

What's in a Name?

I was named after both my grandfathers – Beecher on my father's side and Haskell on my mother's.

My maternal grandfather died before I was born, so I only knew him by what others told me about him. He was a farmer and a godly man with a reputation as a hard worker and willing to lend a hand to his neighbors, whether for building a barn or helping get in a crop. Learning about him made me proud to carry his name.

My paternal grandfather was a sharecropper who eventually became a landowner, and he also was generous with those who knew him. Until I entered school, I was known by my middle name, but since the roll in the classroom generally was called using a student's first name, Beecher became how I was addressed.

Since the name, Beecher, is a bit unusual, I asked my father once how my grandfather got the name. He told me that my grandfather's grandfather was a classmate of Henry Ward Beecher, a Connecticut native who became a Congregationalist clergyman and speaker known for his support of the abolition of slavery and his emphasis on God's love. He was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Because of their close friendship, my great-great-grandfather named his first son Beecher, and the name was passed down. Knowledge of those events and the connection of families brought a new meaning to my first name.

Names are important. Consider ...

A married couple named their new son "Foolish One." The name stuck, and by the time Fool was a grown man, he had lived up to his name. Once, he was befriended by a stranger but incurred the stranger's wrath when he failed to acknowledge his kindness.

His wife, who was wise, did the right thing and settled Fool's debt – the shock of which caused Fool to have a stroke. A fool from birth, in 10 days Nabal was dead.

That's right. Nabal of the Old Testament (1 Samuel 25) bore a name that, in Hebrew, means "fool." Why would parents burden a child with such a negative name?

Naming is a powerful tool in the hand of a parent or any authority figure. When we name someone, we exercise a certain power over his or her life. That person believes us – why shouldn't he? – and thinks of himself in those terms.

God thinks names are important, too. People in the Bible were often given a new name to reflect some significant life event. After Jacob wrestled with God at Peniel, he was renamed Israel, signifying the changed nature of one who had seen God's face.

Regardless of your legal name, if you are a believer in Christ, you have a new name: Christian, meaning "Christ one" or "little Christ." That's a name worthy of living up to.

Names are word pictures. Paint them ever so carefully.

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations (Genesis 17:5 NKJV).