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Part: 1

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“One Month to Live” Part 1 – Living the Dash

I don’t think any place echoes with eternity quite like a cemetery. At my last church, we used to live right next door to the church graveyard, and some of the old gravestones and the lives they represented were fascinating.

The dates on some of the oldest ones there in Birdwood went back to the late eighteen hundreds, and I know that people back then had the same problems and pain as everyone does in life, but I always wondered if they felt as stressed or as pressured as I do. Our technology and modern conveniences have revolutionised the way that we live, but at what price.

And looking at old headstones and graves, you can’t help but recognise that entire lives can be reduced to just two dates and a little dash. Some of them have bible verses or other facts or saying, but each person’s life really comes down to what transpired between those two dates. It comes down to the dash.

I look at the dash of a particular person’s headstone and wonder, what did they live for? What did they love? What were their passions and dreams? What were their biggest mistakes and greatest regrets?

When you think about it, we really don’t have control over many things in life. We didn’t get to decide where we were born, who our parents are, or which time period and culture we face.

We don’t get to decide the dates on our headstone either. We don’t know when our time on this earth will be up. It could be next week or next year or I pray, decades away. Only God knows. Our lives are in His hands. But there is one thing we have a vast amount of control over. We get to decide how we’re going to use our dash.

Each of you get to choose how to spend that little dash of time between the two dates of your earthly existence. What are you spending yours on? Are you living the dash, knowing fully who you are and why you’re here? Or are you dashing to live, hurriedly spending precious time chasing things that don’t really matter to you.

Today we are in our brand new church-wide campaign, a spiritual growth campaign that I know many of you have already joined up to, and I pray even more of you will today and it’s called ‘One Month to Live’ and it is 30 days to a no-regrets life.

As a pastor you often get the privilege to minister to people in the last months and the last days of their lives, and they often have a few common characteristics. You see when people know they only have a few months, or a few weeks to live, they often have amazing clarity about how they will spend their time. They focus on relationships, saying the things they had always wanted to say. They forgive and ask for forgiveness. They didn’t waste so much time of insignificant daily routines, but made the most of what time they have left.

If you too knew that you had one month to live, your life too would be radically transformed. But why is it that we wait until we’re diagnosed with cancer or we lose someone we love before we accept this knowledge and allow it to free us? Don’t you want all that our life has to offer? Don’t you want to fulfil the purpose for which you were created? Wouldn’t life be a lot more satisfying if we lived this way?

Throughout this series, both Pastor Milton and myself, along with the author’s of the book and small group series, Chris and Kerry Shook will challenge you to live as though you only had one month to live. Not because we know something your doctors haven’t told you, as I said before, I pray you each will live for more than the next thirty days. But the point is if you live the next thirty days as if they were your last then you’ll know how to really live.
When we think about the life of Jesus, he knew when he had thirty days left as he led to the cross. And what did he do when He had one month to live? From his life we will discover four principles that will enable you to really live your dash instead of just dashing to live.

And they are that he lived passionately, loved completely, learned humbly and he left boldly.

That is exactly why Jesus came. He said to us: I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10) This is the way Christ lived His life on earth.

And the first principle that we are going to look at if you are taking notes on your bulletin handout this morning is that Jesus LIVED PASSIONATELY. We read earlier that we might have it (life) to the full (John 10:10)

Maybe you aren’t feeling like you have life to the full right now. Maybe right now your life stinks or maybe your life is going really well. God wants you to live the full life where you are fully who He made you to be. Where you are more of you than you have ever been.

And he says that we can live this full life now. The Bible says: And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11-12).

You can live, but to live passionately, this is saying, you need to have the Son of God. I believe the next 6 weeks could be the greatest adventure, great experience of spiritual growth, the greatest opportunity of blessing in your life, the greatest chance to impact the lives of others from your life. But it comes down to the choice you make to live the life that you were made for.

How many of you say that ‘someday I’ll live’? Some day when things settle down, or some day when I get that promotion and making more money. Friends, when are you going to wake up and realise this is life, and you are stuck in someday syndrome. You are already living. Don’t wait until someday, because life moves fast, and you are each still breathing… I hope, and so you have to take advantage of the live God has given you.

Each day is precious. So we had better start making the choices to live because life is painful and life is beautiful all at the same time. This is your life. Stop constantly waiting to live and start living, living the life that you were made to live.

Let’s look at scripture, and one of Jesus stories about His generation. He says: To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are the like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.” Jesus is saying we played the music of life for you, but you didn’t dance and didn’t enjoy life. You were always waiting to live, stuck in the someday syndrome.

Then when the pain and the problems came your way you didn’t cry, you didn’t experience life, you tried to avoid all risk at all costs. You didn’t live. I put you on this earth and gave you the most sacred gift of all, the gift of life, and you didn’t use it.

We often vastly overestimate the power of tomorrow and we get stuck in the someday syndrome. Then we vastly overestimate the power of yesterday and we get stuck in our guilt and past regrets.

Someone, for years kept a sign on his desk that simply said “yesterday ended last night”, and it reminds him of no matter how badly I failed in the past, it’s done and today is a new day. No matter what goals I’ve accomplished, they have little direct impact on what I do today.
So choose to start living passionately. The greatest risk is not risking or not living. The second greatest risk is loving. We each were made by God to love, and we see this is Jesus who if you are taking notes LOVED COMPLETELY.

When Jesus had just a short time left with his disciples the Bible says: Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (John 13:1)

If you knew you only had one month to live, you would want to do the same thing. You would want to love completely. You would say the things you’ve always wanted to say and do the things you’ve always wanted to do. You would focus on relationships and express you love to those closest to you.

It sounds real simple, but it’s quite profound. The reason you are placed on this earth is to love, and you are never truly living until you’re loving. Jesus summed up the entire Bible in a couple of verses in Matthew where he said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

It is saying love God first and love others like yourself, because at the end of your life it won’t matter how much money is in your bank account. It won’t matter how many awards you’ve won, goals you’ve achieved, all that will matter is did you love? Did you love the people in your life? Did you love God with all your heart?

What if you knew you only had one month left to live? How would you live your life? How would you change the way you are living now? Live as though this month is your last, and you will learn how to really live. Scripture says: Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8) If you love completely, you will not fail. If you want to succeed in life, let love be your primary motivation because love never fails.

Each day ask yourself, “Why am I doing this today?” And each time answer it because I love God and I love people, I cannot fail. Is your life motivated by love? Who do you need to tell today that you love them? All the flowers in the world at their funeral won’t mean a thing, if you need to show someone today that you love them, show them. Love is not love until you give it away. God placed you on this earth to love and you’ll never truly live until you love.

Jesus showed His disciples the full extent of His love by doing something simple. He washed their feet. In this One Month to Live Challenge, I want to challenge you to think about the simple little things that can make a big difference. A minor change can make a major difference in letting someone know you really love them.

The third principle is that we were made to learn, and we learn that from Jesus, who if you are taking notes, we know LEARNED HUMBLY. Even though Jesus was God, He taught us by His own example how to learn humbly. In Philippians the Bible says: Have the same mindset at Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, and being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus learned humbly even though He was God. He could have remained in heaven with all of its splendour in all of His glory as God himself, yet He humbled himself and became a man, taking on the very nature of a servant and became obedient unto death on a cross, what an example to us of humility.

And this verse challenges us to be the same as Christ. You were made to learn to be more like Christ. You were made to become more like Him. I’m talking about character building. You can’t take possessions with
you to heaven, but you can take your character, and earth is the preparation ground where God is building our character to be make us more like Himself, readying us for eternity.

And there are really only two things that will build your character. The first is God’s Word, really digging into it, and putting it into your life. And in doing so, it will change your life, and you’ll become more like Him.

The second thing that builds my character is my problems. I like God’s Word a whole lot better than problems. One thing that I’ve noticed, and if you can check with me here. If you have a pulse, just check if you have one. If you have a pulse, you’re going to have problems. You have painful things that are going on in your life right now. But the good news is that those problems can’t stop God’s plan for you.

God wants to use those problems to make you more like His Son, to build your character. So during those problems, keep turning to God and ask Him to take you through the problem to build you and make you more like Jesus.

In Proverbs we read: Remember the Lord in all you do, and he will give you success (Proverbs 3:6 NCV). How many of you want to be successful? Would raise your hands if you want to be successful. It’s a good desire, but the word for success here, doesn’t mean what we think of when we think of success.

It means to make wise decisions. That’s what you need more than anything else, because everything comes out of that ability to make wise decisions. Each of us have also made bad decisions though, but God says, if you’ll remember Him in all you do, He’ll give you the ability to make wise decisions.

How do you put God first, how do you remember Him? I encourage you to follow along this kind of daily and weekly agenda to help keep your priorities in line.

You can put God first by giving Him the first DAY OF EVERY WEEK. Sunday morning. Give God a bit over an hour of all the hours in your week. Make it a priority. It helps you re-calibrate your life and your priorites when you give God the first day, he blesses the rest.

Then give God the First PART OF EVERY DAY. Spend some time each day with God by reading His word, writing down what you’ve learnt, over the next 30 days you could be spending time with God reading your One Month to Live devotional books, but by doing it you will find God blessing the rest of your day.

Then give God the First PORTION OF INCOME. Put God first, give back to Him the first part of all that He has given to you, because if God’s not first in your finances, then he’s not first in your life.

Then give God the First CONSIDERATION OF EVERY DECISION. Have you ever bought a car without praying about it? It probably turned out to be a lemon. But seriously, God wants you to pray about all the things going on in your life. He wants you to pray about your business, your family, your relationship. Ask God to give you the wisdom to make the right decisions, and put God first in your life.

So not only are you made to live passionately, love completely and learn humbly, but you were also made to leave boldly. Because that is also what Jesus did if you are taking notes. He also LEFT BOLDLY.

He was resolute in his mission on earth, he knew why he was here, and we read in the Bible: As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51) There was no hesitation or reservation with Jesus. He was resolute in fulfilling the purpose for which He came.

If you knew you only had one month to live, you would be resolved to finalise your purpose. You wouldn’t waste time or energy on things that didn’t really matter, but you would look for ways to leave a lasting legacy. You would prepare for eternity, because we were made for eternity.
But one of the greatest burdens that keeps us from leaving a legacy is trying to please everyone else, trying to live our lives for their approval. We read in scripture: “His master replied, ‘well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” (Matthew 25:23)

A lot of people will tell you how to live your life, but at the end, only one opinion matters, and that is the Audience of One – God our Heavenly Father. At the end of the day, he’s not going to look at you and say why weren’t you more like Pastor Ben, he’s going to say why weren’t you more of who I made you to be?

So, who are you playing for? Are you playing for toys, for possessions? What are you playing for? Are you playing for pleasure? Are you playing for pats on the back? Are you playing so that people can say you’re a good guy? Who are you playing for? The only one that really matters is the One who created you, saved you, and set you free.

And I want to just challenge you if you haven’t already to take the One Month to Live challenge. This was just the introduction, and there is still a few days to join. If you haven’t already, fill out a sign-up form at the back of the church, or go online to www.omtl.ilp.org.au to sign up.

I believe that God will bless you as you live as though you only had one month to live. Not because you might die soon, but because we want to live as God has created us to, living passionately, loving completely, learning humbly and leaving boldly.