

## MODULE 1 PROFILE

# What Did You Live For?



His parents planned for a small funeral. They expected family, their son's friends, maybe some of the city's political and social elite – the Frassati family was, after all, well-respected in Italy. With a prominent artist mother and journalist-turned-politician father, their son would certainly be remembered. But he died of polio at 24 after living what they figured was a relatively normal life: he'd failed a class or two in high school, liked sports and mountain climbing, and played pranks on friends. Nothing extraordinary. So, they planned for a small funeral for their son Pier.

But as the funeral procession passed through the streets of Pollone, thousands of people crowded to pay their respects. The young man's family was shocked. The crowd included large numbers of the city's poor. Pier's mother and father knew he was passionate about helping people – he talked often about social reform – but they never could figure out where he was always running off to. And now, on a hot morning in July, still shaking from their son's sudden death, here was their answer: Pier had dedicated his life to others.

The poor were also surprised, because they didn't know their friend Pier was part of the prominent Frassati family. Pier befriended many people and provided for their needs, from housing to food to medical supplies, but never let on that he was part of the elite class. In fact, he loved them like part of his family. Unbeknownst to both his family and his needy friends, Pier had been using any allowances he received to pay for others' basic needs.

To his peers, Pier was a lively person who loved mountain climbing and movies. He was popular and well-liked, but his friends knew he was different in one major way. He spent his mornings at the church in prayer; he was always reading books from the saints. He stuck to his principles, even when no one else did, and encouraged others to do the same.

At Pier's funeral in July of 1925, thousands of people he'd known came together to honor a life well-lived. His parents saw the impact he'd made, and not long after, the poor of the city called for his beatification in the Catholic Church. Around the world he is known as Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, patron of young people and mountain climbers.

Only five years before this, another man passed away in Saginaw, Michigan. He, like Pier, had given much of his money away; he invested in charities and local organizations from the wealth he'd amassed. He lived the quintessential American dream as he worked his way up from poverty by dedicating himself to the lumber and iron industries and, eventually, starting multiple businesses and working in politics. The locals admired him; he was one of the richest people in the United States. Yet even though he had seven children, he died in his mansion alone, with only hired servants by his side.

Wellington R. Burt pursued wealth and fame, estranging his loved ones in the process. He was harsh with them, pinching pennies and caring only about his personal pursuits. By the time he reached old age, none of his family or friends associated with him.

And, even now, the only reason he's really remembered is because of the strange "spite clause" in his will. His final wish was that none of his children or grandchildren be given any of his wealth – the thing he'd worked so hard for in his life. Instead, he asked that the money be split among his heirs 21 years after his last grandchild died. His wish came true in 2011, with various descendants receiving up to 3 million dollars each. Most of the heirs weren't very excited. They'd watched this inheritance tear apart five generations of their family, watched siblings and cousins fight endless legal battles. Their ancestor had left a legacy of selfishness and pain in his wake, and they were just glad it was over.