especially if we’re gifted. You know giftedness is an invaluable asset. It’s also it can be a tremendous liability. And I begin to depend on my gift rather than use it.

And the result is that you know I crash and burn. After a long stay of successful effective ministry. But in a relatively short time I can lose it. Though it may have taken me many, many years to develop it. It’s lost very quickly.

Mark Bailey: ?You and I have talked about it on numerous occasions. That the principle that spirituality or spiritual giftedness is no guarantee of spirituality.
Howard Hendricks: Correct. Correct.

Mark Bailey: That’s a thought I hope will always be in front of my heart and in front of my mind.

Howard Hendricks: Right. I do too. And I think a lot of people the laymen make that mistake. He’s so gifted. I mean nobody can expound the scripture better than he can. That’s absolutely correct. But look at the outcome. I mean in the final analysis the only thing that determines your legacy is the outcome. What did it produce? You know what are the permanent spiritual results?

Mark Bailey: I don’t know what conversation, what book, thinking. Somebody said if I could die with six or seven people who are the closest to me, who love me the most and could stand up and give my testimony and their testimony and how it wedded together they would die a happy person. They would die a happy man. And what you just said I think is so significant. What will be the effect upon those people’s lives? And what it is that will affect them. And it’s not knowledge. It’s not giftedness. It’s not skill. Though that may all be appreciated. That’s all celebrity qualifications. The legacy is a different issue. It’s the impact of a life. Those are ways to kill a legacy. Those who listen to this or read this what could we say to them, what would you say to them? Leave a legacy don’t miss giving attention to this or these. What would you tell them?

Howard Hendricks: Well I think the first thing I would tell them in this particular area is an accurate assessment of your giftedness and calling. Because I find that there are many people in ministry who have never really determined what God has given them. So they’re constantly changing jobs and ministries. Whereas I think if you know what your gift is and you trust God and apply the disciplines essential to develop that giftedness then you get a life long ministry. That’s gonna leave the best legacy you can ever leave. So that again in terms of what you’re saying, if people say, “What do you remember about him or her?” It’s always tied in to their giftedness. Their calling. They have this passion that this is why God placed me on the planet.
And I find particularly you know as we’re faced in seminary with a lot of young people, they’re in their senior year. And you ask them, “What are you gonna do?” “I don’t know.” “Well why did you come to seminary?” “Well I wanted to be a servant of God.” “And you’ve been here for four years and you still can’t find out what He wants you to do? You know maybe you better go back to the drawing board and ask some basic questions.”

I sometimes think I can point out the giftedness or at least evidences of it better than they can. I have more confidence in them than they have in themselves. But I think it’s tragic for a person to be gifted and go through all of life and say, “I never knew what it was.” I mean I don’t think God gave you the gift without reason. He certainly isn’t playing hide and seek on you. He wants you to know what it is and to use it for His glory. And I think we talk too much about potential and too little about reality.

Mark Bailey: I think that if they will jump in and server, and this relates to what we may want to say regarding helping people in a local church setting build and leave legacies of impact upon people –

Howard Hendricks: Absolutely.

Mark Bailey: It would come back to what you’ve just said. You know what it is. And I think of Paul’s words, “That I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” You know why did God grab me? And how does God want to use me? And to get into those passages that relate to spiritual giftedness and ask God what did you do. Ask others what has God done in me? You know get involved in service. What is it that God chooses to bless. You know I think all of those you know may be helpful. But not waiting. You know and like you say it’s not living in the area of potential but living in the area of the reality. Of serving may be the best way for them to find that.

Howard Hendricks: Absolutely. I remember very vividly talking to a layman here in the community of Dallas. And asking him if he would consider teaching a class for layman. Very successful. Very effective. Oh he said, “I can’t do that.” I said, “Why not?” He said, “I don’t have the gift of teaching.” I said, “How do you know that? Did God tell you that?” “No. No. I just don’t think I can teach.” I said, “Well let me ask you one question. Have you ever taught?” “No.” “Well then don’t tell me you don’t have the gift of teaching. You don’t know that.”
He started to teach and in about five years was the best lay teacher we had in this community. And when students would ask me, “Where can I see somebody who can really do this?” “This is the man. Go see him. I’ll tell him you’re coming.” And he’d come back and say, “Man, I haven’t seen professionals do as well as this guy does.” Did he have the gift of teaching? Obviously he had it. But gifts are developed. They don’t come fully blown. And it takes time and discipline and effort. And the willingness to pay the price to get where you want to go.

Mark Bailey: ?I think of that passage in 1 Peter 4, “As each one is received a spiritual gift so let him employ it in serving one another.”

Howard Hendricks: ?Yeah.

Mark Bailey: ?As the you know manifold you know evidence of the grace of God. And then he sort of gives us the watershed, “Whoever speaks let him speak as it were the utterances of God, whoever serves let him do it in the strength that God provides. God orchestrates.” And just that watershed do you find yourself gravitating toward speaking the word of God or serving the people of God and those aren’t mutually exclusive. But it’s a great watershed to think through this issue of what’s the reason God grabbed me and God wants to use me in ministry.

Howard Hendricks: ?And I think Peter is the classic illustration of this. I mean when you get to the end of the book of Acts I mean Peter is really not that impressive. I mean he set the record for blowing things. And all of a sudden you see him after Pentecost and like the little Chinese gal said, “Is this the same Peter?” I mean he’s got the same name. But he’s vastly different because the Holy Spirit is controlling him. He had the potential but he needed the reality that the spirit alone could bring in his life. And became obviously one of the leading members of the discipleship.

Mark Bailey: ?Yeah. Let me ask you a final question. We think about leaving a legacy but how do we balance and I think I know the answer but I want to hear what you would say. How do we balance the desire to leave a legacy long term and the day to day practicality of every day life? I know those aren’t mutually exclusive and they’re not unrelated. But what advice would you have of connecting those two?
Howard Hendricks:

I would say that the linkage between those two is the heart of learning how to leave a legacy. Because it’s a lifelong thing. You don’t come to Christ and have a legacy that’s lifelong. You know that you’re gonna have a lot of people saying, “You changed my life. You taught me the word. You led me to Christ.” Etcetera. I mean this comes after ten, 15, 40, 60 years of ministry.

But all of the time you are developing as a person. Therefore you have more to contribute after let’s say 40 years of ministry than you had when you first started. You may have had gifts. But those gifts needed to be developed. And I find that this is the tragedy of our generation. Older people are very low on the totem pole. And young people grow up and shoot, who wants to think about the oldie goldies down there. And the truth of the matter is these are the people they ought to be listening to. These are the people who have the most to contribute to them. Because they’ve been living for 40, 50, 70 years walking with Jesus Christ. What have you learned during this time? How did you overcome the limitations that you had? The problems. The family that revolted and so forth.

And the result is we’re mortgaging the greatest heritage that God has given to us. And that’s older people. I tell my students frankly if you want to spend some time that’s worthwhile find some of the people in the local churches who have been walking with the Savior for 40, 50 years and spend some time with them. You’re real impressed with all the young people who are blowing and going. But I’m not always convinced making that much of a dent. Try somebody who’s really got a legacy. And see how profitable was the time spent with them.

Mark Bailey:

That’s great. Prof I know that we’re doing this with the seminary. And I know that we’re doing it for reproduction. Hopefully not just in terms of print or audio. But for life reproduction. And the lessons for those that God has called us to lead and our alumni who continue to benefit from the ministry of the seminary. But I want to tell you thanks. Thanks for being the kind of a person that leaves a legacy in so many of our lives. And how you’ve responded to life. How you have not lost a passion to study while you’ve continued to teach. And you have been willing to face incredible odds and opportunities together. And you’ve done it with a faithful heart. From my heart to yours thanks for deeply impacting my heart and my life. And you know how much I love you and I tell you that. But I want you to know it and so many do. But thanks for being who you are.
Howard Hendricks: ?I cannot tell you what my years at Dallas Seminary have meant to me. I think I’m the most privileged man in the world. To have had 57 years with total support. You know I’ve served under five different presidents. That’s all we’ve had in this place. And everyone has been on my team. Every one has made tremendous investments in me. Believed in me when I didn’t really believe in myself. And I think the greatest legacy I want to leave is a legacy of students. Because that’s where I focus my life. And have students tell me as they do, “You know you changed the whole course of my life.” I mean I back off and say, “Hey,

Howard Hendricks: it was worth showing up.”

Mark Bailey: ?Yeah that was what it’s about.

Howard Hendricks: ?On the planet. So. I’m very grateful. I’m privileged to be a member of the faculty. And on the team.

Mark Bailey: ?We love it. Thank you.