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## THINGS THAT LAST

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**I recall watching a fascinating series on TV based on the relationship between people and the planet. In one of them they took the viewer to the depths of the Amazon rainforest. Here it was very mountainous, with deep ravines and gorges needing to be crossed by the local American Indian tribes. Their monsoonal seasons are massive, with flooding so intense that each year the local foot bridges, used by villagers to travel between communities, are washed away by the water. It doesn't matter how strong the bridges are, or what they're made of, they never last.**

So over hundreds of years the people have learnt there's only one bridge that survives – those made of tree roots. So over the centuries the people have learnt how to train the tree roots and tendrils to grow together, intertwine with one another, and cross the ravines. These bridges prevail in the face of the annual monsoons. The television footage showed an old man teaching his granddaughter how to train the tendrils that would eventually form part of a bridge. It is incredibly slow and painstaking work. They said that the roots and tendrils he now trained with his grand-daughter to grow across the ravine would become part of the bridge in about 400 years!

Talk about long term planning! And talk about doing things that last...

I reckon planting trees is an incredibly significant thing. Not just for dogs! I sometimes think that planting trees is something we just do, but don't really reflect much on why we do it and why it is so important. Trees are vital for the survival of the human race. We know that. Like all plants, trees soak up carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen – oxygen we need just to live. Trees provide shade and shelter, and homes for birds and animals. Human beings cannot live well without beauty. There is much beauty in trees, in parks and in forests. But they also remind us that most worthwhile things in life take time and patience, persistence and hard work. Most good things in life are not easily won. Things that last take time and hard work.

There are all sorts of lessons we can learn from trees when it comes to parenting and education. Like trees, young people need roots, grounded in good, healthy soil. Young lives need time to grow. They need support when they are young, and need to be protected from the harsher elements. Yet, just as trees, if too protected, grow up weak and spineless, so too, young lives need to be tested by difficult times. That's how they grow in resilience, something they'll need, in order to deal with much greater difficulties later in life. Just as trees take years to establish and mature and are very much about the future, so too is the business of nurturing and educating young lives.

I realise I am what I am because of what my parents mostly taught me. For example, over the years I noticed that whenever my parents said they'd do something for someone they would honour that promise. And I am the same. Because of my parent's example I always try hard to keep to my word. I hate letting people down. Central to their influence has been to expose me to the ideas of one particular man who lived a long time ago. I have chosen to follow the ideas, the teachings, of that one man – Jesus Christ – believing that what he taught and lived and died – will never fade. My parents both talked about and showed me through their lives that this Jesus is someone I could rely on when others let me down. I learnt that Jesus helps me forgive others, and myself, when I struggle to forgive and let go. I discovered that in Jesus I find meaning and purpose to my life.

The author, Tony Campolo, once interviewed a large number of people over 80 years old. He asked them what they would do differently if they had their lives over again. One of the most popular responses was this: *If I had my life over again I'd do things that last.* What lasts? Earlier I said that planting trees last. In a similar vein, looking after our planet, doing things to preserve all of creation, is doing things that last. We leave a legacy to our grandchildren and great grandchildren. Spending time working on building and maintaining nourishing relationships with others, and that starts with our own family, is doing something that lasts well beyond our lifetimes. At the end of the day, who is going to remember us? It will be our children and hopefully our grandchildren.

Someone once said that ideas last – they never die – they continue long after we have departed this world. I think there is truth in that. And the things that have shaped the world in the long term are ideas. I spoke before about choosing to follow the ideas of Jesus. But believing Jesus and the teachings of the Christian Bible, is more than a set of academic ideas. It's a relationship. I believe the relationship that God wants to have with people is something that lasts – it will continue after I have died. In fact, there is the promise of a new, better, richer, never-ending life after the grave, because of having a relationship with Jesus.

As a Christian I also believe that what God says lasts. God is our Creator and Sustainer. He has a plan for us as a collective people, and yet he knows each of us as individuals too. There is a verse in the Bible that says this:

*All human beings are like grass;  
they last no longer than wild flowers.  
Grass withers and flowers fade...  
People are no more enduring than grass.  
Yes, grass withers and flowers fade,  
but the word of our God endures forever.*

God the Creator is ageless and what he says and what He has done will endure forever.

I have chosen to place my life in the hands of that God. Some years ago I went through a significant life crisis. It was mostly the result of my own poor choices. I recall at the time thinking I had totally lost control over the way events were unfolding. I felt helpless, alone and defenseless. Somewhere along the line the voice of God came clearly into my thinking, "Mark, let go. I am in control of this." I recall the peace I felt when I realized that whatever happened, God was in control, and he could and would eventually bring good out of my crisis. All I needed to do was keep trusting in Him.

Through Jesus you also can have a lasting relationship with God. One that endures beyond this life. A relationship you can enjoy forever.