

YOUR ONE WORD FOR LIFE

ONE WORD

Discover Your Word to Ensure Your Legacy

Have you considered there may be one word that 1) describes you at your most basic level, 2) acts as a lens through which your most important decisions are made, and 3) is the one thing for which you're most remembered – your one-word epitaph? There is one word for you that meets these criteria and acts as a centering theme for your Christian life!

The idea of having one word to both describe and define you isn't new – a Google search will yield numerous results. Some of the more popular are Mike Ashcraft's and Rachel Olsen's MyOneWord.org, the OneWord365.com movement designed to help you find your word in a like-minded community of supporters, and the [One Word that will Change Your Life](#) movement from Jon Gordon, Dan Britton, and Jimmy Page. These are all fantastic and highly recommended if you wish to find an annual word to focus and drive your efforts to improve your life.

This article has a slightly different intention – to find a word that resonates across your entire life and acts as a focusing lens and anchor for your legacy – the one thing for which you wish to be known and remembered. This word exists at the intersection of your Spiritual Gifts, your Earthly Gifts, and your Spiritual Legacy; it takes a bit of work to explore and discover, but you're likely to learn things about yourself you didn't previously know, and discern new ways of marshaling your gifts and talents for maximum impact.

I use the mechanism of a 3-circle Venn diagram (Figure-1) to position the main subject areas and create intersections where they overlap – these intersection spaces create the important context needed to explore how your gifts and talents coalesce and give rise to your word. At the intersection of Spiritual Gifts and Earthly gifts you find what you're good at. At the intersection of Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Legacy you find why you're here. And at the intersection of Earthly Gifts and Spiritual Legacy you find how you're remembered. Together, these spaces create a powerful context for you to discover your word.



Figure 1: 3-circle Venn creating 7 working spaces

Body, Mind & Spirit

I'm a firm believer that a life well lived is a life lived in balance – the balance of body, mind and spirit. Using a three-legged stool as an example, the stool is only a stool if all three legs are strong and balanced. Neglect one leg and it becomes weak and the stool becomes



unstable. Take away one leg and it's no longer a stool. We gain strength and maturity only to the extent we continue to grow in balance; as a coach, when I work with someone struggling in some area of their life, I'm careful to explore if there's neglect in one of these three areas. As a society we're largely enculturated to develop our bodies and minds but, to a lesser extent, our spirits. While a person's spirituality is a deeply personal journey best done in community with other like-minded believers, it's ultimately a personal decision to

internally adopt beliefs and values, then externally live-out and put into practice the character of those beliefs.

As Christians we're called to be Christ-like and live transformed lives (*"do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" Romans 12:2 NIV; "throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life... let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God" Ephesians 4:22-24 NLT*). Other spirituality practices have doctrines focused on peace, harmony, unity, selflessness, compassion, generosity, etc. – the point is that nurturing and developing one's spirit is just as important to health, wellbeing and maturity as developing one's mind and body, and it's essential for creating a powerful legacy which resonates long after we're gone. Let's look more closely at Spiritual Gifts, Earthly Gifts, and Spiritual Legacy to see how they converge to create your one word.

Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are something every Christian receives when they accept God's gift of salvation. Just as the gift of salvation is by grace through faith (*"for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:8 NLT*), so too are the spiritual gifts (*"however, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ" Ephesians 4:7 NLT*). It's important to understand these special gifts are manifest through the Holy Spirit who lives in us – they are not conveyed to us to use by our own power and for our own purposes – and they are to be used for the good of the church and community of Christ-followers (*"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." 1 Corinthians 12:7 NIV*).

To further clarify how God expresses His gifts through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in us and not by our own power, prior to His ascension Jesus promised His disciples a helper (or advocate) who would be with them and help them (*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” John 14:16-17 NIV*). Later, Luke writes in Acts chapter 2 (*“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:4 NIV*).

So what are these special gifts given through the Holy Spirit, and how do you discern how you’ve been uniquely gifted? There are different kinds of gifts depending on God’s plan for your life and the work He planned in advance for you to do. First mentioned in the Old Testament in Isaiah 11 were seven gifts (*“The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord - and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2-3; “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” Isaiah 11:5 NIV*). In some texts¹ righteousness and faithfulness are omitted and **Fear of the Lord** and **Piety** are included.

The New Testament lists spiritual gifts in three different places – Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and 1 Corinthians 12; some believe these gifts are distinguished along three lines: ministry, manifestation, and motivation. While discussion of gifts in categories is beyond the scope of this article, it’s absolutely worth exploring your gifts along these lines with someone who has experience. For the sake of brevity this article will introduce the gifts at a high-level and provide additional resources to explore deeper at your own pace.

Romans 12:6 begins by saying *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us”*, then lists seven gifts: **Prophesying, Serving, Teaching, Encouraging, Giving, Leading**, and being **Merciful** (vv. 6-8 NIV). 1 Peter 4:10 begins by saying *“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms”*, then lists two gifts: **Speaking** and **Serving** (v. 11 NIV). 1 Corinthians 12:7 begins by saying *“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”*, then lists nine gifts: **Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Miracles, Prophecy, Distinguishing Spirits, Speaking in Tongues**, and **Interpretation of Tongues** (vv. 8-10 NIV). Regardless your special gifting, it’s important to remember that it is God working in and through us for the good of His church and His people (*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV*).

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_gifts_of_the_Holy_Spirit

DISCOVERING YOUR GIFTS

The best way to begin understanding how God has gifted you is to be immersed in a community of like-minded believers – Christians on the same path of being transformed by the Holy Spirit and committed to doing the hard work of growing in Christ – and it is hard work to “*throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life*”, to “*let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes*”, and “*put on your new nature, created to be like God*”. Being active in community has many benefits, one of which is your spiritual gifts will emerge naturally as you practice your faith alongside others doing the same. I discovered mine not by thinking about them, but by actively living in a way which allowed the Holy Spirit to manifest them through me. I was certainly drawn to the various scriptures that talked about them, and Bible study is an important aspect of discovery, but it was by being willing to live authentically (and with accountability) as a Christian where they emerged most powerfully, and that only happened for me in community.



In addition to discovery through practice, there are online spiritual gift tests to help expose the unique ways the Holy Spirit wishes to work in and through you. *It's easy to be skeptical of these types of online tests, and I've not found any real evidence to support their reliability; that said, there are many, including me, who have had significantly good experiences using them, and I've personally found them to be surprisingly consistent over an extended period of time.* Below (in no particular order) are online tests I've used at one time or another:

- [GiftsTest.com](#) (Rock Church, San Diego, CA) has been in around for years and has been used by tens-of-thousands of users – learn more about this test [here](#).
- [SpiritualGiftsTest.com](#) (Jeff and Michelle Carver) – this test was founded in 2004 and claims 4,000 visitors to the site daily – learn more about this test [here](#).
- [Team Ministry Spiritual Gifts Survey](#) (Larry Gilbert and ChurchGrowth.org) claiming to have helped more than five million people discover their gifts, this 108-question survey is the longest included in my list – learn more about Dr. Gilbert, Church Growth, and the history of this test [here](#).
- [Family-oriented Spiritual Gifts Test](#) (Focus on the Family) – this test requires a bit more work and even some math, but is meant to be done with family members (maybe just husband and wife, or including children) – information about the test along with a great section on understanding and applying your gifts in meaningful ways can be found [here](#).

Please note I've purposely omitted what some consider gifts listed in Ephesians 4 ("So Christ himself gave the **apostles**, the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, the **pastors** and **teachers**, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV) - I view these as roles and assignments and not necessarily gifts. Now that you see different ways to begin discovering your gifts, here's a [detailed list of definitions and descriptions](#) of each gift so you can gain a better understanding of their purpose and meaning.

The goal for this section is to discover three (3) words that describe your spiritual gifts; write them in the spaces provided: 1) _____, 2) _____, 3) _____.

Earthly Gifts

There are myriad ways to represent earthly gifts - for the sake of concision I'll limit the discussion to one's basic talents and strengths. Talents are naturally-occurring advantages in a specific area of thinking, feeling or doing, and represent a natural potential to do something well. We sometimes refer to people as being "gifted" in some intellectual, emotional or physical domain. For example, Michael Jordan is a gifted athlete and, when first starting out, had the natural potential to become one of the greatest basketball players in history. Albert Einstein possessed a naturally great intellect with the potential to create remarkable change in the areas of mathematics and physics. Maya Angelou, although best known as a poet and memoirist, was a powerful civil rights leader with the natural ability to experience life at the deepest level, then articulate what she felt in a way that moved people to action. We all have natural talents and you're likely aware of some of yours.

A strength is the ability to consistently provide high levels of performance in a specific activity. You can develop strengths in areas where you're naturally talented or, out of necessity, develop strengths in areas that don't come naturally. Above I said Michael Jordan had the natural potential to become a great athlete - but don't think for a minute he didn't put in the work. In his book "*Outliers: The Story of Success*" Malcom Gladwell proposed the 10,000 hour rule which says, "Ten thousand hours is the magic number of greatness". I neither agree nor disagree with Mr. Gladwell, but I'm convinced Michael Jordan practiced significantly more than that, and didn't stop practicing once he'd achieved greatness. I, on the other hand, could practice 100,000 hours and never approach anything like the expertise of any professional basketball player. What's the difference? Michael Jordan had the natural potential, and he put in the hard work to turn his talent into a strength.

Over his decades of research and practice, psychologist [Don Clifton](#) was intrigued by what made successful people, successful. What he found were common themes related to personality - certain personality qualities or attributes - specific talents or potentials all successful people had naturally, or had developed intentionally over time.

As with the Michael Jordan example above, he noted successful people worked hard to develop their talents such that they became strengths, which were a major factor in their success.

Volumes have been written about personality strengths and qualities, and these include attributes like humble, compassionate, courageous, generous, even-tempered, determined, responsible, loyal, selfless, etc. – these are great and I’m sure you have many of these. What we’re after in this article is more focused on what drives success, whether at a personal, team or organizational level. In other words, the distinction between interpersonal strengths, and implementation-based strengths. Personality attributes at the implementation level include strategic thinking, consistency, influence, communication, focus, discipline, being adaptable, analytical, responsible, and the roles of developer, activator, and maximizer to name a few. Don Clifton identified 34 of these success attributes (he called them ‘themes’) and organized them into four domains: Strategic Thinking, Relationship Building, Influencing and Executing. Together they represent potentials (plural) to turn talents into strengths which in turn drives success.



I’m a fan of this work as I’ve studied and used it personally and professionally for years to develop employees. Here’s a link to the [Clifton Strengths site](#) listing the themes in their respective domains; lower on the page are testimonials of how people have developed specific themes to their advantage. Words matter, and I’d like to clarify that while Clifton (Gallop) uses the language “Clifton Strengths” and “Strengths Finder or Assessment”, the 34 themes are natural biases or potentials – talents by the definition given earlier - they only become strengths if developed over time. I’m naturally a Developer (can see and cultivate potential in other people), but it’s taken years of work to turn my potential into a strength.

Clifton isn’t the only strength and talent test available – there are numerous, and most have a specific focus. [Myers-Briggs](#) has been used by corporations, government agencies, and colleges and universities for decades and, based on C. G. Jung’s type theory, looks at a person’s behavior through the lens of perception and judgement. [DISC](#) is another popular assessment tool focusing on a person’s communication styles, and is used to help improve teamwork, communication, and productivity in the workplace. The [Enneagram Test](#) is gaining in popularity within spirituality and business disciplines and slots people into one of nine personality types (and 27 subtypes); the goal of this system is to better understand your type so you’ll be able to make the most of your strengths and address your weaknesses in order to achieve your full potential.

Like the spiritual gifts tests, not everyone agrees these “strength finder” tests are valid – there are plenty of skeptics, and some make convincing points. I can only encourage you to explore for yourself and see if you get meaningful results from which you can grow.

Here are a few additional resources for exploring your earthly gifts.

- [Soul Salt](#) is a cool little site suggesting 9 different ways to explore and discover your strengths, with the promise of leading life with greater purpose and passion
- The [Grace & Lightness](#) site promotes a test to help you discover your character strengths (or virtues) using the [VIA Character Strengths Survey](#) - this tool distills your results down into 24 traits organized under six umbrella categories: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence
- [The Bridge 330 Mentoring](#) is the work of Jonathan Frejuste and provides exercises and strategies for discovering your Gifts, Talents, Skills, and Strengths. He also lists other helpful resources.
- The [High5Test](#) provides 7 Ways To Identify & Utilize Your Personal Strengths

If you look at these you’ll start to notice different variations on the same theme. It’s fine to play with the free tests and see what you get, but better to use one of the science-backed tools that use more widely-accepted psychology research. For this I would recommend the Gallop [CliftonStrengths Assessment](#) – you can take the most basic version for \$19.99 and receive personalized results along with the Insight Guide to interpret your results. A step up to the next level (\$49.99) gets you considerably more which gives a better chance of maximizing your potential.

The goal for this section is to discover three (3) words that describe your earthly gifts; write them in the spaces provided: 1) _____, 2) _____, 3) _____.

Spiritual Legacy

Getting to your spiritual legacy can be less straightforward than taking gifts and strengths tests. For the Christian, your legacy springs from your purpose, and your purpose is God’s unique calling on your life – why specifically He created you – the work and

**WHAT WILL YOU
LEAVE BEHIND?**

accomplishments He planned for your life, even before you were born (“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” *Ephesians 2:10 NIV*). God told the prophet Jeremiah “I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5). That was Jeremiah – what about the rest of us? Does the Bible say God ‘knew us before’?

Psalm 139, the entire chapter, is one of the warmest and most reverent hymns we can sing to our Father God; contained within is the passage *“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.”* (Psalm 139:13, 15-16 NLT).

As shown in Figure-1 (page-1 of this article), “why you’re here” rests at the intersection of your Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Legacy; exploring, discovering, nurturing and practicing your spiritual gifts goes a long way towards discovering your legacy – what God intended for you to accomplish with your life. In the earlier Spiritual Gifts section I said the best way to discover and practice your gifts was to be immersed in a community of like-minded believers; that was true for me as well as I explored my life purpose.

I think many of us feel a deep longing to know why we’re here, and have long had a sense that we were made for more. More than just being good and doing our best to be good people. We’re saved, we go to church, we give, we attend bible studies, we support missions, we engage in small groups for intimacy and accountability, we’re faithful in our marriages, and we do our best to raise our children as Christians in a fallen world – we do our best to live our lives as the bible instructs (oh, and we try to practice integrity and not be seen as hypocrites).

More, we’re kind and generous and active in strengthening our communities. We present ourselves in a way that makes Christianity attractive, and makes people want to ask about our faith. And yet, we still have that deep longing – an ache really – that we were created purposefully and with intention – that there’s something specific we were put here to do. I won’t mince words – it’s not always easy to discover and feel confident we’re on the path God created for us to walk. In my experience it takes patience, practice, and a willingness to “wade into the fray” – to get busy in the world where we feel called, and become active in areas that exercise and honor our spiritual gifts. Let’s look at a few ways to begin exploring your God-given legacy.

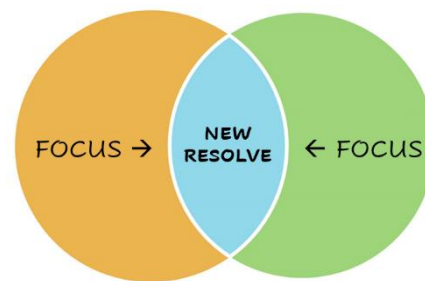
- Crosswalk Christian Ministries (crosswalk.com) – this online Christian magazine has a list of [13 Practical Tips for Building a Spiritual Legacy](#) – these are basic principles for Christian living in the context of your legacy.
- Billy Graham Ministries provides this [7 Ways to Leave a Spiritual Legacy](#) as part of their Summer Soul Refresher series. These are fairly routine and rudimentary but nonetheless valuable.

- The online Christian women’s magazine [Just Between Us](#) has a great article titled [Leaving a Spiritual Legacy](#) – the guidance is mostly basic Christian discipline, but I especially like the *Creating Meaningful Traditions* section; creating family traditions that will flow from your children to your grandchildren and beyond is both important and powerful. Can you remember a tradition from your childhood you brought into your current family?
- Focus on the Family provides the article [Family Legacies: Why Should We Care?](#) I like this because it makes a distinction between spiritual, emotional and social legacies, and equates them to a three-stranded cord which reminds me of Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 which begins “two are better than one...” and ends with “a cord of three strands is not easily broken.” Do you see a difference between your spiritual (kingdom) legacy and your personal (earthly) legacy?
- The most powerful way I know to explore and discover your legacy is through the program [Unleash God’s Dream](#) – this is the work of Rick Linamen, currently Executive Pastor of Adult Ministries at Cornerstone Church in Chandler Arizona. The program is a 6-session guided (coached) process to discover and live into God’s assignment for your life. Here’s a [link to more information](#).

The goal for this section is to discover three (3) words that describe your legacy; write them in the spaces provided: 1) _____, 2) _____, 3) _____.

Exploring Your Intersections

Now that you have tools to discover your Spiritual Gifts, Earthly Gifts and Spiritual Legacy, you can begin to see them through the joined contexts of ‘What You’re Good At’, ‘Why You’re Here’, and ‘How You’re Remembered’.



What did you discover about your Spiritual Gifts and Earthly Gifts? Where they intersect represents ‘What

WHAT I’M GOOD AT	
①	④
⑤	②
③	⑥
RESOLVE: I’m good at...	

You’re Good At’. List the 3 words you discovered for each in the table below – put your Spiritual Gifts in cells 1, 2, and 3, and your Earthly Gifts in cells 4, 5, and 6. Look at them together – can you see how your natural talents and gifts combine to create a unique strength? Complete the resolve ‘I’m good at:’ in the space provided – you can use

words or statements; the goal is to see how the gifts of your body, mind and spirit combine to create the potential to follow God’s unique call on your life.

What did you discover at the intersection of your Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Legacy? Where they intersect represents ‘Why You’re Here’. List the 3 words you discovered for each in the table – put your Spiritual Gifts in cells 1, 2, and 3, and your Spiritual Legacy in cells 4, 5, and 6. Look at them together – can you see how your gifts and legacy combine to create a unique potential? Complete the resolve ‘I’m here to:’ in the space provided – you can use words or statements; the goal is to see how your spiritual gifts and legacy combine to create the potential to accomplish God’s unique call on your life.

WHY I'M HERE	
①	④
⑤	②
③	⑥
RESOLVE: I'm here to...	

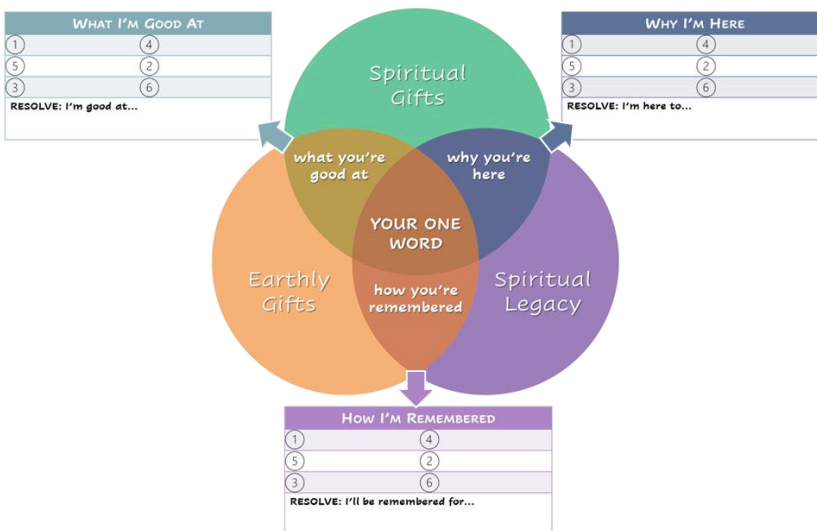
What did you discover at the intersection of your Earthly Gifts and Spiritual Legacy? Where they intersect represents ‘How You’re Remembered’. List the 3 words you discovered for each in the table – put your Earthly Gifts in cells 1, 2, and 3, and your Spiritual Legacy in cells 4, 5, and 6. Look at them together – can you see how your gifts and legacy combine to create a memorable attribute or quality? Complete the resolve ‘I’ll be remembered for:’ in the space provided – you can use words or statements; the goal is to see how your earthly gifts and legacy combine to create a profound and undeniable quality for which you’re best remembered, now and into the future.

HOW I'M REMEMBERED	
①	④
⑤	②
③	⑥
RESOLVE: I'll be remembered for...	

What did you discover at the intersection of your Earthly Gifts and Spiritual Legacy? Where they intersect represents ‘How You’re Remembered’. List the 3 words you discovered for each in the table – put your Earthly Gifts in cells 1, 2, and 3, and your Spiritual Legacy in cells 4, 5, and 6. Look at them together – can you see how your gifts and legacy combine to create a memorable attribute or quality? Complete the resolve ‘I’ll be remembered for:’ in the space provided – you can use words or statements; the goal is to see how your earthly gifts and legacy combine to create a profound and undeniable quality for which you’re best remembered, now and into the future.

Finding Your Word

How do you feel about the work you’ve done up to this point? Do the spiritual and earthly gifts you’ve identified really reflect your talents and strengths? Do you feel like the words you’ve selected really fit who you are? Do they resonate deeply, and do you get a sense of satisfaction when you review them through the joined resolves of What You’re Good At, Why You’re Here, and How You Wish to be Remembered? If you’ve diligently explored and prayerfully considered how you’ve been gifted, I’m confident you’ve landed on a new and more complete understanding of who you are and why you’re here.



That said, this is the first step in a journey of continued discovery and refinement as you better understand and come into alignment with God’s unique plan for your life. Here are your next steps:

1. Capture your summary resolves in the table below – is there one word that’s starting to emerge that resonates across your three resolves? If so, add it to the table below. If not, your word may begin to surface as you complete the steps below.

Intersection	Resolve	One Word
What I’m good at:		
Why I’m here:		
How I’ll be remembered:		

2. Think of three of your closest friends (family members count) and review this work with them – share with them your working notes and how you arrived at your 3 words each for Spiritual Gifts, Earthly Gifts, and Spiritual Legacy, as well as the resolves that emerged from What I’m Good At, Why I’m Here, and How I Wish to be Remembered. Ask if what you’ve discovered describes you in a meaningful way.
3. Talk through with them the One Word which has emerged that describes you at your most basic level, acts as your north star for important life decisions, and is the one thing for which you’ll be remembered – your one word epitaph. Ask if they think your word fits you.
4. Consider taking someone else through this process and helping them get clear on what they’re good at, why they’re here, and what their potential legacy might be. Help them find their One Word!

**ONE
WORD**

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE YOUR LIFE

Can you think of one word that describes your life – your one word epitaph?

1) What word would you use for your spiritual purpose – your life calling?

2) What word would your family choose to describe you?

3) What word would friends and acquaintances choose?

4) What one word would represent how you want to be remembered?

DIFFERENT KINDS OF LEGACY

Continuing the one word theme, jot down 1-3 ideas you have about the different kinds of legacy below – think about which ones you'd like to share with the group.

Personal Legacy

1)

2)

3)

Family Legacy

1)

2)

3)

Spiritual Legacy

1)

2)

3)