

Lessons  Leaders

Reflections on Living & Dying

A CONVERSATION WITH
JIM GOLDSMITH



Executive Summary: Brian Beckcom talks to Jim Goldsmith about his five-year battle with cancer, what it's like to know you are going to die soon, how his priorities changed once he was diagnosed, his Christian faith, and the most meaningful and important things in life.

Introduction

Welcome to the Lessons from Leaders Podcast. I'm your host, Brian Beckcom. The most uncomfortable conversations we can ever have are those that revolve around death and dying. Even though we'll all go through this, we avoid thinking about it, we avoid talking about it, and we avoid paying attention to it. Well, in this podcast, my guest is Jim Goldsmith.

Jim is a successful lawyer, husband, and dad who has thought a lot about death and dying and living and loving over the past five years as he has fought a brave battle with cancer that is nearing its conclusion in the next two to six months. This may sound a little depressing.

Talking to Jim is actually one of the most inspiring things I've ever done. He has a view on life and a perspective on living and dying that we could all learn from. In the show, Jim and I talk about the most meaningful experiences of his life. How his diagnosis changed, his perspective on what's important and what's not important, the biggest challenges he's faced, his advice for others facing a similar diagnosis, what he would tell his younger self, what he wants to do with his remaining time, the role of his Christian faith in helping him through this journey and a whole lot more.

Now I give you one of the most impactful and motivational podcast guests you will ever listen to, my friend, Jim Goldsmith.

From Football Brat to Lawyer: Jim's Upbringing

Brian Beckcom: Tell everybody a little bit about yourself. Where are you from? Where you grew up? You're a lawyer now, but you've had a little bit of a circuitous route to becoming a lawyer. Tell us about that route and tell us a little bit about your family too, if you don't mind.

Jim Goldsmith: I think one of the most important things about my growing up was how mobile we were. I mean, I know you were a military brat yourself, and I wasn't a military brat, but I was a football brat. So my dad was a high school football coach in Texas. For those who know people who are coaches or know athletes in high school, coaches change. They move from school to school. Two

years and gone is not uncommon. So I grew up learning how to be in a new town, make new friends, adjust to that lifestyle, and embrace it. It also allowed me to spend a lot of time with my dad. He drove a bus to the track meets, and I would go to the track meets with him on Saturday morning, leave the bus yard at five in the morning and he'd have a thermos full of coffee and I'd have a couple of glasses of water and we'd go down the road and I'd sit next to him and we'd go to these track meets. He took me one time to a coaching clinic, at Baylor in Waco. He's down the field and I'm down the field with him, and all of a sudden he couldn't find me and he's looking around for me. I was sitting on the top row of the stands right below the press box with Grant Teaff, who was the head coach of Baylor.

Mr. Teaff had found me on the stands kind of playing around. He just sat next to me and was kind of talking with me about what was going on, how the practices were shaking out, and what we were doing. I guess that was kind of reflective of how I'd grown up. Like, here's a man I didn't know. You can make a friend that way, just like I did when I was moving from school to school as a coach's son. So eventually did most of my high school career in Katy, Texas, just outside of Houston. Graduated from Katie, went to Texas A&M, where you and I have some familiarity, had some good success on A, and was a good student.

I was in the Corps of Cadets and had some leadership responsibilities there in the corps, which developed a lot of the leadership skills that I use today.

Brian Beckcom: I remember when you were a couple of years older than me in the Corps. I still remember being in the Corps. When I was a sophomore, actually when I was a freshman, the Fish Drill Team commander was a black guy named Darius, and I can still remember him calling Cadence outside my room. I mean, I can still hear that in my brain. Again, for people that don't know, the attrition rate at the Fish Drill Team is like 90%, or at least it used to be when Jim was there. I think you raised a great point, Jim. They're competing against ROTC programs with teams that have been training for four years or that did it in high school.

Literally, Fish Drill Team takes these kids and within a couple of months, turns them into the best Drill Team in the country. So it really is kind of an incredible deal. If you're not familiar with it, you kind of don't appreciate what a big deal it is.

Jim Goldsmith: Well, it makes you appreciate how important focus is, no matter what you do in your life. I mean, obviously, as freshmen in college, you're new to the college environment. You're making friends. You're in the Corps of Cadets. You've already got more pressure and more activities, things to do. You've got academics to worry about. But that intense focus for a couple of hours in the morning and a few hours at night and then on the weekends, that's what you did. I mean, there was no weekend activity other than Fish Drill Team.

They say that if you spend 100 hours doing something with intense focus, you can become a master at it. The difference is, instead of spending that 100 hours over four years, you spend that 100 hours over about four months. That focus really does sharpen you. It's a major lesson that I've learned as far as how important focus is to get good and successful at something.

Brian Beckcom: What did you do after college?

Jim Goldsmith: Ironically, I was contracted to go into the Air Force, had a contract to go into the intel services, and had actually been to officer training school while I was at A&M. In 1991, the first desert storm happened back in late January of 1991. That was a massive success for our military, but as a result of it, came about what they called the peace dividend, which means let's draw down our military and let's reduce the number of people that we have. I was not a scholarship recipient for the Air Force. I was not an academy recipient. So those people had priority, but there weren't enough plane cockpits to go around for everybody. Guys like that who didn't have a pilot seat ready had to take an intel spot or an operation spot that was occupied by me. So I was out.

The plan was originally for me to do my service in the Air Force and then go to law school. I'd always wanted to be a lawyer, but when I got out, I still felt like I needed to do something else to make me a little bit more well-rounded before I went to law school. So I went into the insurance business and did a lot of catastrophe restoration work. I was traveling the country with a major insurance company dealing with the aftermath of tornadoes and fires and hurricanes and that type of thing, and it was supposed to be a five-year stint, but when you're single and you're traveling around the country, working hard, partying hard, I turned five into 13, but eventually got things turned around, realized where I was supposed to be, and went back to law school back in 2003.

You're Not Shaped By Your Successes

Brian Beckcom: Now, Jim, in addition to being one of the funniest guys I know, you've also got a really good perspective on life, and you've always had a good perspective on life. I want to ask you a couple of questions about what I think are some things that, as you grow older, wise people tend to start reflecting on. It's something - I turned 50 in November - I've been reflecting on some of these questions quite a bit. I just want to kind of come out right now and ask you, if you were to list two or three things in your life that you're the most proud of, things that give you the most personal, not pride in a bad sense, but things that are the most important to you at the age of 54. What would be the top two or three things you'd put at the very top of that list?

Jim Goldsmith: The way to phrase it is not necessarily what you take pride in, but an acknowledgment of what has shaped you in the right way. Number one, I believe that you're not ever really shaped by your successes. Rarely. Most of the time, you're shaped by your failures, how you react to them, and what you learn from them. For example, as part of my story, I'll tell you that I was married a couple of times previously that ended in failure. What those things did is instead of wallowing in it and having a little pity party, I tried to learn from it. A lot of times when you have relationship failures, you're looking at and focusing on what the other person did.

You can never really do that if you expect to grow, you want to look at what you did. How did you play a role, what actions, and what thought processes did you have that put the relationship in the situation that it was?

During that time, my faith was growing. My faith in Jesus and my surrender to Jesus was coming at that time. That's one of the cardinal principles of the Christian faith, which is to self-analyze, to look at your conduct, your thought process, and your words to other people. Take responsibility for them and learn from them. That's kind of what I did with the relationships.

With any other setbacks in life, you got to decide what you're going to learn from it, what you're going to take from it, and how you're going to apply something different later on when you're confronted with similar circumstances. That's number one, learning from your failures and not leaning back.

Failure and Shame: Two different things

Brian Beckcom: Let's talk about that a little bit more, because I think that's really important. I tell people when I win a trial, my notes are like two sentences long, and it's like 'You're the best, you're awesome.' But I literally learn nothing. When I lose trials, I end up having five pages of stuff that I need to work on. So I couldn't agree more with you on learning more from failures, failures being a better experience. But here's what I want to ask you, Jim, just being totally candid. I think I'm afraid of failure.

I've always been afraid of failure. So failing, especially failing publicly, has been something that's been kind of hard for me to get over. How do you reconcile the fact that failing is an opportunity to learn and grow and get better with the idea that, well, I don't want my friends to see me lose? I don't want my friends to see me lose this case. If they see me lose this trial, all my buddies are going to think that I'm not really that good. How do you balance those two things?

Jim Goldsmith: Well, I think you got to disconnect failure from shame, because that's what you're talking about, really. You're talking about the shame that comes with failure, whether that's a relationship, whether it's financial, whether it's as a trial lawyer, you never want to crawl back to your firm's offices on Friday at 5:00 with a jury charge that has an adverse finding to your client. It's not something to celebrate, right? But I think you've got to separate that. That's a construct that society puts on you that if you fail, it's shameful. I think that's completely wrong. That's why I think you need to approach it with the mindset of, this is my opportunity to learn before you fail. It's not a matter of hoping you fail or enjoying it or relishing it, but just recognizing what opportunities might be out there for you through that failure.

I'm a big fan of journaling and writing down affirmative statements about who you are, not who you want to be, but who you are. So if you are a diligent lawyer who learns from his failures and you write that down on a regular basis, then maybe you add, 'and it's not shameful to learn from your failure.' You write that down and absorb it, it just becomes part of your state of mind. That's what you were describing as a perceived shame, not a real shame. I mean, you don't even know that people are going to care what happened at the trial. But you feel like you will and that's in your own mind, not in theirs.

Brian Beckcom: That is such an important point. I had a month-long trial in San Francisco in February this year, and it was a ball-breaker, to say the least. I had a terrible judge, a federal court

who ruled against me on every significant matter. It was a big case, and I was nervous as shit going into it. Jim what I found, and we're going to talk about this for sure, is when people go through very difficult things, that's really what tends to help you learn things. I was journaling because, like you, I've had a journaling habit my whole life.

I was journaling right before this trial, I was so nervous, just all worried about losing, and I finally realized, 'Hey, why am I afraid of losing? Nobody cares if I lose. My friends and family are going to love me no matter what.' All that matters for me personally is that I give it everything I got, not because I want to tell everybody, hey, I gave it everything I got. Because when I look in the mirror, when this thing is over, I will know whether I gave it everything I got. So it took me 50 fucking years to realize this, but I finally realized that failure is basically all in your mind. Your friends and family are going to love you no matter what. The important thing is not what other people think. It's what you think about yourself when you're looking in the mirror.

Jim Goldsmith: Fear of failure is pretty common. I have that, too. Fear of failure is pretty common with high performers. The danger is that a lot of people have a self-talk fear of failure. The danger is that it might prevent you from taking risks, or it might prevent you from going out there and getting in the arena and setting up to fight because you don't want to fail. Well, that's all self-talk. It's all you, nobody's sitting there before that trial in San Francisco telling you, Brian, you better not lose or people are going to hate you.

Brian Beckcom: People are going to think you suck.

Jim Goldsmith: I've known you for 30 years and I didn't know you were going to trial, so who cares, right? Yeah, but it's all self-talk. Self-talk is so important. You get to decide what you're going to tell yourself, and you're your own number one audience, so you don't have to listen to that self-talk. You can have your own self-talk that, 'Hey, I'm not ashamed to go out there and give it the good fight, and whatever happens, I'm going to learn from it and be a better lawyer, be a better friend, be a better husband, whatever the circumstance is.'

Decisions Based On Money and Time

Brian Beckcom: What is something, Jim, that maybe you used to think was really important in life something that you really thought was a big deal, that you don't think is that big a deal anymore and vice versa? What is something maybe you didn't give enough emphasis to or enough attention to that you now, at 54, think is very important?

Jim Goldsmith: The first one, money hands down is the answer. There are many decisions that I made in my life that were based strictly on monetary considerations, and compensation for a new position. In almost all of those situations, whether they worked out financially or not, there was a large matter of dissatisfaction. Unfulfillment. Never did I make a decision based on money that I felt just like a champion because I made that call.

The second half of that is what's more important now that I didn't realize, and for reasons we'll talk about earlier and that's time, we only have so much of it and we don't know when it ends. It's just like

if you have a finite amount of well, let's use money as an example. You've got a money bag with 1000 coins in it.

What do you do with it? If it's unlimited, then you can do whatever the heck you want or nothing at all. But if there's only 1000 in there and you know that you're going to be emptying out that bag eventually, what do you do with each and every coin that you have? You think hard about it. You think hard about how you're going to invest it, and you invest it in the people and the things that are most important to you. The Bible says, where your treasure is, your heart is there also. And treasure is not just money. It's time. Where you want to spend your time, that's where your heart's going to live.

This Is What Really Matters

Brian Beckcom: I read this book during Quarantine, actually, by this Dutch guy and basically he said living forever would be the worst thing you can possibly imagine. He said people think they want to live forever, but they don't really think this through. If you had unlimited time, you would have no reason to do anything really ever because you have unlimited time. So his point was the fact that we have limited time, it makes what we do more important and we're more careful about the decisions we make. I tell you again, maybe I shouldn't be thinking this way at 50, but I have this real sense, Jim, of these things that I want to do in my life and knowing that I don't have time to do everything that I want to do. You're in a similar situation because you've been fighting a battle with cancer for many, many years and you've recently got some very bad news about the course of your cancer. The bottom line is doctors have told you that you're probably not going to make it past the next six months. That's the kind of thing I cannot imagine how that clarifies your thinking. How has that news changed the way or how has it not changed the way that you've looked at the limited amount of time that you have left?

Jim Goldsmith: Well, it's definitely changed. I mean, this cancer journey began five years ago in December of 2018, when I was first diagnosed with melanoma. Back then, it was a mole on the arm. No big deal. You go to surgery now, I've got a big fancy scar that looks really cool on the beach. My Mr. Universe days are over because my triceps are gone, but it wasn't that big of a deal.

And while it's scary and melanoma is a serious cancer and it's got a high mortality rate, you just don't think that a mole is going to do that to you. So we go through a second surgery after it recurs and then go through a period of about a year and a half to two years where everything's fine. I tell you what, when you have that everything's fine mentality, and you're just going and getting scans every now and then to make sure it hasn't gotten worse, your priorities don't change that much because it's not really the threat that you think it is. Then it came back in January with some tumors in the lungs, pancreas, and liver. That kind of stuff is really scary, right?

You start to refocus. You start to really think about the time that you're spending on everything else but your family and your faith and the thing that really matters. We got some good test results back in May that some of those tumors were going away because of the treatment. I think the difference at that time is I did not slide back into, okay, everything's fine now. I have infinite time again. It really did

redouble my efforts on both my physical fitness, my sleep, my relationship with my wife, and my relationship with my kids. It really did change things back in May, and we were going along just great. I had some pain in my left shoulder and some nerve weakness and went to the doctor to have it checked out.

Turned out I have tumors on my spine, tumors in my pituitary, and the melanoma has spread to the lining of my brain and my spine, and there's no treatment for it. They can provide a little bit of palliative care, but it's a matter of months before this little journey is over, at least this phase of it is. Now you're talking about really finite resource time becomes a very finite, indefinite resource. And so you make very different decisions based on what you're doing with your time and who you want to spend it with.

An Opportunity To Live With Purpose

Brian Beckcom: What would you tell somebody, Jim, who's received a diagnosis like you have? I mean, what would be your advice to any listeners that might be going through something similar?

Jim Goldsmith: In the same way that you have to approach failure as an opportunity to learn that it's not a negative and there's no shame in it. This opportunity you have to approach with that same attitude, what can I learn from it? How can I make my life richer? More importantly, how can I make the people's lives around me richer? How can I pour into them whatever wisdom and love that I have, that I can give them and do it intensely and do it purposefully and do it with some urgency? That's something that we don't do a lot in life, is live with urgency. And I think when you're in this situation, don't crawl into a ball, don't let it beat you, don't let it dominate your life. Instead, go out and live with some urgency and take whatever positive you can apply to other people and offer to other people. Go get it. Tell some people you love them.

Call somebody that you haven't talked to in a year and say, 'Hey, I just want to let you know, back two years ago, you were a big influence on my life and you did some things that really brought joy to me and I want to thank you for it.' I've been doing that a lot the last couple of weeks and it's, man, what a gift. What a gift to have a diagnosis like this that has time attached to it that I'm not going away tomorrow, but I can go tell people thank you, tell them that I love them. It feels like such a blessing to be able to that.

Brian Beckcom: We were talking about that a couple of nights ago, Jim, when we were talking about setting up this show, and you mentioned to me how grateful you were that you had a chance to say things to people and do a few things. We're going to have a huge party coming up here with a bunch of your friends, and it's going to be amazing. But your point was you felt so grateful and you and I both have a mutual friend who died at 47 about two months ago of a heart attack, suddenly out of nowhere, didn't have that opportunity.

Dying A Good Death and Living A Good Life

We also have something in common, that my mom passed away from cancer, but had an opportunity to say her goodbyes as well. But let me ask you, obviously this kind of thing would clarify anybody's

thinking about a limited amount of time. By the way, everybody that's listening to this show is in the same boat. We all have a limited amount of time.

Jim Goldsmith: You are on the clock. You're on the clock whether you know it or not.

Brian Beckcom: Whether you know it or not. You're either going to be thinking about this now or you're going to be thinking about it at some point in the future, most likely. I guess my question for you is, you and I have been in touch over the past four or five years. We've had some great conversations. My observation, I've seen you having a great time at A&M baseball games with our buddies. When I pass away, one of the things that I think about when I die is my kids and my wife.

I want to do it in such a way that I want to die a good death, I guess, is the only way I can think about it. But on the other hand, I want to live a good life too. So all these things you said about telling people how they've influenced your life and thanking them and stuff, how do we get people to do that when they're not facing it? Seems like why wouldn't we just do that all the time, like the normal way we live?

Jim Goldsmith: It depends on your habit. So the Bible says that you should be grateful in all circumstances, not when times are good and not scraping for the good in times that are bad, but be grateful in all circumstances. If you're approaching it like that, then whatever information you get from a doctor or from your employer or from a trial, you're still grateful. You're grateful for what that gives to you. I think if you approach things like that, then you're always looking for things to be thankful for. There's always that silver lining. You mentioned the desire to die a good death. It is kind of cliché.

I mentioned that to a friend of mine at lunch today. It's like the Mel Gibson movie when he's praying for strength in his cell. Give me the strength to die well.

Guess what? If you're given the strength to die well and you're approaching it with that attitude and you're grateful for the chance to do that, you're going to live well. You're going to show your gratitude to other people that I'm grateful to God for every moment that I have left on this earth. If I walk around with that kind of attitude, how much is that going to bless other people? They're going to look at that and go, hey, what is that magic thing that he has that makes him happy even though this incredibly terrible thing is happening to him and his family? That gives me an opportunity to share my faith with him and tell him that now I believe that I have a savior who died for me on the cross so I don't have to fear death. If anything, I get the chance to be a witness to my family, that my relationship with Christ is more important than any other relationship in the world. I want you to have that same type of relationship too. So what a great tool. Again, you just have to be grateful in all the circumstances, whether it's positive or negative. Your attitude doesn't have to change just because your circumstances do.

Jim's Journey of Faith

Brian Beckcom: Let's talk a little bit about your faith because I know that's a big part of your life, it has become a bigger part of you now. I often wonder when I see people that claim to be religious and then something tragic happens and they don't lean on their religion. I wonder, are you really getting

the message of your religion if you don't lean on your religion in these kind of hard times? So how has your faith been integrated into this, both into your life, not just with the journey with cancer, but in general? How has your faith sharpened over the last few years? Tell us a little bit about that.

Jim Goldsmith: It's a great question. I want to nitpick just a tad bit in the use of the word religion versus faith. To me, there are plenty of religions in the world. All of them deal with climbing our way to God, finding our way to God, whether it's Twelve Steps, whether it's Seven Pillars, whether it's a pilgrimage to Mecca, whatever those things are. Even with faith traditions and the Christian faith where there are certain rituals and things you have to do, all of those are man's efforts to get to God. My faith in Christ is God's efforts to get to me, to reach down and become a man and die on the cross for me, to have a relationship with me. Not because of anything that I can do or anything that I've earned, but it's a purposeful effort for my savior to come down and find me and pluck me out. Now, because of that and because there's nothing I can do for it, I can only have gratitude for it.

I didn't earn it. I can't give it away. I didn't ask for it. There's nothing I can do to keep it or lose it. It's a gift that's been given to me, and with gifts come gratitude. So you approach life with that gratitude. Now, I know that there are people who have had conversion experiences that went from in-the-gutter drug addiction to alcohol to "bam."

They are on fire for Jesus and they're clean and everything else. I didn't have that journey. That wasn't the path laid out for me. I was baptized as a young kid at 13. I knew who Jesus was, but I didn't live like I was following him. I was a hedonistic son of a gun. In college, you'd be hard-pressed to find anybody more hedonistic. I did some terrible things along the way.

But what an amazing testimony it is that somebody who was that - I'll just say evil with a lot of the conduct that I had when I was in college and afterwards - that God can still shape me into something different. I'll be frank with you, having two failed marriages and having paid for multiple abortions and killed my own kids, right? How does a man turn from that to adopting two kids and pulling them out of foster care and adopting them. That's not human, that's supernatural. I wouldn't have done it on my own had it not been for Christ in my life. There's no other way to explain it other than once you accept the free gift of Christ, once you approach that with gratitude, and once you start to open up to it and realize it's not about learning a ritual. Or doing a thing or praying a certain prayer. It's about trying to let God put his own heart in you and let that be a heart change. Your entire perspective changes. May not change overnight, but I'm certainly a different person now, having walked with Christ for 25 years than I was when I was a hedonistic young kid.

Brian Beckcom: I'll tell you something. My mother died when she was 35. You and I have talked about that a little bit. She was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was five and she was 30. She was given six months and she died five years later. But she actually converted to Catholicism. She was religious beforehand but became very religious. Even though it's been 40 years since she passed away, that's still something I remember about her a lot. I remember her faith.

I remember the way she lived, and her faith. I've got some letters, handwritten letters that she wrote to me that my aunt sent to me a couple of years ago that talks about her faith, that journey, that life you're living right now. I can guarantee you all four of your kids, when they're 50 years old or 60

years old, will still remember that about you. I think that's because we can talk about money and football games and all this stuff and the climate change and who's going to be the next president. But when it gets down to it, these questions of life, death, and faith, I don't know that there's really anything that matters other than these questions, is there?

Jim Goldsmith: At the end of the day, I totally agree with you. Everything else is window dressing. They can be fun, they can be great distractions, but they are window dressing to the real purpose in your life. The real purpose in my life is to edify the God that made me, and to serve others by using the motivation and the heart that He has implanted in me through His Holy Spirit. That's the purpose. That's a purpose that you teach your kid, and then they do the same for their kids. The Bible says that you should raise your kids up in the way they should go, and when they grow old, they will not stray far from it.

That's not just about learning a Bible verse or memorizing Bible verses. It's about helping shepherd them out into the world, to shape that world based on what you've taught them, and use that as a foundation for them to make their world better, just like I hope we make our world better now.

Perspectives on Death

Brian Beckcom: I'll be completely candid, I talk a big game about being all rational and philosophical about death and all that, but the second I start coughing funny, I freak out. But have you ever thought about the idea that Jim Goldsmith and Brian Beckcom were not around for the past 4 billion years or however long the Earth has been around? And we will not be around, neither one of us, for the next 4 billion I mean, our time on this planet is like a blip on the radar is over-exaggerating. It's like a nano blip on the radar. The idea that you would be afraid of being dead, which everybody's been dead for 4 billion years, that's where you spend 99.9% of your time. Why would we be afraid of that? Being conscious? This is not the normal state, I guess is what I'm trying to say. This is a tiny, tiny blip. Have you ever thought about the fact that neither one of us has been here for that long?

Jim Goldsmith: I've thought about it a lot lately and interesting that the way you phrase that is exactly what the Psalmist wrote 5000 years ago, that we are vapors in the wind, we're just smoke, we're here for a second, and then gone tomorrow.

Brian Beckcom: Does that give you comfort? Because to me that gives me a little bit of comfort thinking about that.

Jim Goldsmith: It can be comforting. I think it should provoke a lot of wonder in your life. Like it's amazing that we have the short amount of time that we have here. It's amazing. How much should we be doing with it that we're not how much value are we adding to the people around us with that little time we have as the vapor? But more importantly, I think you bring up a point about fear of death. I think that's the common thing, right? A common thing is fear. Because it's like a horror movie when you're in a haunted house and you're at the door to another room and you don't know whether something's going to jump out at you if you open it, or if it's going to be a bright light with no danger in there at all. You just don't know.

I think the difference between people of faith is that we do know that there is a place waiting for us that our savior has made for us, that he has gone before us to make a place for us. If it was not so, he wouldn't have told us that and he did in his word. So the faith that I have is that that place does exist. It's where I'm headed and it's where everybody's headed that has faith in Christ. I have nothing to fear. I don't fear death at all. My concern is for the people that I leave behind and making sure that they have the tools to make it to where I'm going as well. That they have the education and the knowledge of their faith.

Once they make it their own, they're not going to have my faith. I don't give my kids my faith. It's their responsibility to find their way on their own. I'll guide them, but they make their own way in their relationship. Just like I can't force them to marry a certain person, they're going to find their way to their own relationship with Christ if that's what they choose. I don't fear that. I want to know that I've done everything possible to equip my family with what they need to go forth in the world and make other disciples and increase their relationship with God.

Living in a State of Gratitude

Brian Beckcom: Have you ever had to deal with any anger issues? I think if I got a diagnosis which eventually we basically all will get some sort of terminal diagnosis, right? One of my first reactions is going to be, I'm going to be fucking pissed. I'm going to be like, 'Why is this shit? This is bullshit. Why me?' First of all, have you gone through that? And second of all, if so, how have you dealt with that kind of emotion?

Jim Goldsmith: I don't know if you know who Tim Ferriss is. He's a podcaster. I've adopted his method of five minutes. I think it's called the five-minute morning or something like that. That's where the concept of gratitude comes in, that you've got to spend every day, I write down three things that I'm grateful for. It could be hot coffee, or something random. Just find things that you're grateful for. I think if you build that as a habit, then that reduces the anger that you feel because you're automatic.

I don't know if I could find it, probably, but the morning that I got the word that the cancer had gone to the brain, the next day, one of my journal entries was, I'm grateful that I have health insurance through my employer that's going to take care of me through this. I'm grateful that I bought life insurance earlier in life that's going to take care of my family. You just look for that thing to be grateful about and it's harder to be angry. Was there anger? Sure. I'm not going to tell you that I'm not, I think it's a normal human emotion. But really, what are you angry about? Anger is always the second emotion. I don't know if you've ever noticed that, but anger is always the second emotion.

There's always something before it, fear. Fear or damage of your pride, whatever it may be. Anger always comes second. The key is what came before the anger. It's usually fear. It's usually thoughts that you've not done what you were supposed to do while you're here, that you've wasted time and now you don't have the time to waste. Once you realize that, it's a little bit easier to set the anger aside.

Focus on that first emotion, not the second.

A Lesson in Friendship

Brian Beckcom: There's a Buddhist saying that I really like, and that is anger is a hot coal that you hold in your hand thinking it's going to burn somebody. I've always thought that was a very good saying. Let me ask you this question from a somewhat selfish perspective, Jim. I think a lot of people, when one of their friends or family members gets bad medical news, don't really know how to act or what to say. They don't know how to act. I mean, like we were talking about earlier, one of our mutual friends died suddenly this summer. His older brother and I have talked probably 20 times since then, and I struggle sometimes.

I don't really know what to say to him. I call him up and I literally sometimes will be like, I just don't have any words. I feel like I'm not being a good friend because I want to say something to help, and I can't do it. From your perspective, what would you tell people who are around people that are terminally ill and sick, what has helped you? What kind of input and advice has helped you?

Jim Goldsmith: It's going to sound like a broken record, but the Bible already writes a lot about this and that's in the Book of Job. Job went through incredible trials that he didn't deserve, that Satan was putting on him to test him. And there's a point in the Book of Job where his friends come around him and they're just there. They're just present. Don't say a word. They're just there with them. There comes a point in the Book of Job where they start to offer advice, and that's when things go sideways and their relationship is damaged because of trying to help too much. Sometimes there's nothing you can do to help except be present.

Again, that goes back to time. How are you investing your time? Just be there. 'Hey, I don't have any words of advice for you. I don't know what to tell you, but I'd like to take you for a cup of coffee in the morning and just hang out, and let's talk about whatever you want to talk about. We don't have to talk about sickness if you don't want to, but just want to spend time with each other. You're not alone.' That's ideal, man. And then if there are organic conversations that are going to come from that, awesome.

But I think there's such pressure on other people who are not sick to say the right thing and to do the right thing. There shouldn't be that pressure. I made a joke to somebody the other day. It's kind of a morbid joke. Sorry.

The common thing to say in circumstances like this is 'Jim is there anything I can do for you? I will do anything.' And I said, 'Yeah, you can die in my place.' Well, let's not go that far. But that's really all you need to do is just be present.

I got a guy, a friend of mine I've known for 25 years through the insurance business. He came into town back in March when things were a little bit unknown. With what was going on, the abdomen and cancer and stuff, he didn't come in to give any comfort. He's like, I'm going to come in and hang out for a day or two. Is that cool? Can I stay in your guest room? Yep. He and I went on a couple of runs together and talked about working out. He's a California guy and talked about surfing a little bit and

just was present. There was no pressure for him to cure me or make me feel better. He was just there, and that was awesome.

Brian Beckcom: I was with my wife a couple of years ago. We were in Colorado at an event of some sort, and we met this older couple and this lady. I talked to this lady for 20 minutes or so, and all she did was sit there and listen and ask me questions. I was walking out of this deal and I turned to my wife, I go, 'That's the coolest lady I have ever met.' All she did was sit there and listen. What a skill that is. Being able to just sit there and just chill and just like you're saying, that's hard to do.

I remember a couple of years ago, you had gotten some not so good news, and people were, like, telling the funniest off color jokes, and I was just sitting there laughing my ass off. I can't believe people are saying this to Jim on text, but I knew that you're the kind of guy, you don't want people to treat you any differently. Like, you were probably laughing as hard as everybody.

Jim Goldsmith: That was hilarious. I mean, laughter is great. Stephanie and I spent a lot of time laughing and cracking jokes about our situation just because it's good to laugh. It's a stress reducer. I mean, it produces chemicals in the brain that really relax you and put you at ease whenever you laugh. So you make jokes, and that's great. I love it. I'll say something else, we have another mutual friend who's about a year older than me who passed away suddenly a couple of years ago, and he's what I would consider the best friend that any man could ever have.

He was just a rock that was always there if we needed him. When I first was diagnosed back in 2018 or 19, he didn't call and say, can I come? Is there anything I can do? He called and said, what's your address? Not to send me flowers, he showed up on the doorstep the next day and just said, 'Hey, thought I'd come hang out for a little bit.' We spent a couple of hours hanging out, went to lunch, and didn't talk about cancer much at all. He was just there. He was just present and man, what a blessing that was. Just a good friend and what a good lesson to learn on how to be a good friend in the same context as what we were talking about with Job. Just your presence. It's really all people need.

Beyond A Bucket List

Brian Beckcom: Are there any things that you still want to accomplish or experience in this time you have left? Like, if you were to pick the two or three things you still feel like you need to do, what would those things be?

Jim Goldsmith: That is a really interesting question, and it's something I've put a lot of thought in for the last several years. I think the natural tendency is to think of a bucket list of things you want to do, like the Tim McGraw Sign song about riding the bull and skydiving and all that stuff. I've been fortunate to do a lot of cool things in my life anyway. But the things that two or three years ago I thought, hey, I might want to do this if things go south. I don't have any desire to do them right now. Really, I don't. The idea of, let's say I have always wanted to see the Eiffel Tower, right? But that's something I've never done. I wanted that two years ago, I thought, hey, that'd be pretty cool to do.

You look at the time investment in that. Yes, I could take my kids and maybe that's memory-making, but I'm much happier having a movie night with my kids on the couch watching and laughing and

doing something personal and intimate with them as opposed to taking a big trip and making a big splash. Because again, it's not about the thing that you see in this world. This world is a vapor. This world is smoke, and it's going to pass away, and it sure is. If you believe, as I do, that we're going to see a kingdom in heaven that dwarfs anything that I see here, why would I not look forward to that instead of this little Lego kit that we have down here? That's just a mere reflection of the majesty that's before us in heaven. I don't need to see anything, I don't need to do anything.

I'd like to perfect my brisket a little bit better, maybe get that down a little bit better. It's getting good, but I think I could do a little bit better. I would like to find a way to serve other people that I haven't ever served before. I've never done a soup kitchen. I've never done a ministry under the bridge. So there are things that are popping in my head about, how do I do that? Do I want to write a book? Do I want to write things down for posterity? Things like that. But as far as making a splash and going and seeing a part of the world that's just going to blow my mind at this point, my mind's blown and doesn't need to be blown anymore.

Living In The Moment

Brian Beckcom: Because I've had this experience, Jim, there'll be times in my life where, for example and I'm thinking of a very specific time two or three years ago where I was on a family vacation and we were sitting in a hotel and my daughter was lying on my lap. She was like nine years old at the time, and she was watching a TV show. My boys are over there, and my wife and I remember just kind of looking at my daughter and just thinking, this is all I need. I don't need anything else. This is perfection. Just being able to look in my kids' eyes, that's all the experience I need. But that kind of thing happens so rarely, and it's so fleeting.

We all have things that we're focused on, so we don't really appreciate the things that are right there in front of our face. Has this experience helped you to really focus on the stuff that's, like, right there in front of you? Like, the stuff that really matters?

Jim Goldsmith: Yeah. I'll give you a couple of specific examples, actually, from the last couple of days. So my morning routine is I take my youngest to school. My next youngest, my 14-year-old, is a freshman in high school. Their schools start about an hour apart. So about the time we're walking out the door with my junior high student, my high schooler is just waking up. Our routine has been me knock on her door, go in there, give her a kiss on the forehead, tell her I love her, taking Georgia to school. Have a good day.

I love you, and out the door. Now, that's our normal routine. Now, I go in there this morning and with a thought process of, this might be the last time I ever do this.

Someday it's going to be the last time for sure. But what happens if you approach that moment with that same gratitude and that same view of it as a scarce, beautiful thing, then it's not just a routine. It's a little piece of magic that you can leave with your kid. It affects everything you do every day, because it might be the last one. I bought her a pair of earrings for her 14th birthday, and I'm in the

Hobby Lobby buying a card for her. We don't do cards. We're just not a Hallmark card kind of family, right? But I decided to get a card.

I'm going to write something sappy in it, and I'm sitting in Hobby Lobby with all the ladies with their yoga pants on and their kids, and they're buying flowers and little wood knickknacks, and I'm sobbing like a little baby in the card aisle, realizing that this might be the last card that I buy for my kid. So how cool would it be if you approach moments like that all the time, even when you didn't have a terminal diagnosis, right? Not saying that you should blubber about Hobby Lobby every day, but just to recognize how precious those moments are and how rare they're going to be.

Brian Beckcom: Well, there's another podcaster who I listen to quite a bit. You may know Sam Harris, who talks about the fact that there will be a last time you hug your kid. For sure, by definition, there will be a time, whether you die, your kid dies, or goes off or you don't see Jim again. There will be a time when your daughter doesn't want to give you a kiss on the cheek because she's a little too old. There will be a last time that you and I talk. You and I will talk for the last time at some point after October 15, and that's true for everybody.

I think that's a great observation, because if we look at it that way, then a lot of people think it's morbid to think that way, or there's something more. But in reality, it's how you approach it.

Jim Goldsmith: It's how you approach it. Right. It's going to be the last time. I have to grieve for that. I have to be upset about it. I have to be angry about it. You mentioned anger. Or you can be grateful for that time right then, and maybe you'll get lucky enough to be grateful again tomorrow morning.

But being grateful for that moment right there is what I'm talking about. The approach that we need to take every day, regardless of what your health is.

How Will You Be Remembered?

Brian Beckcom: The Buddhists have a meditation practice called *memento mori*, and a lot of different faith traditions have it. Memento mori basically means reflecting on your own death and reflecting on it in a very serious way, like literally picturing yourself dying, picturing yourself being buried, picturing your body. When I heard that, it's just, why would anybody want to do that? That sounds crazy. But when you do it, what you find is everything seems more alive and you just have this sense of sometimes. When I do that, Jim, I'll just have this sense of awe. I find the more you think about it and the more you talk about it, actually, in some ways, the more awe inspiring it gets. Let me ask you a question.

How do you want your kids to remember you? If you could put into their heads, this is how I want my four kids to remember dad, how would you want them to remember you?

Jim Goldsmith: I would want them to remember me as someone who put Jesus first in my life before my wife, before my kids, that He is number one. I would want them to remember me as someone who put my wife second, not my kids. My kids aren't my idol. They're not my partner.

The Bible did not say that a man shall leave his family and cleave to his kids and become one flesh, cleave to his wife.

Brian Beckcom: My dad used to tell me that all the time. He'd tell me and my brother, he goes, 'Look, if it's between you two and your mom, she's coming first.'

Jim Goldsmith: I had one of my oldest kids one time say that I think it was a teacher or a counselor or something. She had told them that I said that my wife comes before my kids. And the counselor said, 'Well, that's just crazy. You should always put your kids first.' I'm like, well, how's her married life? Do you know she's not married? I'm like, how old is she? 30? Well, judge by the fruit from the tree if you want to, but that would be another lesson.

There's a great book by Jocko Willink called Extreme Ownership. And the idea is that when you're in a group environment, everybody owns everything.

That's true in a marriage, right? Everybody gives 100%. It's not 50 50. It's 100%. And so I would want them to remember me as somebody who owned my responsibilities to them, owned my faith, and demonstrated it to them so they knew with absolute clarity what I believed and why, and then trusted them to own it themselves if that's the path they chose.

I don't think that God builds robots. I don't think that he builds people who are compelled to follow Him. I'm not going to build that in my kids. My kids are going to have the freedom to choose and to own it if they want, but they're going to know for me the path that you can walk.

Brian Beckcom: Your life, you're one of those guys that has a large group of men that would literally crawl through broken glass for you. You've got some men, and I would include myself in that category, along with a lot of other of our mutual friends. How do you want us to remember you?

Jim Goldsmith: Same way. Why would it be any different? Yeah, why would it be? You know, my kids are important to me. They're close, but at the end of the New Testament, in Matthew, the great commission that Jesus said is, I want you to be my witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. So to me, Judea is my family, Samaria is my immediate community, and the ends of the earth are all the people around me. It doesn't say to be witnesses to those people in different ways. Just be my witnesses. So why would I not want the same goal for all my friends and to remember me for that? I certainly don't want them to remember me for who I was in college, let me put it that way.

A Life Without Regrets

Brian Beckcom: Do you have any regrets right now? Anything you regret?

Jim Goldsmith: No, no regrets. I mean, I would not be the person that I am today without the faults and fallacies that I displayed when I was younger. We're all a product of that. So going back to gratitude again, man, I'm glad I screwed up in that way because I learned some invaluable things from it and eventually pulled me toward Christ. I'm grateful for who I am now as a man, and I wouldn't

be that same way without those things. I don't think you go with regrets. You have gratitude for what you were able to learn from those mistakes and be grateful for how it shaped you.

If you're not grateful for how it shaped you, then it's time to start looking at what those things were and why it didn't shape you the way you were. Maybe there's something you need to reflect about or something to be grateful at that you haven't taken ownership for. So it's an opportunity for reflection.

The Power of Forgiveness

Brian Beckcom: Just a few more questions. Jim and I really do appreciate your time. Other than your faith, what have been the top two or three most meaningful experiences in your life?

Jim Goldsmith: Most meaningful experiences? Wow.

Brian Beckcom: Okay, let me tell you why I'm asking that question, okay? Because I want to know, as somebody who is looking at their life with essentially perfect clarity right now, all the bullshit is kind of on the side. I want to know, when you think back on your life, what really matters to you, obviously, other than your faith, which is the most important thing, but what sticks out in your mind as being the two or three most meaningful things in your life?

Jim Goldsmith: When you ask that question seems like you're asking for something positive. Like what's something that impacted you positively. I think that that can also be something that most people might consider as negative. So if you don't mind, I'm going to get a little bit raw just about childhood experiences and things like that.

We all have experiences in our childhood that shapes us as adults and continues to. When I was six years old, I was at my grandparent's house and was abused by a neighbor, sexually abused by a neighbor. That's something that I've told my wife, and my church in giving my testimony, but not a whole lot of people other than that. As a matter of fact, one in six young men have experienced some type of sexual abuse, so it's not an uncommon situation.

As I progressed through life and that hedonistic period that I told you about, a lot of that, as I reflected back later, was a result of combating that pain. I was abused like that. Therefore, I have to behave this way to take away that pain, whether that's masking through alcohol or relationships with women, when in reality you come to learn that you can be healed through a relationship with Christ and be forgiven from that and more importantly, to forgive other people that have hurt you. I went through a process like that back in 2010 where you go through and you identify people who have hurt you. If you don't know who they are or it's not reasonable to forgive them personally, you write out a letter and you just tell them, 'Hey, this is what hurt me, but I forgive you.' Man, that is healing. Forgiveness is healing. It's like that same Buddhist phrase that you talk about, about anger, holding a hot coal in the hand and expecting it to burn somebody else.

Forgiveness is just like letting go of the rock, letting it drop to the ground. That incident shaped who I was, both in my sinful hedonistic phase and then in my redemption phase. After surrendering my life

to Christ, is something that He healed in me that allowed me to go forward and be more productive despite that experience. That's number one.

Brian Beckcom: Let's talk about that real quick, because what I noticed about that, and this goes a little bit to something we were talking about earlier, is when I ask you about one of the most meaningful experiences of your life, you think of something that's, quote, negative.

I actually think of the same thing. I think of the thing that shaped me the most was when my mother died when I was ten years old. You can look at it as a negative thing, but you can also look at it like you've been telling us to do throughout this whole podcast as a learning opportunity, as an opportunity to grow. Isn't it interesting? Like, I remember there was a job that I wanted 20 years ago at a law firm that I didn't get, and I remember literally crying as an adult male on the couch for an hour. My wife's like, I can't believe you're crying. I wanted this job so bad. But I look back on it and I thank God every day I didn't get that damn job because it would have been terrible. Isn't it interesting that a lot of the things when we reflect back on our life that seemed to be completely negative, turn out to be the things that teach us the most?

Jim Goldsmith: Our lives are a collection of contrasts. You can't have a beautiful light without understanding what it's like to be without that, and understanding what the dark is. You can't have the warmth of a sunrise without understanding the bitter cold of a winter's night in a tent somewhere. You can't have what I think is the beauty in my story and the redemption of my story without the contrast of that sexual abuse and then the attendant behavior later on. That's the miracle of what Christ does in people. From my point of view, what Christ does in people is he takes people who are dirty, hurt, and angry and washes them clean and can give them a new attitude and a spirit of gratitude, which is what happened to me, and I hope that it happens to everyone else listening to this podcast.

Brian Beckcom: To say the second most meaningful thing, the thing that came to mind. In terms of most meaningful, you were going to say something else, I think.

Jim Goldsmith: My relationship with my dad. Again, it's a question of contrast, right? So my dad grew up on a dairy farm, working very hard, getting up at 3:30 in the morning, milking cows before he goes off to school, and then coming home and doing it again before he goes to bed. His dad was not a nice, kind, loving dad. His dad was abusive, both physically, emotionally, and verbally, even to the point where whenever I was a young kid and as an adult, my dad was there with my grandfather and he would be treated in the same way. You'd see the kind of slumped shoulders that my dad had from that. My dad was physically struck a lot by my grandfather. My dad had the courage and the strength not to do that. He broke that chain.

People talk about that being a cycle all the time, the cycle of violence between a family. My dad had the courage and the strength not to do that. It's very rare, and I'm grateful for it, because we had the kind of relationship that up until the time that he died last August, we would be on the phone at least once or twice a week, just shooting the bull and just asking about how work is going and which trials I lost and which trials I won and hearings and all that kind of good stuff. He was really proud.

We were able to spend that time because we had not damaged our relationship when I was a young man, a young kid, through his violence, he turned away from that, and man, I'm so grateful for that. That's a really meaningful element of how I grew up and my relationship with my family.

Brian Beckcom: Now, wait a second. So you're telling me that when you reflect on your life, the size of your house, the case you won, the kind of car you drove, the money you made, none of those are that meaningful or rich?

Jim Goldsmith: Nothing. None of it. The only thing that matters in life is the relationships that we have with other people and with your creator. The relationship with other people is a reflection of the one you have with your creator.

Brian Beckcom: What do you want your funeral service to look like?

Jim Goldsmith: I am not a big fan of traditional funeral services. We had one for my dad last year, and it was great and fine, and people came and paid their respects and everything. But Stephanie and I have talked for five years. If things go south, what do we want to do as far as a funeral or memorial? We just decided we want to have a party. A party with friends to come and have a good time together, which is what we've always done with our friends. Eat a little food, eat a little barbecue, drink a few beers, and tell some lies. Brag on each other, and verbally destroy each other.

But the question was, would we do it after I'm gone or not? So at this time, we decided, this sounds like so much fun. I don't want to miss it, so we're going to have kind of not a memorial service, but just a party and a celebration with anybody that wants to come and hang out and tell some lies.

Brian Beckcom: I'm excited about it, man. You can count me in. Please reserve a spot for me. Anything else, Jim, that you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

Jim Goldsmith: No, I'm just thankful for the opportunity. I've listened to your podcast a lot. There's a part of me that doesn't understand why I would have anything of value to offer, but I appreciate you recognizing that there might be something that somebody can hold on to, and I hope somebody hears it. I hope somebody's motivated by it or encouraged by it. More importantly, I hope that they ask about this Jesus guy that Jim believes in and how it's a basis for his joy and gratitude and ask somebody else a question about Jesus, and that would be time well spent.

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About the Author

[Brian Beckcom](#) is one of the nation's top trial lawyers. He is also a widely published author, including multiple books and hundreds of articles. Brian's interests include technology, consciousness, meditation, physics, mathematics, history, language, stories, narrative, memetic theory, leadership, persuasion, quantum gravitation, computer science, and more. Lessons from Leaders podcast

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