

Live Like You Were Dying: Introduction

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

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This morning we begin a new series of messages entitled “Live Like You Were Dying” based upon the popular song by the same title. Over the next five weeks we are going ask, “What would it mean to live like you were dying?” Death is something we don’t like to think about or talk about. But the reality is 100 percent of us will die! And we do not know when. We may only have hours left or many years. No one knows other than God. Dealing with the reality of death helps us to put things in order in our lives.

I hope you will be here each Sunday. Some of our Sunday school classes will be discussing the topics each week. We will have small groups in the fellowship hall each week. If you are not involved in class on Sunday morning or would like to focus on this topic, we invite you to go to fellowship hall next Sunday morning at 9:15 or 10:30. If you are looking for a place of connection in our church, this is a great opportunity to make new friends. These groups will meet through the month of October.

In the bulletin each week will be a key verse which I hope you will memorize. Today’s verse: Psalm 90:12 “Teach us to make the most of our time, so that we may grow in wisdom.”

Next week, the Reverend Susan Brown, will bring the message! You will not want to miss.

Let’s look at a passage of scripture where the Apostle Paul encourages us to look at our lives in light of the end of time.

Romans 13:11-12

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

VIDEO: SONG WITH GRAPHICS “LIVE LIKE YOU WERE DYING”

If you got word today you only had 30 days to live, how would your life change? How would you spend your time? How would it impact your relationships? How would you prepare for eternity? What would you do that you’ve never done before?

Some of you are struggling with a terminal illness right now—you know you have limited time, and this series is not just a mere exercise for you. Those are questions you wrestle with every day. Some of you have had close calls. Perhaps you experienced a serious accident or illness that took you to the brink of death. Perhaps you had open heart surgery or an organ transplant and were given a new lease on life. You made some

decisions during that time about how you wanted to live your life differently. Maybe you lived differently for awhile, but you've fallen back into the old pattern of taking things for granted.

Recently I had a difficult conversation with one of my sons. We had a serious disagreement, and the conversation did not end well. We did not talk again for several weeks. Then I received a voice mail message saying that a friend of his lost his dad rather suddenly. It made him stop and think, so he wanted to call and assure me of his love even though we disagree. We get these wake up calls occasionally that remind us we are all terminal. It is not a matter of "if," but "when".

The good news is this life is not all there is. Jesus Christ came to die for our sins upon the cross, so that we could be forgiven. Three days later he conquered death by his resurrection so that he could give us the gift of eternal life. This series of messages is not primarily about life after death. The good news is that Jesus not only came to give us eternal life, he came to give us abundant life right now! Jesus said: "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10). The word "abundant" means "overflowing." The Living Translation of this verse says: "My purpose is to give you life in all its fullness."

For many us of our lives are "filled" but not "full." Our days are filled with activity and busyness. We feel overwhelmed and overloaded. We run fast, but we can't outrun the emptiness gnawing inside us. We wonder: "Is this all there is?" During the next 30 days, I hope we can focus our lives on the things that really matter. The things that will help us to experience fullness in our lives.

First of all we need to live with a sense of urgency. In our scripture from Romans 13, Paul says, "Another reason for right living is that you know how late it is; time is running out." (NLT) Even though we know we have limited time on this earth, we live like

we will be here forever. A survey asked college students: “If you could know the exact date of your death, would you want to know?” 87 percent said “No.” What would say—would you want to know the exact date of your death? Most of us would prefer not to—we prefer to live like we are not dying.

Maybe we do not want to know the exact date, but all of us need to face the reality that someday we will die. Without that realization we may get near the end of our lives and wonder what happened? So many unfulfilled dreams, so many lost opportunities, so much left undone, so many regrets.

Perhaps the most dangerous word in the English language is “someday.” Someday I’ll make things right with my mom. Someday I’ll take that trip. Someday I’ll have more time for the kids. Someday I’ll talk to my friend about Jesus. Why don’t you fill in the blank: Someday I’ll _____. What is something that you hope to do someday? “Someday” never comes unless we start taking steps today to make it happen.

The “Los Angeles Times” reported about a man who returned to the house where he grew up. He’d been away for 20 years. He goes into the attic and finds his old jacket. It had been there over 20 years. He puts it on—it must have shrunk in the attic! He reached in the pocket and pulled out a receipt for a pair of shoes he had taken to be repaired 20 years ago and forgot to pick up!

On a whim, he goes to where the shoe repair shop was located in his old neighborhood, and it’s still there. The same guy is still working at the shop. He hands the guy behind the counter his receipt. The man goes back to the work area and returns to the counter and says: “They’ll be ready Friday.”

For many of us “someday” never arrives. Living with a sense of urgency does not mean living faster or busier lives. Frantic does not equal urgent. To live with a sense of urgency means to live with an awareness that you are not promised “some day.”

Living with a sense of urgency means “embracing” today. It is to seize the gift of today—to live in the moment. What if we lived next week as “no regret week?” What if we embraced each day as a gift? What if we did not take life for granted this week? What if we did not take the people in our lives for granted this week? How would it feel to live each day fully engaged in the moment?

This past week was one of those where I felt overwhelmed with activity. At the end of each day I felt more and more behind. I did not see how I was ever going to catch up, much less get ahead so I could look ahead. Looking at my calendar for next week does not give me much hope that things are going to improve. It will take me some time to purge my calendar of busyness so that I can place on it those things that will bring fullness and allow me to embrace today. I am preaching this series of messages for my benefit! My calendar has gotten out of control. So I will start this week with a plan to look ahead on my calendar for the next 30 days and see what is there that really matters and take off some of the other stuff. What is one thing you will do to begin to give yourself space to embrace each day as a gift?

Second, live with a sense of eternity. In Romans 13 Paul says “Wake up, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here.” As much as it is to take today for granted, it is an even bigger mistake to take eternity for granted. Most of us are so consumed with pursuing the good life here and now that eternity rarely crosses our minds.

Paul reminds us that while we ought to live with a sense of urgency in this life, this world isn't our home. The Bible calls us pilgrims, wanderers and nomads on this planet.

As Winston Churchill was nearing the time of his death, he made plans for his funeral. He asked to be laid in state in the heart of London at St. Paul's Cathedral. He requested that his casket be placed under the massive dome in the center of the

Cathedral. Churchill requested that two trumpeters be stationed on opposite sides of the balcony that circles the dome. At the close of the service he wanted the trumpeter on one side to play taps. When he finished the trumpeter on the other side was to play reveille, the wake up call. What a beautiful picture of the reality that when we are laid to rest after this life, we awaken to a life in eternity.

We are wanderers in this life. Heaven is our home. Every day we are one day closer to home. When we live with a sense of eternity, it loosens our grip on the things of this world. We see the futility of always living for more stuff. "Turn you eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

To live like we were dying means to live with a sense of urgency and a sense of eternity. It also means to live with a sense of priority. If you really had a month to live, how would your priorities change? When we live with one eye on eternity and one eye on the gift of today, then we can begin to prioritize our lives.

Earlier in this message I quoted John 10:10 where Jesus said he came to give us abundant life. I only quoted the last half of the verse. The first part says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." What are the thieves that have robbed you of abundant life? Is it the distractions, the busyness, the misplaced priorities? In Romans 13, Paul encourages us to "put aside the deeds of darkness." We need to put aside our frantic pace of life. Hurry is the enemy of the abundant life. In our rush to accomplish and achieve and live life to the fullest, we rob ourselves of some of life's richest moments. The badge of busyness is one that we wear with honor, but in reality it is a curse to the health of our bodies and our souls and our relationships. Our worth is determined by how busy we are. It is a state of mind and soul. I have a hurried spirit.

If we knew we were dying, I have a hunch we would not speed up, but rather we would slow down. We would put aside some of the things that clutter our lives. We would slow down to enjoy, savor those things that really matter.

We cannot follow Jesus at a sprint. Speed is the enemy of intimacy, both intimacy with God and the people we love. What is robbing time and life from you? In order to live like we are dying, we have to ruthlessly eliminate the unimportant.

Put aside the busyness and put on more time for relationships. That is where focusing on the eternal helps us to embrace today. Relationships are eternal. Our relationship with God is eternal. Our relationships with others are eternal. If you are going to focus your life on the things that last it will be your relationship with God and others.

If I knew I was dying, I would make time each day for some longer and deeper conversations with people I love. There are some things I would want to make sure didn't go unsaid. Who do you need to get with this week for an unhurried conversation? What can you put aside to make sure that happens?

To live like you were dying is the most liberating way to live. You are free to put aside stuff that does not matter. You are free to choose things that will make your life more full—and abundant life overflowing with joy and peace. What is one thing you will do this week to live like you were dying?