Legacy Love Letter

A legacy love letter (also known as an ethical will) is a personal document you create to communicate your values, experiences, life lessons and family heritage to your loved ones. Unlike a legal will which focuses on passing along your physical assets, property and items of monetary value, an ethical will serves to share guiding principles, memories, spiritual values, stories of personal faith, family objects with personal (but not necessarily monetary) value and future wishes for your family.

Sample Legacy Love Letter

Dear Children,

A passage from Psalm 16 resonates with us. It says, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance." That verse prompted some heart-stirring conversations that we'd like to share with you.

We are thankful for the "good inheritance" we have received from God. As we grow older, we want each of you to know how much we love you and deeply appreciate the many ways you have enriched our lives. We're especially grateful to see the blessings in your lives.

We see our will as an ongoing testimony of our love for God and for you, and that is reflected in the way we have divided our estate among you and the organizations we love. We hope that when the time comes, someone would read Psalm 16 as an encouragement for our family to continue serving God with gladness for generations to come.

We love you,
Mom and Dad

It's Not Transactional It's Meaningful

rockford rescue mission
rescue + recover + restore

Writing a Legacy Love Letter

Because a legacy love letter (ethical will) is not a legal document, and is not made for the purpose of distributing assets, the content and form is up to you. Here are four themes you may wish to cover:

Beliefs and Values. What do you believe? What are your guiding principles when it comes to marriage, raising children, church and ministry, handling money, etc.?

Life Lessons. What were some of the defining moments of your life, and what did you learn from them? What experiences and people are you most grateful for? Think of significant events, moments and experiences in your life. What would you like your loved ones to know about your hopes for their future?

Personal Feelings. How can you communicate love to them? In other words, how have they impacted your life in a positive way? Is there anyone you owe an apology or confession you've never been able to communicate? An ethical will can be a powerful place to share these feelings.

Message of Hope. What are some of the most meaningful passages of Scripture to you? What message of hope and encouragement do you wish to leave to your family and friends?

See below for a worksheet to help you get started.

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This material has been prepared to provide general information regarding the subject matter covered. It is not intended to serve as legal, tax, or other financial advice. You should consult with your own attorney, CPA, or other advisor regarding your specific circumstance.

Legacy Love Letter / Ethical Will Worksheet

Where To Begin

Ethical wills do not have a formal structure to follow — they're as different as the people writing them. You can type it or handwrite it into a journal. You could also record yourself on video or audio, create a poem or even a scrapbook. Just be sure whatever you create feels like a natural and true reflection of you. (That will also be part of the gift it is to your loved ones!)

Sitting down to a blank piece of paper can be very intimidating when you have a lot to say, or have trouble knowing where to begin. Here are some questions you can use as prompts to begin writing your ethical will.

What are some of your favorite things?

Examples: your favorite family vacation spot, artists, musicians, songs, memories, hobbies, etc.

What is important to know about your family?

Are there stories and memories you have from your grandparents, parents or children that future generations would like to know? What lessons (helpful, humorous or otherwise) did they pass down to you? Think about your life as a child, spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt or uncle, friend, etc.

How have your life experiences shaped you?

Consider these:

I am most proud of…

I am most grateful for…

My biggest failure/regret was… (and here's what I want to say to make it right)…

The most difficult time in my life was…

I would like to ask forgiveness for...

The happiest time in my life was...

What are your hopes for your family's future?

Consider these:
The values I want to pass along are…

My wishes for my children / grandchildren / spouse are…

I hope you get to experience…

When you go through hard times, I hope you always remember…

I sincerely believed the work of [list charitable organization or cause] and I hope you...

However you decide to structure your ethical will, the important thing is to remember that every human has a deep desire for identity, mission and a sense of belonging — and your ethical will can bestow a blessing unlike any other. Don’t be afraid to speak from your heart, be open, honest and vulnerable. The legacy you leave behind will not only provide stability and peace — it can be a gift that impacts confidence, hope, healing and encouragement into the lives of those you love most.