

Your Reputation Matters

Justin Morton

Something To Think About

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YOUR REPUTATION MATTERS

Week 1: A Reputation Worth Having

You do it and so do I. We are all guilty and we may not even realize how guilty we truly are. Whether we realize it or not, we spend a lot of time thinking about things that involve our futures. From the time we are little kids chasing our big dreams, to the time we are big adults enjoying our little nest egg, we spend quite a bit of time thinking about our future.

One of the things you probably don't spend a lot of time thinking about is what people will remember about you once you are no longer around. For most of us, this kind of thinking probably seems very morbid. We go through life thinking about all the things we want to do with our lives and the many things we want to accomplish during our time on earth, but we never really give thought to what we would want others to think about us once we are gone, either because our situation in life causes us to go or because of our passing from this life.

Although we do not spend a lot of time thinking about this kind of stuff, I believe it would do us well if we just stopped and took time to consider what other people might remember about us if we were no longer around.

QUESTION: If you were gone tomorrow, perhaps because you had to move or something much worse happened, what would you want the people who knew you to remember?

It's interesting to hear what you would want people to remember about you at this point in your life. Now fast forward several years ahead to a point in time where you have lived a long life on earth and have accomplished many of your hopes and dreams. By most standards, you have truly lived a full life.

QUESTION: What would you want people to remember about you at this point in your life?

When we really stop and think about what we want people to remember about us, the things we want people to remember generally involve the good, right? We want to have such a reputation among others that when they reflect on our lives, they cannot help but focus on the good and positive.

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.”

- Proverbs 22:1

“A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.”

- Ecclesiastes 7:1

QUESTION: Why would it be said a good name is better than great riches and precious perfume? Because our name and reputation is what people will remember about us long after we are gone.

Tonight I want us to spend some time thinking about our reputation among others and consider what kind of reputation is really worth having.

REPUTATION AMONG OUR FRIENDS

We all have friends, although some may be closer than others. But have you ever stopped and thought about what your friends really think of you? We want our friends to think well of us. We want our reputation among our friends to be one where they think of us favorably even after we are gone.

QUESTION: What kind of reputation do you desire to have among your friends?

I think we should want our reputation among our friends to be one where they consider us to be loyal and reliable. Our desire should be to have a reputation as being someone who can be

counted on no matter what the situation. Friends want to have friends who will stand beside them even when others turn and walk away.

“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin.”

- **Proverbs 18:24**

QUESTION: What can we do to make our reputation among our friends one that is favorable? A reputation worth having among our friends is a reputation of being loyal and reliable; being someone who can always be counted on.

REPUTATION AMONG OUR NEIGHBORS

When we talk about our neighbors, we are not only talking about the people who live near us, but we are talking about all the people we come in contact with from day to day (remember the Good Samaritan?). Even though these may be people we do not know as well as our closest friends, we should still desire to have a good reputation among them.

QUESTION: Why should we desire to have a good reputation among our neighbors? We can impact people by our actions and behaviors.

QUESTION: What kind of reputation should we desire to have among our neighbors and others we come in contact with?

I would suggest we desire to have a reputation among our neighbors as someone who was always busy doing good works.

“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. **37** But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room. **38** And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them. **39** Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

- Acts 9:36-39

Dorcas is said to have been full of good works and charitable deeds. She was so full of good works and deeds that some widows stood beside her lifeless body and showed off all the tunics and garments Dorcas had made them.

What if you and I became known as people who were always going around doing good things for others? Do you think such actions might have an impact on the community around us? Of course it would.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. **43** Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. **44** Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, **45** and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. **46** So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

- Acts 2:42-47

Part of the reason the early church grew so exponentially is because those who were Christians had a reputation for going about and looking for opportunities to do good. They were consumed with the interest of other people. That should be the same attitude we have in the church today.

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

- Philippians 2:3-4

A reputation worth having among our neighbors is a reputation that involves us being people who are full of good works.

Friends, our reputation matters. It matters now and it will matter when our time on this earth comes to an end. May you and I live in such a way that God is glorified because of the reputation we have before others (Matthew 5:16).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do people give so little thought to their reputation, both now and after they are gone?
2. What kind of reputation should a child of God strive to leave behind for others?
3. What can you do in your life right now, to help you as you strive to leave behind a godly reputation?

YOUR REPUTATION MATTERS

Week 2: A Reputation Worth Losing

He was the kid everyone made a point to stay away from. He didn't have many friends and spend a lot of his time by himself. It's not that he was a bad person; it's just he was quiet awkward socially. Every time he tried to make friends with someone, it would not take long before they had all they could take and finally asked him to leave them alone.

Looking back on this now causes many different emotions to stir up within me. If only I knew then what I know now. How lonely this boy must have felt every day he walked the halls of our school. Why didn't I do more? Why didn't I try to be the one friend this kid seemed to long for? Why did it seem every other student in our school rejected this guy? I am afraid the answer to this question is based on his reputation. This guy had a reputation for being the socially awkward kid no one wanted to be around so everyone who knew of his reputation did his or her best to avoid him.

Your reputation matters! If your reputation is not favorable among others, it can cause you a lot of heartache and pain. I believe the young man from my high school experienced something a lot of us have experienced along the way. He experienced having a reputation he would really like to lose.

Think about it for just a moment. If a person is known for something that damages their reputation and causes unwanted heartache and pain, do you honestly believe they like that reputation and want to keep it? Of course not! I, like many of you, believe they want to lose their negative reputation in hopes of having their life see a dramatic change.

QUESTION: How many of you know someone who has a reputation for something they would be more than happy to lose?

QUESTION: (you don't have to raise your hands if you don't want to, but...) How many of you have a negative reputation among others you would like to lose? Perhaps most of us have something if we are honest.

Just as we can have a reputation worth having, we must understand we can also have a reputation worth losing. Tonight, let's think about a few different reputations we can have among others that if left unchecked, can cause us and our influence among others to be severely damaged. I would suggest to you these are reputations that are worth losing.

LOVE FOR THE WORLD

Most of us probably enjoy life perhaps we even love life. There is nothing wrong with enjoying our lives and living life to the fullest. The problem we often run into comes when we allow our love for the world to trump even our love for God.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

- I John 2:15-17

John told his readers not to love the world or the things in the world. Why would John say such a thing? The reason for not loving the world is because the typical things we love about this world are not from the Father; thus, they come from the evil one.

QUESTION: What are some things we tend to struggle with loving in this world?

What's happens to our influence among non-Christians when they know we claim to be a Christian and to love God more than anything else, but they see our great love for the world and it's desires? Our influence becomes less compelling to others. Another reason we should not love the world is because when we allow ourselves to love the world and the things in the world, we run the risk of allowing ourselves to turn away from God and hindering our ability to influence those around us.

For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

- 2 Timothy 4:10

Paul told Timothy that Demas, a one-time co-worker with Paul, had since deserted him and left the ministry because of his great love for the world. If we are not careful, our love for the world can cause us to turn away from God and lose our godly influence upon others. This is not the reputation we want to have.

DISRESPECTFUL

Aretha Franklin made the song RESPECT a hit in 1967. That song, all these years later, is still a popular song choice among contestants in singing competitions today. And whether we realize it or not, it's a rally cry for many of us today. We all want a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

QUESTION: Who do you desire respect from?

But...as much as we want to be respected by others, how much respect are we willing to give to others? As Christians, a common virtue among our lives should be that of respect. We need to desire to be people who have a reputation for being respectful toward others. Consider a few areas of our lives where we should be known for having a reputation of respect.

We should have a reputation for showing respect to others, including our peers. They should always know no matter what, we will always be respectful of them. After all, we want respect from them, don't we?

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

- Matthew 7:12

QUESTION: Why are we sometimes guilty of being disrespectful towards our peers.

We should have a reputation for showing respect to those who are older than us and even in charge of us during various occasions. For example, a great example of this would be having a reputation for showing respect to the student ministry volunteers who give of their time to serve you and the students in our ministry.

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

- Romans 13:7

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

- I Peter 2:17

QUESTION: Why are we sometimes guilty of showing disrespect towards those who may be serving over us?

The challenge for a lot of teenagers though, is not necessarily being respectful to our peers or those over us, but it is being respectful towards our parents. I can't tell you the number of times I have seen teenagers be disrespectful to their parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** "Honor your father and mother" which is the first commandment with a promise.

- Ephesians 6:1-2

QUESTION: Why are we sometimes guilty of being disrespectful toward our parents?

When we have a reputation for being disrespectful towards our peers, people in authority over us, or even our parents, we run the risk of destroying our Christian influence among others. This is a reputation we shouldn't desire. If we have reputation for being disrespectful, let's make it a point to begin right now working on improving our reputation among others.

HOLIER THAN THOU ATTITUDE

We all probably know people who suffer from this complex. And if we do know someone who suffers from such a complex, they probably infuriate us by their words and actions.

QUESTION: What does a person mean when they say someone has a "Holier than thou attitude?"

People who suffer from this kind of attitude often think of themselves as being spiritually better than the people around them. They are often self-righteous and consider sin to be far beneath them. They can be quick to judge others for their sins and shortcomings while never taking time to stop and consider their own sins. They may be hesitant to extend grace and mercy to those who need and ask for it, but

they expect grace and mercy to be extended to them when they seek such. Let's notice two biblical examples of this type of attitude.

Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' **28** But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' **31** And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'

- Luke 15:25-31

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

- Luke 18:11-14

Both of these examples give us insight into what this “Holier than thou” attitude looks like and how ugly it is when viewed from afar. May we guard against having this type of reputation among others so our Christian influence can be effective!

Let us all guard our reputation amongst others so we can, by our words and actions, help bring others into a saving relationship with Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which of the three negative reputations do you struggle with the most?
2. What can you do to help yourself guard against the negative reputations you struggle with?
3. What other negative reputations should we guard against having?

YOUR REPUTATION MATTERS

Week 3: Our Reputation Before God

As important as our reputation among our friends and neighbors are, our reputation in the eyes of God is the only reputation that truly matters.

QUESTION: Why is our reputation before God the only one that truly matters? We can fool our friends and neighbors but we can never fool God.

“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

- Hebrews 4:13

God knows who we really are. Since we cannot fool Him into thinking we are someone we are not, our desire should be to have a genuine godly reputation before Him.

QUESTION: What might a godly reputation look like in the eyes of God?

There are perhaps several answers to this question, but let me give you three that are found straight within the pages of scripture. These three examples involve Enoch, Abraham and John the Baptist.

“When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. **22** Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. **23** Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. **24** Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

- Genesis 5:21-24

QUESTION: What do you think is meant by the phrase, “Enoch walked with God?”

Enoch was so faithful and in step with God and His will, God didn’t make Enoch see death. He was simply taken up by God. The only other person in scripture to have such an experience was Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Enoch had the reputation of walking with God.

And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God.

- James 2:23

Wow! How incredible to be called a friend of God. We understand friends are people we have special relationships with. They are the people we interact with almost daily and spend the majority of our time with. We typically long to be with our friends.

QUESTION: Why do you suppose Abraham was called a friend of God’s?

Of all the things that could have been said about him, Abraham had the reputation of being a friend of God’s. I am not sure there is anything better that can be said about a person.

“Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

- Matthew 11:11

People spend their entire lives striving for greatness. Some even allow that desire to push them to the point of losing some of the most important parts of their lives. John was not one of those people who strove for greatness. He was simply a humble servant.

QUESTION: What do you remember about John the Baptist?

John the Baptist had the reputation of being the greatest to ever be born of a woman. That's a pretty impressive reputation.

It is extremely important for us to have a good reputation among our friends and neighbors, but even more so before our heavenly Father. We can always fool the people around us into thinking we are someone we're really not, but it's important to remember we can never fool God.

May we all live in such a way that our reputation before Almighty God, is the same reputation we have before others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of reputation should we desire to have before God?
2. Of the three examples mentioned above who had a great reputation before God, which one stands out to you the most? Why?
3. What do you think to be the most important reason for us to have a positive reputation before others?