

Leave It Better Than You Found It

Air Dates: December 12-16, 2022

Day One

There's a slogan from the Boy Scouts that I like a lot: Leave it better than you found it. It's good for Boy Scouts, but don't you think that Christians should have that same kind of attitude? I'm going to talk about what we should leave better than we found it.

We should leave our jobs better than we found them. I'm not suggesting you literally leave your job, but rather that because you are doing your job, things should be better where you work. Your presence in that job should be a positive thing, so that if you did leave the job, it would be better than you found it.

Another way to put that is to ask, *If everyone in your organization worked like you do, would the organization be better off?* For example,

- If everyone worked as hard as you do—put in the same number of hours really working—would productivity go up or down?
- If everyone arrived at work the same time you do, would everyone be on time or late?
- If everyone were as creative as you are, finding new and better ways to do things, would there be new initiatives and new ideas happening—or not?
- If everyone were as willing to go the extra mile like you do, would there be more people exceeding requirements—or less?
- If everyone were as positive and upbeat as you are, would there be a better morale where you work, or would it be worse?
- If everyone were as neat and tidy as you are and cleaned up after themselves like you do, would the work environment be nicer or messier?
- If everyone talked about others in the organization the way you do, would there be lots of positive confirmation going around, or lots of gossip?

You get the idea. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment” (1 Corinthians 11:31). It's just smart to check up on ourselves—to judge ourselves—and avoid coming under judgment by others, so ask yourself if you are leaving your job better than you found it!

Day Two

Leave it better than you found it! What a good idea. I'm taking a look at how we, as Christians, can leave things better than we found them. I talked about how to leave your job better than you found it and now I encourage you to consider how to leave your relationships better than you found them.

Relationships are the sandpaper of life, are they not? We all need to live in relationship with others, and yet getting along with the people in our lives can be the toughest assignment we have. So, how can we leave our relationships better than we found them?

Let's start with what we call the Golden Rule, which Jesus gave us when he said, "Treat other people exactly as you would like to be treated by them—this is the essence of all true religion" (Matthew 7:12 Phillips). Jesus says that we should take the initiative to improve the relationships of our lives, not wait on the other person to do it. Has someone treated you ill lately? If so, are you willing to put this Golden Rule into practice and respond to them the way you wish they would respond to you? If so, you will definitely improve that relationship.

Here's another relationship principle from the Bible that will definitely leave a relationship better than you found it. From Philippians 2:3-4:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Putting others first is a sure winner when it comes to improving relationships. I remember when I read that passage and just shook my head because I couldn't figure how in the world I could ever live up to it. Consider others better than me? That doesn't come naturally for me, how about you? So, I just began to pray and ask God to show me how to put this into practice. God showed me that it begins with an attitude of the heart—*consider* others better than yourself, think of others in that way. I find that if I change my thought life and truly remind myself that others are just as important as I am and what they're doing is just as important as what I'm doing, then I can start to truly look to their interests, and not just my own.

Well, if we practiced these two principles in our relationships, there is no doubt we'd see great improvement, and we'd leave them better than we found them.

Day Three

The Christian Working Woman, began in 1984 to challenge workplace Christians to see their jobs as assignments from God, not just a place to earn a living. And the way we live on those jobs has a greater impact for the Gospel than anything else.

I'm taking a phrase from the Boy Scouts and applying it to our lives. It is: Leave it better than you found it. I've talked about leaving our jobs better than we found them and leaving our relationships better than we found them.

Now let's think about leaving our environment better than we found it. There's a lot of concern about what's happening to our environment, and we should be good stewards of God's universe, that's for sure. Which means we recycle as much as possible and do whatever we can to make our physical world better than we found it.

Then there's our more personal environment: our living space and our working space. I have a friend who decided she could do something for the environment. She got tired of how messy and unclean public washrooms tend to be. So, she decided that she would try to leave any washroom she used better than she found it. When she told me what she was doing, I realized I had never even thought of taking that kind of responsibility—to leave a public space better than I found it. But if we all did that, we'd live in cleaner, nicer environments, wouldn't we? Our streets and roadways wouldn't be cluttered with trash.

Someone has said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and while I'm not sure that can be supported biblically, there's no doubt that we should care about cleanliness for ourselves and for others. So, why don't we just decide to leave our environments—wherever they may be—better than we found them.

Day Four

How's your church doing? Since I've been on staff at my church, I'm well aware that churches that thrive and do well are those who have lots of involvement from the congregation. I'm proposing that we adopt the Boy Scout mantra to leave things better than we found them, and I was thinking how much better our churches would be doing if every church member took that seriously.

You know, it's not difficult to find things wrong with your church. It's full of people—people who make mistakes, people who don't have it all together, many are new believers with lots to learn. So, you won't have trouble finding something about your church that you don't like so much. But if it's a Bible preaching church, under godly leadership, and that's where God has put you, then you have to ask yourself what you're doing to make it a better church.

I think of a woman who was in our church until God called her home—we called her Miss Shirley. Miss Shirley never held an office in our church, but few people have benefited the church like she did. For years she made it her job to greet someone new every Sunday, invite someone new to sit with her, get to know them, and just share God's love with them. One of my friends tells how when she started coming to our church, she was very wounded and was trying to just isolate herself from everyone, but Miss Shirley found her, sat with her, invited her to a Sunday class, and eventually helped her get involved and find healing. Miss Shirley definitely left our church better than she found it.

Just ask yourself: If you dropped out of your church today, would it leave a hole? Would your service to the church be missed?

God created us for community; we are one body in Christ, and we need each other for fellowship, for healing, for growth, for accountability. I hope you are very much committed to your church and you can say for sure that you are leaving it better than you found it.

Day Five

Leave it better than you found it. That's a Boy Scout slogan. I've never been a Boy Scout, but I'm sure I could benefit from making that a personal goal—to leave everything better than I found it— a personal goal.

I've talked about leaving our jobs better than we found them, leaving our relationships and environments better than we found them and leaving our churches better than we found them.

I want to tell you about my friend, Cynthia, who definitely left a situation at her work so much better than she found it. Some years ago, she worked in a department where one coworker made it very clear that she and Cynthia could never be friends because Cynthia was African-American. It's hard to believe that someone would actually say that, but this person said those very words to Cynthia.

Thankfully, Cynthia was able to get beyond her hurt feelings and respond appropriately to this situation. She prayed about it, and got the idea to start what she called "Project Love." Now, she didn't announce to her coworkers that she was starting "Project Love," she just decided to do it. Besides being kind and considerate on a daily basis, she decided to invite each person in her department to have lunch with her as her guest. So once a week she would deliver a written invitation to a coworker, including this woman who said they could never be friends.

Well, who can refuse such an invitation? So, the two of them went to lunch, they began to get to know each other, this woman saw how wrong her attitude was and what a good friend Cynthia would be, and before long they became friends. Now this woman openly and proudly claims Cynthia as a friend, and though they no longer work together, they keep in touch.

Cynthia left that place and that relationship so much better than she found it. She could have responded with anger and bitterness, but she chose to respond in love. That's the power that we have as believers because we have the Holy Spirit within us to enable us to do what otherwise we would find impossible to do.

I hope you'll remember this simple slogan: Leave it better than you found it. It's one way to show God's love to others.