

Change a Life, One Child at a Time

*...I want to know
how many times you've opened
your heart and extended a hand
to your homeless sister or brother.*

*I want to know
if you will sit in the quiet dark hours
between midnight and dawn listening
to another's heartsong.*

– Gloria Burgess from “Song to Myself”

Who could have imagined that the engaging, articulate woman who is now Executive Director of Crown Academy had been living out of her car with her two young sons and then in a homeless shelter for several years after that. Now a respected leader in her community, Maxine Davis started Crown Academy 18 years ago. The school is designed to meet the unique needs of children who are homeless.

After the tragic death of her husband in a head-on collision by a drunk driver, Maxine fell into a life of depression, repression, and loss. Finding herself with her two young boys in a homeless shelter, she learned a lot about herself and about what really matters. Not money and not things, but family and serving others.

From her first-hand experience, Maxine also came to realize that her stereotypes about homeless people were totally unfounded; like her, they simply weren't prepared for a sudden, unexpected crisis. Almost everyone she met at the shelter—adults and children alike—had the same hopes and dreams as she and her boys. The children wanted to see grandma or grandpa again and play with their friends, and they all dreamed of living in their own house again. Maxine also learned that they shared some of the same fears—being alone, being so overwhelmed that they wouldn't ever feel normal again.

Eventually, Maxine found the courage to improve her life, while simultaneously recognizing her passion for improving the lives of others in her situation. With this vision, Maxine

created Crown Academy to serve the educational, social, physical, and spiritual needs of homeless children in the first through eighth grades. In addition to classroom instruction, the school also provides the children with much needed clothing, toiletries, school supplies, and hot meals. And Maxine recognized that by reaching out to these underserved and often ignored people in her community that Crown Academy is making a difference in the world. For Maxine, by recognizing her passion, she thoughtfully and deliberately changed her life into something with lasting value.

Service: Begin with Yourself

We all want to make a contribution that leaves the world a little better off than the way we found it, a contribution that is worthy of our lives here on earth. We can do this by walking a path of thoughtful choices, a path that in my life I have come to call legacy living.

Legacy living is about being fully who you are and doing what you have to do because it is the only choice that assures a congruent life, a choice that simultaneously links your present with the past and the future. It is about living your life to consciously create something of enduring value that will benefit both the present *and* future generations. And you will come to understand that you must do so with passionate intention.

Passionate intention means being deliberate about who you are, how you show up, and what you do, and deliberate in choosing your words and actions. Being deliberate shapes every other choice you make, propelling you forward with purpose, drive, and unstoppable momentum into a field of infinite possibility and allure, a field that can only be known by those who accept the *dare to wear their soul on the outside*. When you accept this dare, you are being true to your inner compass, to your authentic self, to your soul's calling.

To wear your soul on the outside means that you choose sovereignty over your life. This means that you say *yes* to your own hopes and dreams and *no* to someone's agenda for your life. This radical stance means that what you say and what you do are in harmony *and* aligned with your calling.

When you connect to your passion and wear your soul on the outside, your first goal is to bring forth and manifest your unique personal attributes and the special gifts and talents that only you can offer, that can only come through you. Your second goal involves service to others, where your focus is not self-centered, but rather it is other-centered, directed towards being of service to others in the here and now and on behalf of the future. Empowered in this way, you can follow *your* path of legacy living.

For me to reconcile and integrate these twin goals into my life I use what I have come to call the ***Seven Sacred Promises*** of legacy living. As the foundation of my workshops, in my writing, and in my classroom, my seven tools of choice are: ***gratitude, faith, love, vision, integrity, creative action, and legacy*** (see sidebar). As you experience the Sacred Promises for yourself, they will provide a gateway and will support you as you make this critical choice to bring forth your uniqueness and strengths, thereby transforming your life and the lives of others in your classroom, family, community, congregation, workplace, and beyond. The impact of your choices creates the footprints of your life, the legacy that you live and the one by which others will remember you.

Recognize the Sacred Promises in Action

Seeing how the Sacred Promises can fit into one's life path is the first step toward living your legacy now and for the future. As the following table illustrates, as Maxine climbed out of the depths of darkness after her husband's death, she worked through all seven

The Seven Sacred Promises

Gratitude means giving thanks for the blessings in your life, and expressing your appreciation for those who paved the way, those who cleared a path or built a bridge for you. Take a moment each day to acknowledge your blessings; then pass your blessings on by sharing your joy with others.

Faith allows you to say, "I trust myself. I can do it." Faith allows you to lean into a greater power, knowing that what you hope for will manifest, will become real, concrete, and tangible. Your belief in what is possible becomes the bridge that will support you as you respond to your calling and claim your life's purpose.

Love allows you to devote time and energy to whomever or whatever brings you joy. What we create with our hearts and hands is love made visible. Your actions become heart-centered instead of self-centered. With Self-love, Love for Others, and Divine Love, you learn to devote your passion and energy to be of service to yourself and to others.

Vision offers you a concrete snapshot of where you are and a picture of where you want to go. Vision invites you to see outwardly as well as inwardly with the eyes of your heart so that your soul responds in kind. Vision also invites you to invest in tomorrow with a sense of possibility and hope.

Integrity means to be true to yourself. It says, "This is who I am, and this is who and what I value." When you stand and walk with integrity, you bring the beauty and bounty of your own true voice with you wherever you go and you will be able to honor the values and wholeness of yourself and others, recognizing your interrelationship with all beings.

Creative Action includes all of the small and big steps to move you from where you are toward the direction of your vision and calling. Creative action is also the manifestation of your legacy in the making, the tangible fruit of the Sacred Promises at work in your life.

Legacy invites you to consciously focus on being of use to someone or something beyond yourself. Whether you use your talents to encourage and uplift, innovate and invent, be an architect or shape-shifter, your life will count for something, and you will leave the world a better place.

Sacred Promises. In so doing, she found her passion and calling, eventually creating for herself and for the benefit of others a legacy for now and the future. Try creating a table like this for yourself to see how the Sacred Promises can support you as you transform your life:

Sacred Promise	In Action
Gratitude	For those who accepted Maxine into the shelter
Faith	In herself and the future
Love	For adults and children in the shelter who were in the same situation as herself
Vision	For a better life for her and her sons and for other homeless children and their parents
Integrity	As she learned to be true to herself, honoring her wholeness
Creative Action	As she expressed gratitude, faith, love, and integrity, and fulfilled her vision and legacy
Legacy	In her establishing Crown Academy to be of service to others

Say Yes to Yourself

If you want a different tomorrow, you must do something different today. I invite you to look further into yourself to find and follow your calling, and apply these Sacred Promises in support of your life journey. In turn you can help your students with their calling and, in applying the Sacred Promises, encourage them with their goals along their intentional life path.

Saying *yes* to the Sacred Promises as a sacred life path is a radical act not only because it has affinity with soul, but because when you acknowledge and respond to your soul's calling, you claim power and authority in your life. Like any other form of artistry, proclaiming and wearing your soul on the outside is a political act, a revolutionary offering of bread and

water to the hungry and thirsty in spirit. When you say *yes* to the Sacred Promises as a sacred life path, this positive, life-affirming action will ensure a different tomorrow for yourself and others.

Yes, I Can: How Do You Say <i>Yes</i> to Yourself and Others?			
		Yes	No
Gratitude	When you say "thank you," do you look the person in the eyes and wholeheartedly say thanks with your eyes, heart, voice, and hands?		
Faith	When you believe in a project or new idea, do you follow through and make it happen, standing firm in the face of criticism and rejection?		
Love	Do you say an emphatic <i>yes</i> to what matters to you so that your passion can benefit yourself and others?		
Vision	Do you have a vision for your life so that you feel you can live to your fullest potential and live a balanced life in which all your needs are met?		
Integrity	Do you act congruently with who you truly know yourself to be rather than editing yourself to fit the circumstances?		
Creative Action	In situations where others see only obstacles and road blocks, do you imagine opportunities and possibilities?		
Legacy	Do you make conscious and frequent choices that are aligned with a vision for making your life count for someone or something beyond yourself?		
If you said <i>yes</i> to three or more of the Sacred Promises, you're on your way. Make a plan today for how you will change your <i>no</i> responses to <i>yes</i> . Keep it simple. Take one small action each day for the next 30 days, and see what a wonderful difference your actions make in your own and others' lives.			

About the author: Dr. Gloria J. Burgess is a behavioral scientist, consultant, and executive coach, as well as an award-winning poet, author, director, and performing artist. Gloria is the author of the best-selling book *Legacy Living* and her recently-released book *Dare to Wear Your Soul on the Outside: Live Your Legacy Now* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley).