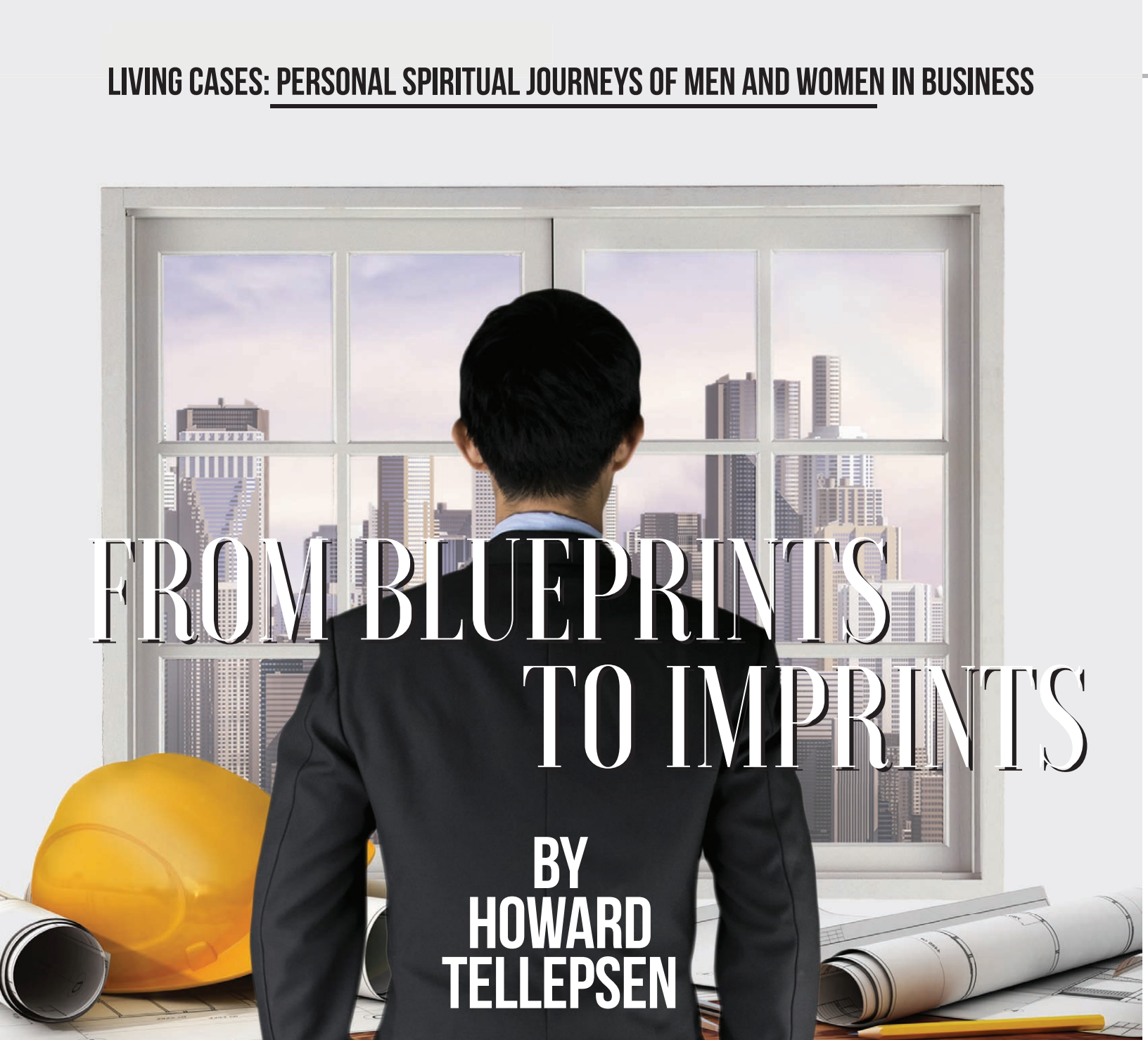




FROM BLUEPRINTS TO IMPRINTS

**BY
HOWARD
TELLEPSSEN**

**Adapted from the author's speech at the Center for Christianity in Business Networking Luncheon in Houston Baptist University on September 25, 2015.*

It is a privilege for me to talk about how my faith impacts my role as the leader of a multi-generational business and how as business leaders we can draw on our faith to make decisions in our business and family lives. My faith and philanthropy, as well as my sister's and brother's, have been greatly influenced by both our parents and grandparents, as they set the example by always being dedicated to fulfilling God's purpose for their lives and serving the community. As we all know, children learn by watching their parents.

Our story begins over a century ago with my grandfather, Tom Tellepsen, who was born in a small town in Norway. His father came to America seeking a better life for his family and was unfortunately killed in a construction accident while working as a carpenter building the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City.

Tom was only 3 years old when his father died. So in the life of Tom Tellepsen, the figure of his mother stood as an enduring inspiration. To Tom, his mother was both good and beautiful. He recognized, in her character and

in her life, the real meaning of Christianity. He often said, "She has God within her."

The knowledge of his mother's love and faith in him was never absent from Tom's consciousness. It gave him strength in times of weakness, and sustained him in the face of hardship. He understood what the Lord reminded Paul in 2 Corinthians (12:9, ESV): "My power is made perfect in weakness." Her teachings of what constituted right and wrong were deeply rooted in the Bible, and her faith in God was the basis of Tom's high principles throughout his life.

On Tom's fourteenth birthday, and with his mother's consent, he shipped out of Norway as a cabin boy on a sailing ship. Can you imagine your teenage son leaving to go around the world to pursue his future? "God bless and keep you" his mother said, and because her benediction was the basis of his faith, he never doubted that God, too, was within him, guiding his footsteps, heeding his prayers. Worshipping God, to my grandfather, was believing in His goodness and obeying His direction. His mother had taught him, "In doubting ourselves, we deny Him," ... "what you do for others, you do for yourself."

After two years traveling around the world, he ended up in Panama and worked as a carpenter for the high wages of \$5 per day building the Canal from 1906 – 1908. Malaria was prevalent in Panama and my grandfather could remember taking as much as 14 grams of Quinine to overcome the dreaded disease. During one attack, he fell into a half-conscious state and was taken to the tent hospital.

After observing him all day, the camp doctor proclaimed, "Tellepsen is a goner for sure." That night the fever passed and when he reported to work the next morning, he caused quite a stir. As Mark Twain is noted as saying, "reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated."

Just like my grandfather, we all go through life's challenges and our faith and strength is tested. We need all of our spiritual resources and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ during the tough times. In James 1:2 it tells us to "consider it joy as we face trials." Tom Tellepsen was not a victim and would never be. He was a builder, but he was first and foremost a believer! Five generations later, that foundation is firmly cast in our family and our business.

I'd like to share with you how I introduce Tellepsen when we interview for an opportunity to build a new

project. It will give you insight into the role faith plays in our culture and our company:

- Building Houston Since 1909
- Fourth Generation Family Owned
- Strong Culture
- Cornerstone of the Community

Tellepsen has been building Houston since 1909. We are a fourth generation family owned and operated company with a very strong culture, and are a cornerstone of the Community.

Building Houston Since 1909

My grandfather remembered from his seventh grade geography class in Norway that he wanted to go to Texas, to explore the new frontier. So, after working in Panama and at the age of 21, he traveled to Texas and in 1909 started building in Houston. I often tell people that I am glad my grandfather picked Houston and not Detroit. The population of Houston was only 65,000. That's amazing to me! Look at where we are today!

His first project was a house located in Montrose. It still exists today and is the home of the University of St. Thomas History Department.

During the 1920s when Mr. Tom (as he came to be known) was only in his 30s, he built several projects of significance that are still being used today: Miller Outdoor Theater at Hermann Park; the Chemistry Building at Rice University; Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church at the front

door of the Texas Medical Center; the Museum of Fine Arts; and the Anderson Clayton Longreach Wharves at the Port of Houston.

Six years ago we celebrated our Centennial, as Builders of Significance for 100 years. Houston has been good to the Tellepsen family, as we have had the opportunity to build facilities for five generations of Houstonians to live, play, work, heal, learn, and worship. We've had the blessing of serving congregations large and small throughout the city. In every instance our people become a part of the church for the time we are on campus. It is a very important part of our family and our business. It's a constant reminder of the importance of faith to our family. You might consider it part of our ministry.

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Fourth Generation Family Owned

I am the third generation – Tellepsen was previously led by my grandfather and then my father, who both lived until they were 88 years old. I have four sons who are living their faith and are all in leadership positions in the company, significantly contributing as the fourth generation in the family business. I'm pleased to say that their faith is as strong as their great grandfather's, and they continue his legacy of servant leadership.

When I was 60 years old, I started working on succession planning for our company. During this process, I learned several things:

- According to the Family Business Institute, family-enterprise success stories of harmony, health, and longevity seem to be exceptions to the rule with family owned and managed businesses - 30% last into a second generation, 15% remain viable into a third, and only 3% operate until the fourth generation or beyond. It takes much more than efficiency to make a great company. It takes faith!
- Succession planning is hard work and must include the family, as well as the company . . . it's an evolving, lifelong, intergenerational process. Planning, partnered with prayer, brings wisdom to these challenging decisions.
- 25% of typical breakdowns are due to heirs not being adequately prepared, and as a result, education of heirs is critical – the family and company history, the company's values and ethics, and most importantly, the nurturing of their faith.

Strong Culture

Tellepsen has always had a strong culture, a shared belief system based on our values, which are rooted in our strong faith. It all starts with mutual trust and respect:

- Internally, how we treat one another at Tellepsen;
- Externally, how we treat other members of the project team – owner, architect, engineers, and subcontractors.

I always heard my father and grandfather say, "It is important that Tellepsen be involved with something larger than ourselves;" it is not about us, it is about others . . .

giving back to the community, embracing those who are less fortunate than us.

It is important for key family members to stand at the center of the organization; personifying the corporate culture and aligning interests around defined values. Markets ebb and flow. We've certainly seen that over the past few months.

Our faith is the rudder that steers us as we engage these changes and make critical decisions. Our employees and their families depend on us, and we draw on the power of our God to give us wisdom.

We draw on our faith daily – constantly demonstrating why our values matter. Our values are reflected in our people and processes. We are judged by our actions and

behavior, not by words or mission statements. My father would always say, "Let your actions speak louder than your words."

We put our employees and customers first and emphasize social responsibility. Employees in the construction

industry tend to prefer "family owned" firms. "Family" is important to the feel of our company. Family values, rooted in our deep faith, give us a strong competitive advantage.

Cornerstone of the Community

The cornerstone is the symbolic foundation on which every building is constructed. In so many ways Tellepsen has been a cornerstone of the Houston community for over 100 years. Our family's involvement and commitment to the community is multi-generational - Ninety to a hundred years with organizations that share common faith-based values such as the YMCA, Boy Scouts, and the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. Volunteerism shines within each one of us, for it is God's way to stay in touch with our soul through good and thoughtful deeds.

My grandfather wanted to improve himself after he arrived in Houston, and in 1910 he took architectural drafting classes at the Downtown YMCA night school, and that started an over 100 year relationship between the YMCA and the Tellepsen family. Five generations of our family have been involved with the YMCA . . . four generations have given continuous service on YMCA boards, with three of those generations being Life Board members of the YMCA of Greater Houston.

In 2010, one hundred years after Tom Tellepsen attended the YMCA night school, the Y opened their new flagship Family Center in downtown Houston and incor-

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porated the Tellepsen name in acknowledgement and gratitude for the family's unprecedented continuity and deep-rooted commitment spanning a century of giving to the Y community.

You might ask why we are so deeply committed to the YMCA. The mission of the Y is to put Judeo-Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. Four distinctive attributes characterize both our family and the Y, and are displayed on each floor of the Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA. They all have Biblical roots:

- Faith: "That They All May Be One" is taken from John 17:21;
- Family: "Here Am I, and the Children God Has Given Me" comes from Hebrews 2:13;
- Service: "Do Not Merely Listen . . . Do" is from James 1:22; and
- Learning: "Your Wisdom Will Reward You" is from Proverbs 9:12.

Our family has also been involved with the Boy Scouts for 90 years, and three generations of Tellepsens have served on the local Sam Houston Area Council board of directors. I am a Distinguished Eagle Scout and have been strongly influenced as a youth and an adult by the 12 points of the Scout Law:

"A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and 'reverent.'"

Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, knew the importance of faith in building a young man's character. As the Scout Oath states: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

Four generations of the Tellepsen family, all who have been raised in the church, have served on boards and vestries, as well as built facilities, for the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and our neighborhood parishes . . . starting with Mr. Tom's church, Church of the Redeemer in the East End - two blocks from his home, St. James in Riverside where I grew up as an acolyte and Boy Scout, St. Martin's in Tanglewood, Episcopal High School, and St. Luke's Episcopal Health System.

From Blueprints to Imprints

I mentioned that when I was 60 years old I began addressing our estate planning: started working on the business issues of management succession, business continuity, and ownership transfer. After several months I ended up focusing on family values and transition issues.

The result of my reading, research, thoughts and prayer was that I put together a "white paper" entitled Tellepsen Family – Blueprints to Imprints. It addresses our family's faith, values, and legacy.

The dictionary definition of legacy is something handed down or inherited from generation to generation. Everyone is going to have a legacy, whether they realize it or not. The Tellepsen family legacy is to be involved with something larger than ourselves – giving back to our community. I feel strongly that a legacy ought to be a life's work . . . something you live every day, not just pass on when you die.

I believe that people are defined by what they pass on to future generations. Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." Philanthropy is spiritual for me. Through the Bible we are taught and expected to serve our fellow man; to give our lives more purpose and to be part of something larger than ourselves.

My oldest son, Tadd, once asked me, "Dad, what would you tell your 10 grandchildren if they were sitting on the floor here in front of you?"

I answered by saying that I would get down on the floor with them, looking straight into their eyes, and share with them what I've learned from my parents and grandparents, and what your mother and I have tried to pass along to our four sons. I would start with....

- Let your actions speak louder than your words;
- Have a strong work ethic;
- If you do your best (not just tell yourself that you did your best; not just check the box, but truly do your best), you can accept any outcome;
- Have confidence with humility; we know that confidence is important to self-esteem, equally important is to have humility with that confidence – our family has certainly been blessed; some would say we are privileged. However, we have never forgotten Luke 12:28: "To whom much is given, much is expected or required."
- Maintain an attitude of gratitude; be grateful for our many blessings;
- When you have many blessings, you have the responsibility to share those blessings – giving back by sharing your time, talent, and resources
- My father would often say, "If you do not give when you don't have it, there's a good chance you won't give when you do have it;"
- Giving begins with thinking of giving; giving is a habit;
- Be unconditional in your love with your family; the power of love is stronger than the love of power;
- Do not be a victim;
 - So often you see people when things aren't going their way, they look for excuses or other

people to blame. We must be responsible for our actions;

- Your great, great grandfather was not a victim; when he was 3 years old his father died; he contracted malaria in Panama;
- On a personal note, when I was 25 years old, Tadd was just 14 months old, and your grandmother was 6 months pregnant, we were living in Michigan and the furnace in our home exploded and I was seriously burned – 50% of my body, of which 30% was third degree requiring 20 operations of skin grafting;
- Like your great, great grandfather I never considered myself a victim. It didn't cross my mind to ask God why did this happen to me.

Each one of us has an opportunity to make our own IMPRINT. Pray daily, seek God's purpose for our lives, and pursue opportunities to be involved with something larger than ourselves. I want to leave you with this Prayer of Faith (grandmother's influence)

God is my help in every need, God is my every hunger feed.

God walks beside me, guides my way, through every moment of the day.

I now am strong, I now am true; patient, kind, and loving, too.

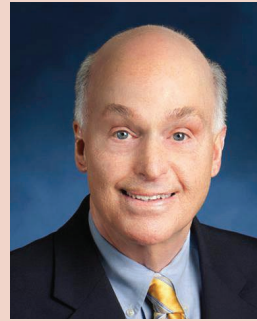
All things I am, can do and be, through Christ, the Lord that lives in me.

God is my health, I can't be sick! God is my strength, unfailing – quick!

God is my all, I know not fear. Since God, and Truth and Love are here.

Amen.

About the Author



Howard Tellepsen

is Chairman and CEO of Tellepsen, a fourth generation, family owned and operated business providing commercial, institutional and industrial construction services in Houston since 1909. Today, Tellepsen, known as

“builders & believers” drawn to opportunities to be a part of something that is “bigger than themselves,” employs over 2,000 people and is perennially ranked among the top construction companies in the city. Howard received his Bachelor of Civil Engineering from Georgia Tech and is a trustee of the Georgia Tech Foundation. Howard serves on numerous civic and corporate boards, including St. Luke's Health System, YMCA of Greater Houston, Houston Associated General Contractors, and Boy Scouts of America, among many others. Howard and his wife of 47 years, Carolyn, have four married sons and ten grandchildren.