

# **Spiritual Growth Campaign**

## **Living the Dash**

### **Part 1 of series: One Month to Live**

#### Introduction

Perhaps no place echoes with eternity quite like a cemetery. Not surprisingly, I'm fascinated by old gravestones and the lives they represent.

The dates on some of the old monuments and grave markers in the Pittsburg Pa. area where I lived go back to the eighteen hundreds. My imagination launches me into the various stories the markers tell. I find myself pondering what life was like in the 1800's or early 1900's. I know people back then had the same problems and pain as everyone does in life, but I wonder if they felt as stressed and pressured as I do.

Our technology and modern conveniences have revolutionized our twenty-first century lives but at what price?

Looking at old tombstones, I can't help but recognize that entire lives are now reduced before me to two dates and one little dash. Some monuments include facts or sayings, Bible verses or touching memorials, but each person's life really comes down to what transpired between those two dates. It comes down to what's in the dash. I look at the dash of a particular person's marker and wonder,...

*What did he live for?*

*Whom did she love?*

*What were his passions and dreams?*

*What were her biggest mistakes and greatest regrets?*

When you think about it, we 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 gravestone. We don't know when our time on this earth will be up. It could be next week or next year or 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.

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 dashing to live, hurriedly spending precious time chasing things that really don't matter to you?

We're starting a new series today, a spiritual growth campaign; we're calling One Month To Live – 30 Days to a No-Regrets Life.

As a pastor for over thirty eight years now I have had the privilege to minister to many people in the last months and days of their lives. I noticed some common characteristics in each one. When they knew they only had a few months or weeks to live they had an amazing clarity about how they would spend their time. They focused on their relationships, saying the things they had always wanted to say. They forgave and ask for forgiveness. They didn't waste time on insignificant daily routines but made the absolute most of their time left.

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

In this series we are going to be challenged to live life as though we only had one month to live. That's what this series will be all about. I want to challenge you to live the next 30 days as if they were your last – not because you're going to die in a month, Lord willing you are going to live many, many more months and years.

The point is if you live the next 30 days as if they were your last then you'll know how to really live! Over the next several weeks together we will discover four universal principles that will transform the question, "*What would you do if you had one month to live*", into an amazing lifestyle of meaning and purpose. These four universal principles can be seen in the life of Christ. Think about it.

Jesus knew when you had 30 days until the cross. What did He do when He knew He had one month to live? From His life we discover four universal principles that will enable us to really live our dash instead of just dashing to live.

He lived passionately,  
He loved completely,  
He learned humbly and  
He left boldly.

That's why He came. Look at what He said in John 10:10. "*I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.*" (Msg.)

This was the way Christ lived His life on earth. He showed us four universal principles to live the life God made us for.

## **PRINCIPLE 1: JESUS LIVED PASSIONATELY.**

Would you underline the phrase *better life in your outlines that I put in the bulletins*? Maybe right now your life stinks or maybe your life is really good right now. God wants you to live the *better life* where you are fully who He made you to be. Where you are more of you than you have ever been. Where you are living the life that God has called

you to. It's the better life. God lays it out there for you. He says I have the better life for you than you can even imagine. You can experience that life now!

1 John 5:11-12 tell us how. *"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."*

John was sort of like Howie Mandell here in Deal or No Deal. He says the choice is yours and it's a pretty clear cut choice. Life or Death -- Deal or No Deal. He says you can live your life the way you were made to live. You can be fully alive. You can really live and not just exist, but to live passionately you must have the Son of God! Deal or No Deal.

I believe that this campaign can be the greatest adventure of your life.

The greatest experience of spiritual growth in your life.

The greatest opportunity of blessing in your life.

The greatest chance to impact the lives of others from your life.

I believe this can be the greatest decision of your life, but it really comes down to the choice you make to live the life that you were made for. But then Satan acts as the banker of the game show of life and he calls in and he doesn't say that's a bad deal God offers you. He offers you the better life. Don't take that. Take my offer, the miserable life. That would be an easy choice.

He says you know, God's offer is really pretty good. He does offer you the better life and you really ought to take it, just not today. Do that some day.

Maybe you are thinking about becoming a believer, committing your life to Christ and you think, yeah, that's what I need to do. Commit my life to Christ and Satan will say you should, you should really commit your life to Christ, but not today, some day. Some day down the road. Some day you should commit your life to Christ, just not today, it's not a good day for you.

Or maybe you are a believer and you're really thinking about totally surrendering everything to the Lord, really living all out for Him. Really giving Him your complete self, risking it all for Him. Getting really involved in the church. Getting really involved in the work of God.

You think I really need to do that and Satan says you really should, but not today. It's not a good time for you. It's a busy time in your life right now. Maybe some day when things settle down a little bit.

God's favorite word is today. Satan's favorite word is some day.

We get stuck in what I call the someday syndrome. We say... some day when things settle down I'll really live for God. Some day when this problem gets out of my life then we'll really be happy. Some day when work is not so busy I'll spend more time with the

kids. Some day when I get that promotion and I'm making more money then we'll really enjoy life. We get stuck in this some day syndrome.

Folks, when are we going to wake up and realize this is life? It's beautiful and wonderful and painful and frightening and exhilarating and awe-inspiring all at the same time. This is life. This is your life, but we are constantly waiting to live. We're constantly waiting to live. We think some day then I'll really live. No, this is all you're got -- Today. This is your life.

Life moves so fast. It's gone before you know it. It's a precious, sacred gift that God gives us and I said it - you're still breathing. You still have a chance. You're still breathing so you still have this sacred gift of life that God has given us, but you have to take advantage of it. You have to make the choices to take advantage of it.

Life moves so fast and it reminds me of that credit card commercial where the dad is pushing his little boy on the swing. He pushes him out and then when he comes back he's transformed into a 180- pound teenager that just clobbers his dad and just knocks him to the ground. Then it says life comes at you fast.

I can relate to that. My two children just turn 39 and 41 this month! Life comes at you fast.

Speaking of aging, I came across a comedian's take on aging that I really like. It says,..

"Do you realize that the only time in our lives when we like to get old is when we're kids. If you are less than ten years old you are so excited about aging that you think in fractions. How old are you? -- I'm four and a half. You are never  $36\frac{1}{2}$  . You are four and a half going on five.

That's the key. You get into your teens and now they can't hold you back. You jump to the next number, even a few ahead. How old are you? I'm going to be 16 and you could be 13, but hey you are going to be 16.

Then the greatest day of your life. You become 21. Even the words sound like a ceremony. You become 21.

Yes, but then you turn 30. Ooh, what happened there. Makes you sound like bad milk. He turned, we had to throw him out. There is no fun now, you just soured. What's wrong? What's changed?

You become 21. You turn 30 and then you are pushing 40. Whoa, put on the brakes. It's all slipping away.

Before you know it you reach 50 and your dreams are gone.

But wait, you make it to 60. You didn't think you would, but you make it.

So you become 21, turn 30, push 40, reach 50 and make it to 60.

You built up so much speed now that you hit 70. After that it's a day-to-day thing. You hit Wednesday.

You get into your 80's and every day is a complete cycle. You hit lunch. You turn 4:30. You reach bedtime. It doesn't end there.

Into the 90's you start going backwards. I was just 92 and then a strange thing happens if you make it over 100 you become a little kid again.

I'm 100½."

I hope everyone of us lives to be 100½, but even if you do, life moves so fast and the years just fly by.

We better understand that these years are precious. The day is precious and we 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.

I want you to look at a passage that really intrigues me that Jesus talked about in Luke 7:31 -32 He talked about His generation.

He says, *"To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute 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. You didn't enjoy life. You were always waiting to live. You were always 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.

Jesus is saying, "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."

You didn't live. You were always waiting to live.

We 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 our past regrets.

John Maxwell, for years, has kept a sign on his desk that simply says “yesterday ended last night.” He says 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.

The power of today. So first I start living. I have to choose to start living passionately. The greatest risk is not risking. Not living.

The second greatest risk is the second thing we’re going to talk about. You were made to love and the second greatest risk is loving.

## **PRINCIPLE TWO: JESUS LOVED COMPLETELY.**

Look at what Jesus did when He knew He had only a short time left with His disciples in John 13:1 (NIV) *“Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.”*

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 focus on your relationships and express your love to those closest to you.

It sounds real simple, but it’s profound.

The reason why you are placed on this earth is to love and you’re never living until you’re loving.

Jesus summed up the entire Bible in a couple of verses in Matthew 22:37-39, *“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 neighbor as yourself.”*

It’s saying love God first and love others like yourself. 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, it won’t matter how many 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? That’s the only thing that’s going to matter one day.

What if you knew this was going to be the last month you would be on this earth? 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 right now?

If you knew you only had one month left to live I think you would really focus on relationships. Your relationship with God and growing closer to Him, getting ready to meet God. Your family, your friends, making a lasting impact on the lives of others.

If you knew you only had one month left to live, how would you live your life? If you live your life this month as if this is the last month of your life you will have learned how to live. At the end of this month you will have learned how to live. I challenge you. Live your life this month as if it's your last. As if you have one month left to live.

Then at the end of this SERIES you'll know how to live because that's the way you should live.

If you live your life that way you'll be a huge success. Why?

1 Cor. 13:8 tells us. "*Love never fails ....*" That's why. If you love completely, you will not fail. If you want to succeed in your business let love be your primary motivation and your primary goal. You want to succeed in life?

Let love be your primary motivation because love never fails. You want to succeed in your family? Let love and loving your family be your primary goal. Love never fails.

If love is your goal. You cannot fail. You will not fail if love is your goal.

I ask myself why am I doing what I do? Why am I doing this? Because I love God and I love people. I cannot fail. – I - cannot - fail.

Why do you do what you do in your business? Why do you do what you do in your life? Is it motivated by love?

By the way, love is not a syrupy feeling. Love is an action. Love is a choice. Live your life out of love.

So, let me ask you. Who do you need to tell today that you love them? Do it today. All the flowers at their funeral won't mean a thing. Who is it today that you need to show that you love them? An act of love.

Love is an action. Who do you need to show love to? Love is not love until you give it away. Who do you need to give love away to today so it can become real? God placed you on this earth to love and you'll never live until you love.

Jesus showed His disciples the full extent of His love by doing something simple. He washed their feet.

In this challenge, I want 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.

Then I was made to learn. I want us to move to the third case. I was made to learn

### **PRINCIPLE 3: JESUS LEARNED HUMBLY.**

Even though Jesus was God He taught us by His own example how to learn humbly.

In Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV) the bible says, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

*but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!*"

Would you underline the phrase *He humbled Himself and became obedient to death*. The writer of Hebrews tells us that *Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered*. Jesus learned humbly though He was God. He could have remained in heaven with all of its splendor 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 of humility!

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. The only thing you can take with you to Heaven is your character. You can't take anything else with you, but you take your character into Heaven. This earth is a preparation ground where God is building our character to make us more like Himself, to get us ready for eternity.

There are only two things that build your character. Number one is God's Word, really digging into God's Word. It builds your character. I challenge you to spend time in God's Word, really dig into God's Word. I think it's so important for us to find a Bible reading plan and dig into it. Get in-depth into God's Word. Dig into God's Word. Put God's Word into your life.

There are only two things that will change your life. The books you read and the people you meet. You meet God and hang out with God and spend time with God and get into His Word and read His book, it will change your life. You'll become more like Him. You become more like the people you hang around so hang around God. Get into His Word.

The second thing that builds my character is problems. I like God's Word a whole lot better than problems. I don't know about you. I said that I believe that this One Month To Live Campaign is going to be the greatest blessing in your life ever, but I didn't say it would be problem-free.

Some of the greatest blessings in our lives are disguised as problems. Some of you are going through the most difficult problems you've ever gone through.

I find that life moves on two tracks. There are great things happening in my life and then there are tough and bad things happening in my life all at the same time. So everyone of you have problems.

If you have a pulse -- you have problems. Everyone of you have painful things going on in your life right now. But here's the good news. 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 for your own good, for my own good.

That's what God is doing. So keep turning to Him during the problems, during the pain and say God take this problem out of my life. God says, "No, I'm going to just take you through the problem." God change my circumstance and.. God says, "No, I'm going to change you instead."

That's so much better when God changes us to make us more like His Son. You allow God to work through your problems by turning to Him and you get into God's Word and this will be the greatest adventure you've ever had.

I want you to look at Proverbs 3:6. It's a great verse. It says, *"In everything you do, put God first, and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success."* Underline that word success.

How many of you want to be successful? Raise your hand. Yeah. It's a good desire, but I have to let you know this word for success in the Hebrew doesn't mean what we think success is. We think of success as monetary success, financial success.

That's not what this means. The word for success here in this passage in the Hebrew literally means the ability to make wise decisions.

That's what you need more than anything else. For everything comes out of that ability to make wise decisions. You are going to face some tough decisions in your life. You need the ability to make wise decisions in your business, in your family, in your relationships. You need the ability to make wise decisions in your life. It says here if you will put God first you can't go wrong. He won't let you go wrong.

Have you ever made a bad decision? Oh man, I've made some bad decisions. We've all made some bad decisions, but God says if I will put Him first He'll give me the ability to make wise decisions.

Here is a little formula for putting God first.

Give God The First Day of Every Week. Sunday morning. Give God two hours of all the hours of your week say God I'm going to put You first. Make it a priority. It helps me

recalibrate my life and my priorities and when I give God the first two hour He blesses all the other hours.

Then give God The First Part of Every Day. Spend 15 or 20 minutes with God every day reading God's Word, writing down what you learned, praying about what's coming up in your day. Sometimes I say God, I'm too busy today, but then I realize no, I have to spend time with God. When I do and put Him first in my day He just helps me get more done. He expands my day. He blesses the rest of my day.

Then give God The First Portion of My Income. Put God first. Give back the first part. That first 10% and tithe because if God's not first place in your finances He's not first place in your life.

Then give God The First Consideration of Every Decision. Have you ever bought a car without praying about it? It was a lemon, wasn't it? Yeah. God wants you to pray about every single thing that goes on in your life. He wants you to pray about everything., in your business, in your family, in your relationships. Pray about it.

I always pray God, help me not make a mess of things. Close this door on me if it's not the right door. God give me the wisdom to make the right decision here and God says you can't go wrong. I'll give you the ability to make wise decisions.

You were made to live passionately, you were made to love completely, you were made to learn humbly, but you were also made to leave boldly, so you have to make the choice right here and right now, today, to start leaving.

#### **PRINCIPLE 4: JESUS LEFT BOLDY.**

Not only did Jesus live passionately, love completely, learn humbly but He also left boldly. He was resolute in His mission on earth and knew why He was here.

I love the sense of urgency

I read in Luke 9:51 (NIV). It says, "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*"

There was no hesitation or reservation with Christ. He was resolute in fulfilling the purpose for which He came.

If you knew you only had 30 days to live you would be resolved to finalize 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.

This earth is not your home. You were made for eternity and the Bible says God placed eternity in our hearts.

Everyone of us knows that we were made for eternity deep down in our hearts. Even an Atheist knows deep down in their heart that they were made for eternity.

There is something that tells us there is more to life than just the here and now. We all realize that inherently. -- We were made to leave. We were made for eternity. We were also made to leave a legacy.

One of the greatest bearers that keeps us from leaving a legacy is trying to please everyone else. Trying to live our lives for everyone else's approval.

Look what this verse in Matthew 25:23 says. *"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!'"*

A lot of people tell you how to live your life, but at the end of your life there is only one opinion that matters.

That Audience of One – your Heavenly Father saying well done.

Saying hey, you lived the life you were made for. God is not going to look at you and say why weren't you more like Pastor Tom?

He's not going to look at you and say why weren't you more like Billy Graham? You should have been like Billy Graham. God's not going to look at you and say why weren't you more like this guy or that gal?

He's going to say why weren't you more of who I made you to be? Why weren't you more of you? Why didn't you live the life I made you to live?

What I want God to say more than anything is well done. Tom, you sure didn't have it all together and you made a lot of mistakes, but you were fully you. You were fully who I made you to be and that gave me pleasure. Well done good and faithful servant.

I heard the story about a high school football player who was the second string linebacker and hardly ever played. He only played on the kick-off team and then he would play when his team got way ahead, they would send him in with the scrubs.

But it was the last game of his senior year and he stormed into the coaches' office and he had this sense of urgency about him. He said, "Coach, you've got to let me start. You've just got to let me start. You've got to let me start tonight." The coach said, "I can't make any promises."

You see this boy didn't play a whole lot, but his dad was like most other dads, he came to every game. He was there no matter what even if his son played little or none he was always there rooting and cheering his son on.

He was like most dads in that way, but he was unlike most dads in that he was blind.

Every though his son didn't play a lot, he never saw him play, but he was always there to cheer for him. He was always there and his presence was always felt even though he was blind.

But this young man begged and begged and begged the coach until finally right before the game the coach said, "Okay, I'll let you play the first series."

Well, that young man went in and he was fired up to play. They handed it off to the fullback and bam he just slammed that fullback behind the line of scrimmage and stopped the play. The very next play the quarterback went back to pass and this young linebacker blitzed and sacked the quarterback.

He played the rest of the game. He ended up with over 20 tackles and at the end of the game as he came running off the field the coach grabbed him by the helmet and he said, "Son, what got into you?"

He said that's one of the greatest games I've ever seen a high school linebacker play. I don't get it. What happened?" He said, "Well, coach, you know my dad who comes to every game and he's blind?" The coach said, "Yeah, I know who your dad is. Yeah, I know all about that." He said, "Well, my dad died last night and this is the first game he's ever seen me play. That's why I had to play."

He said, "I was playing for him. I was playing for him and it made all the difference."

So, who are you playing for? Are you playing for toys, for possessions?

Who are you playing for? 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 made you, the coach who made you and who put you in the game. Your Heavenly Father.

He's the only One that really matters and Him saying well done.

You're never really ready to live until you are ready to leave so let me ask you. Are you ready to leave?

If you knew you were going to die tonight do you know you'd go to Heaven? Are you ready to leave?

I hope you'll trust Christ if you haven't. Not because you might die tonight, but because you'll probably wake up in the morning and you'll need God.

We need God desperately every day.

Closing Prayer with challenge to trust Christ.