

## Your Final Act of Stewardship (Putting the *Testament* Back into Last Will and *Testament*)

The phrase “Last Will and Testament” will be remembered by those in the Baby Boomer generation and older. The Testament portion of this legal document included a person’s last words and directives to family and friends.

“The Last Will and Testament” was intended to do two things. This document helped people to “will” their worldly possessions to others, either people or organizations. Second, the document served to declare or “testify” to the lessons they had learned in life, and to make final statements of importance to their loved ones.

The phrase “Last Will and Testament” is rarely heard today. With our desire to shorten, abbreviate, and simplify wherever possible, and likely to reduce the cost of drafting the document, we have removed the testament portion on this final declaration, focusing instead on the willing of our possessions. So, in our haste to be efficient, we simply refer to this final document as our “will”. The only time the phrase “Last Will and Testament” is seen is at the top of the document.

One of the great privileges of working in the area of gift planning is the opportunity to work with members of our church, helping them to craft the stories that make up the “Testament” portion of their “Last Will and Testament”. They also share with me the joy they experience in leaving a gift to support some ministry, a ministry close to their hearts.

Most wills today are concise. There is the standard opening paragraph stating that being of sound mind and memory, the testator (the person making the will) is now making the following directives for the distribution of property, and revokes and cancels all former wills. This is followed by paragraphs stating how the possessions are to be distributed.

However, if we were to read the wills of some of our very elderly members who were raised with former generations as their example for their wills, you will find a different document. These are wonderful wills that tell us so much about the person. They testify, or witness to the life and beliefs of the person. They share the lessons learned in life, and sometimes they challenge those to whom they are passing on God's gifts. They give me a greater appreciation for the gift given to their chosen ministry, or ministries.

Some of the best examples can be found in final documents nearly two centuries ago. Consider the opening paragraph of the will of Peter Cottrell in 1803:

*“In the name of God, Amen. I, Peter Cottrell of Prince William County Virginia being sick and weak in body, of sound and disposing mind and memory, knowing that it is appointed for all men to die, do make and ordain this my Last Will and Testament, commending my soul into the hands of Almighty God, hoping alone for Salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ and my body to the dust to be buried in decent Christian burial at the discretion of my Executors. As to such Worldly Estate as it hath pleased almighty God to bless me with I dispose thereof as follows...”*

What a *“testimony”* for our loved ones to read. And what a time to make our testimony – at our last opportunity!

Christians today should consider this opportunity to witness to their faith through their will. We should think in terms of spiritual wills as well as legal documents.

Others have strongly urged that Christian wills could include a personal statement of faith, expressions of love, forgiveness, and encouragement to the family members; and instructions about donating assets to the church. A will does not have to be a cold, wordy document that reflects

nothing of the personality of the person who signed it. It can and should be a source of comfort and encouragement to grieving family members. Remember, a will is a public document. Wouldn't it be a special legacy to leave a Christian will that is forever filed as our testimony to the goodness and mercy of God in our lives? Who knows, someday in the future one of our relatives may locate our will at the courthouse and read how God led us in lives of faith.

It is important that we as Christians do not let the world lead us down another path of worldly materialism in regard to our final opportunity to testify and act for our Lord. We need to consider making our wills more spiritual and give deeper consideration to leaving our possessions not solely to our children, but also to places in God's kingdom where the Gospel can move forward. **Remember, you do have another child in your family, and His Name is Jesus.**

Our *"Last Will and Testament"* is, in a way, our final opportunity to witness to the world and our loved ones before we stand at the feet of our Lord for judgment of our stewardship with the gifts He had given us to manage while we were on this earth.

**This is a rework of an article by Don Reed, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at Sterling College in Sterling, Kansas. We thank Mr. Reed for allowing us the use of this article.**