

Date: September 13, 2009

Title: Live Like You Were Dying

Scripture: Romans 13:11-12

Romans 13:11-12 (NLT) ¹¹ This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living.

Well, the Sunday has finally come to pass. Today, we are beginning our “Live Like You Were Dying” series. Let me tell you that this next 30 days might be the best 30 days of your life. It is quite possible that this experience will change your life as you begin to consider your life, your priorities, your future, etc. But in order to get the most out of this series I hope you will consider making a commitment to thoroughly apply yourself to growing your faith for the next 4 weeks as we continue with this campaign. The 5 things I’m encouraging you to commit to are:

1. Attend all five of the sermons in this series. Normally, you just show up not knowing what I’m going to preach about, but for the next four weeks you will know that I am going to do my best to present the concepts and ideas that live like you were dying contains.
2. Get into a small group. Sometimes we think that we can live our Christian lives alone and isolated, but God said right there in Genesis that it is not good for human beings to be alone. Getting into a small group will help flesh out the ideas in the series and it will give you an opportunity to share your life with other Christians; supporting and getting support as you go.
3. Read the daily reading found in the participant’s guide. This is just one more way to keep the ideas fresh in your mind and allow the Holy Spirit to be active in your life.
4. Carry with you and recite often the scripture cards for the week. Like reading the segments in the participant’s guide, this will keep the ideas fresh in your mind so that you can make the kind of deep consideration that often goes along with significant spiritual growth.
5. The fifth thing is a little less tangible, but just as important and maybe the hardest one of all. Be open to the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit in your life. Expect God to speak to you. Be willing to allow yourself to grow and change.

Now, I know that many of you have filled out the commitment cards and are all set to join a group, but there are probably still a few of you who are not sure you want to jump in. It's only 4 weeks and it might be the most important four weeks of your life.

In your bulletin are the words to the song, "Live Like You Were Dying." We are going to listen to the song and watch a video later in the service, but for now I want to call your attention to the words that are printed in your bulletin. If you are not familiar with the story of the song, it is about a man who gets the results from his doctor that let him know that he only has a short time to live. When the narrator in the song asks the question, "What'd you do?" We get the list of all the things the man did once he knew he was dying.

Now, I want to ask a kind of a silly question: How many of you know you are dying? I know that is a silly question because every one of us knows that we are dying. I mean we might not know that our death is eminent, but the death rate in our congregation is 100%. We can get a deferment for a little while, but none of us can get a permanent exemption. We are all going to die eventually, most of us are blessed not to know how soon, so we can put it off in our minds and pretend that it might not happen... but it will happen eventually. It will be a sad day for all of us when you pass on, but we all know that it is going to happen.

This is why the message that Jesus came to deliver to us is so incredible. Essentially when the disciples found Jesus' tomb empty and when Thomas put his fingers in Jesus' wounds all of humanity received a message that even though our physical life is sure to end, our spiritual life can continue with Jesus Christ into eternity. But that eternal life doesn't just start when we leave this life, it is possible right now. Jesus came to let us know that life can be full of love and hope and enjoyment and purpose; what Jesus called in John 10:10 'abundant life.' The message translates it this way: **John 10:10 (MSG)** "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of."

So, let me ask you this: What would your life look like if it was full and abundant? I know that for many of you life is plenty full. In fact it might feel like it is too full of running and doing, and still there is an emptiness in your soul that all the busyness never seems to fill. My prayer for you is that these next thirty days will open your life to the abundance that God has wanted to give you for years.

So, let's start these thirty days with a short passage of Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul is trying to encourage these early Christians that this Christian life that they had just pledged to live had an importance and urgency about it. There are two challenges we find in Paul's words, so let's look at them now:

1. Live with a sense of urgency 2. Live with a sense of priority

First, let's look at the challenge to *live with a sense of urgency*. Paul is trying to encourage his fellow believers that the hour is later than they think. Paul says: It's late! Time is running out! The night is almost gone!

I think that the reason Paul's words are so urgent is because we spend so much of our lives pretending that we are immortal. Intellectually, we realize that death is just around the corner, but emotionally, we spend most of our lives in a state of denial. We somehow manage to lull ourselves into a state of self-deceit where we tell ourselves there will be time tomorrow to do those really important things. I wonder how many people take their last breath regretting what they have left unsaid, undone, or unspoken. I have heard it said that the most dangerous word in the English language is 'someday.' Some day I'll take that class I've always wanted to take. Someday I'll get right with my family members. Someday, I'll spend time with my loved ones. Do you have a someday list? I'm not really talking about the things you might never be able to afford or achieve because you're not gifted in that area, I'm talking about the things that could really happen if you would take the time and effort to make them happen.

PROCRASTINATION??

Now, let me clarify something. Living with a sense of urgency does not mean faster or busier. Frantic does not equal urgent. Living with urgency simply means that we live with the reality that none of us are promised "Someday." You can wear your seatbelt every time you get in a car, you can eat right, you can exercise; do all the things within your power to sustain your life, and still the only guarantee is that life on this earth in this body is temporary.

The point of all this is that our future is uncertain, our past is gone; all we really ever have is the present. In Matthew 6:27-30 Jesus urges us to live in the present because to worry about the past or the future is to worry

about something over which we have very little control and no guarantees. Psalm 118:24 says, “This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it!” (NLT)

So the first challenge of this series is to embrace today. It is to seize the gift of this day and live gratefully in the moment. Let’s make a commitment today to live for the next seven days with no regrets. Let’s see what it feels like to live one moment at a time not worrying about what is going to happen, rather just thanking God for this moment as it is right now. Wouldn’t it be great if next week when we have our time of witness if every hand went up to share how God had been at work in the everyday moments of our lives. Wouldn’t it be great if every person was able to share how they saw God at work in their lives because they were focused on the *now* and not distracted by the *what may come* or upset by *what should have been*.

This may seem like we are letting go of all good sense, throwing all care to the wind as if we were guaranteed not to live another day. But this is not the case. You see, living like you were dying isn’t giving up to the inevitability of death it is embracing the power of life lived fully even with its obvious and sometimes frustrating uncertainty. You see, the truth is that you may live only one more day, but just as true is that you may live to be 100. So, *living like you were dying* is a way of putting a magnifying glass on your life so you can be intentional about how you choose to spend your time.

The second challenge in our scripture is ‘to live with a sense of priority.’ If you only had 30 days to live, do you think that you might focus your attention a little differently than if you were still living with the illusion that you will live forever? What we are trying to do through this campaign is to rouse ourselves from the illusion that this life will go on forever and that there will always be a tomorrow...so we can intentionally prioritize how we are going to live each moment. It’s not so much that we want to ignore the future; living like there is no future, what we are saying is that we want to live our lives based on our eternal future. Living with a sense of priority simply means we are making intentional choices with our precious time.

In our scripture for this morning the Apostle Paul tells us to remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. What a wonderful word picture. Those of you who have ever worn a set of coveralls to do a really dirty job know how great it feels to finally remove

your dirty coveralls after getting all grubby and dirty. Paul is telling us to choose, or prioritize what we do with our time according to God's plan for our lives rather than our own self-serving desires. When we remove our own soiled and selfish priorities and instead put on the life giving – life saving priorities of God, we live the life for which we were created.

But putting on a new set of clothes does require some adjustment. It requires a decision and effort and it won't happen by accident. It requires prayer and concentration and a lot of motivation. Motivation like: What if you only had 30 days to live.

Now, Paul tells us to take off the dirty coveralls of sin, but he doesn't go into a lot of specifics. So, I want to offer just a few possible areas that you might want to consider as you think about the priorities of your life.

You might want to consider taking off the frantic pace of life. Hurry does crazy things to our minds. For one thing, it reduces life to just bear essentials. How many of you watch NASCAR? Ok, for those of you who don't it is really fast cars going round and round in a circle for long periods of time. These cars are going close to 200 miles an hour at times. When the drivers are going this fast, they cannot afford to notice anything but what is right in front of them. I mean, there is no way you would expect one of the drivers to notice the scar on the cheek of a man sitting up about 5 rows in the south stands, right? They are simply going too fast to notice anything but their driving. I know this is extreme, but usually, the faster you go, the less you will be able to see going on around you.

That is what happens when we live our lives at breakneck speed. We lose the ability to see the simple yet important things happening in our lives. Busyness is given high marks in our country and sometimes taking time to enjoy life is seen as lazy or unproductive, but without rest, our bodies and our lives become tired and worn out. There is a reason our scriptures command us to keep the Sabbath. Our bodies and our spirits need to take some time to let life happen. Psalm 46:10 says, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Sabbath is a time to rest and let the voice of God speak to you.

So, how about this week you try a slower approach. Walk somewhere when you might ordinarily drive. Or leave your watch at home on the day you don't work. Find a place in your home or yard or even in your neighborhood to just sit for a few minutes and listen for God's voice. You might be surprised to hear what God has to say when you really listen.

Another set of soiled clothes you might want to consider removing is a **Frantic pursuit of the 'good life.'** Now, I say the pursuit of the good life because often times in the pursuit, we lose track of what we are pursuing. We think that we will be so happy after we get (*you fill in the blank.*) So once we get that house, or boat, or car, or computer it isn't long before that item meant to deliver the good life is no longer delivering and another desire takes over. Once that one is achieved, another takes its place and the pace to acquire continues while the precious minutes and hours and days become months and years and decades that slip away forever into the past. Gone! Just Gone!

When we take off the **Frantic Pace and Pursuit** suits, we might just find that there is time to put on what Paul calls thee **"shining armor of right living."** Right living isn't just acting perfect and making no mistakes like a robot, it is living life intentionally the way God designed us with more *time for relationships* and the important things that make life worth living. Wouldn't it be just grand if when you set aside all the stress and struggle that comes from the frantic pursuit of stuff, you found that the good life is really not about all that stuff? Wouldn't it be great to discover what we really all know anyway, that life is not about our status nor our stuff, but about the people and the Lord we love.

For the next 30 days, we all have a chance to take the magnifying glass of mortality and focus in on what is really important; to see what it might be like to "Live Like You Were Dying." Our song says, I hope someday you might get the chance to live like you were dying. The chance is here... its here for all of us.

I want to play a video for you now. The music is the song "Live Like You Were Dying" and the movie clips are from the movie The Bucket List. Today, I'm going to let this video take the place of our closing hymn.