Series: Live Like You Were Dying
Message: Leave A Legacy

Opening Song: “Don’t Blink”

Service Setup—Roger

I am very intrigued by old cemeteries. I find it fascinating and thought-provoking to read the epitaphs on tombstones. Epitaphs are a kind of “parting words” left on behalf of the person who died. Sometimes they are chosen/written by the person who died, and sometimes they are written by a family member. I am very interested in epitaphs. Some are funny:

Mel Blanc (for years the cartoon voice of Porky Pig) “That’s All Folks!”
Jeremiah Johnson: “I told you I was sick.”

Some express a tribute:
George Washington Carver: "He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."
Others will have words about a loving father or caring mother or a brave soldier.

Some are ironic:
Clyde Barrow: 1909-1934 “Gone but not forgotten” True. Bonnie and Clyde

Some epitaphs express an emotion or passion of the deceased:
Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty I'm Free At Last."

Finally, some epitaphs express a word of advice, which I always find interesting.
Last year, Joy and I were walking through a cemetery in Mystic, CT, and we came upon this tombstone. (Show picture.) It reads:

Amos C. Bogue  June 9, 1883-Dec. 24, 1915
“Consider friends as you pass by, As you stand once did I, As I am you soon shall be, Prepare for death and follow me.”

I’ll paraphrase his words: “Live Like You Were Dying.” One day, you will die. What will remain behind are the memories people have, the way you shaped people’s lives, and the things you built. These make up your legacy. When you die, how do you want to be remembered? For that to happen, you must live a certain way today. That’s today’s theme: Leave a legacy.

Prayer

Songs: I Am Free; Holy, Holy, Holy; Agnus Dei; Give Me Jesus; Amazing Grace

Message
We opened the service today with the song: “Don’t blink.” The lyrics pierce my heart: “Just like that you're six years old and you take a nap and you Wake up and you're twenty-five and your high school sweetheart becomes your wife. Don't blink You just might miss your babies growing like mine did Turning into moms and dads next thing you know your "better half" Of fifty years is there in bed And you're praying God takes you instead Trust me friend a hundred years goes faster than you think So don't blink.”

The Bible has its own version of that song:

Now listen, you who say, ”Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (The Bible, James 4:13-14 NIV)

What is your life compared to? A wisp of smoke. Strike a match, watch the quick light flash and watch as the smoke disappears into the air. That’s a picture of your life. Encouraging, huh? But it’s true.

1.8 people die every second.
108 every minute
6,461 people per hour
155,060 per day

Some of you don’t need numbers to remind you how short life is. You know someone personally who died in the last few weeks. I don’t have to remind you that life is short. It’s burning a hole in your heart.

Maybe, just maybe, we should live like life is short. The song “Live Like You Were Dying” wraps up with these words:

“Live like tomorrow was a gift, And you got eternity, To think about what you’d do with it. And what did you do with it? What would I do with it?”

Jesus said almost the exact same thing in a story:

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' "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!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' "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!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. (The Bible, Matthew 25:14-27 NIV)

In a simple story, Jesus reminds us of three core truths.

**Your life and your stuff and every ability you have is a gift from God.**

Every good thing you have is a gift from God. Your house. Your abilities. Your money. Your personality qualities.

**You are expected to make a difference for good and eternity.**

This is true for every one. You have been given life and given abilities and given stuff to make a difference.

Some have the ability to make money.
Some have the ability to make friends.
Some have the ability to make goals, score points.
Some have the ability to make meals.
Some have the ability to make music.
Some have the ability to make widgets or software or buildings.
Some have the ability to make investments.
Some have the ability to make people laugh.
Some have the ability to make people learn.

You have these abilities so that you can make a difference for good. Every one of you: kids, teens, adults. God wants you to use them to serve other people.

**At the end of your life, you will give an account of the difference you made.**

In the words of the song, you will be asked: “What did you do with it?” Your life was a gift; what did you do with it? The evaluator will be God. What you want to hear is “Well done, good and faithful one.” You made a difference proportionate to the gifts I gave you. Well done.”

But God’s assessment could be different: “What a waste.” You had so much, but you changed so little. Most of your life was spent on you. You didn’t do a whole lot
that mattered to me, and I was the one Who gave you all you have. You could get “well done” or you could get “what a waste.”

I’ve never met anyone who expressed to me the desire to live a “what a waste” life. In our heart of hearts, virtually every one of us wants to make a difference. The thought of living a “what a waste” life is depressing. Harold Kushner put it this way: “I am convinced that it is not the fear of death, of our lives ending, that haunts our sleep so much as the fear...that as far as the world is concerned, we might as well never have lived.”  Harold Kushner

So, how do we live a “well done” life? The truth is that we have to break life into smaller units, like days. The song says “tomorrow is a gift. You will have eternity to think: what do you do with it?” He emphasizes each day as a gift; that’s a very helpful way to think about living for what matters. A “well done” life is simply an accumulation of “well done” days.

Years ago, I came across a poem whose message I have never been able to forget:

This is the beginning of a new day
I can waste it. Or use it for good
But what I do today is important,
Because I’m exchanging a day of my life for it.
When tomorrow comes, This day will be gone forever,
Leaving in its place something that I have traded for it
I want it to be gain and not loss, good and not evil,
Success and not failure, in order that I not regret
the price I have paid for it. (Author unknown)

At the end of a day, what are the things that will last beyond that day? What are the things that will really matter? What are the things that make a day “well done?” Here are some possibilities.

- Do the right thing when you’d rather not.
- Use your words to express love and thanks to God.
- Give something you have to assist or enrich someone else.
- Inspire, instruct, or encourage someone.
- When you value people over money or your job.
- When you make a sacrifice to meet someone else’s need.
- When you listen to people and take their concerns seriously.
- When you tell people how good God has been to you.
- Enjoying time with God—talking to Him, reading His words to you.

All of the things I have mentioned have value beyond today. They are a good use of the life that God has given to you. They make up “well done” days that make up a well done life.

A few weeks ago, I started a simple practice that has helped me to assess my days. I got the idea from Gordon MacDonald. Each morning, I open a journal and I write the word “yesterday” and its date. I then proceed to highlight a few moments from
that day. Did I spend time with God? Did I spend time with family? Did I choose to ignore God at points in the day? Did I give? Did I encourage someone? Did I help someone out? Bill Hybels calls this a sort of “post-game” assessment. It is a great reminder of what’s important going into a new day.

Maybe you want to try a similar thing. What is important is that you see the importance of every day and the difference you can make. “Well done” days make up a “well done” life that will result in a “well done” from the One Who gave you your life.

(Prayer)

Song: Leave a Legacy

Let me ask you to pull out the “Legacy” card you were given when you came in. When you die, someone will sit down to write an obituary that will show up in a newspaper and probably online. You’ve read these. They often recount a person’s memberships or awards or accomplishments or years worked. What is it you want your obituary to say? What would you want highlighted? How do you want to be remembered?

Imagine that your family and best friends sat down at a table to write your obituary. Now, then, what do you hope your spouse will say? What do you hope your friends will say? What do you hope your kids will say? What do you hope your parents will say? What do you hope the kids at your school would say? Most of all: what do you hope God will say? (Write it out on the tombstone below.)

© East Hampton Bible Church (ctehbc.com)