

**Series: Live Like You Were Dying**  
**Message: Love People More**

(This message followed our showing the video clip of a couple who discovered that the husband had only 6-10 weeks to live.)

If you and I were to really begin to "live like we were dying," I don't think anything would be impacted more than our relationships. I think to our theme song for this series: "Live Like You Were Dying." The song repeatedly speaks of how it changed the dying man's relationships. He says...

- "I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter."
- I "gave forgiveness I'd been denying"
- I "was finally the husband that most the time I wasn't, and I became a friend a friend would like to have."

That fits the story we just heard, doesn't it? Our relationship is deeper; it's sweeter. The prospect of death reminds us of how deeply relationships matter to us. When faced with death, people almost always drawn to be with and speak to the people they most love. I think of that word "distractions." In everyday life, so many things "compete" with relational time. We are easily distracted. "Loving people" has a way of getting put backstage somewhere.

If we know death is near at hand, however, relationships move to front and center. When death is imminent, expressing love becomes extraordinarily important to people.

1996 was a terrible year for climbing Mt. Everest, the worst actually, with 15 fatalities. Eight people died on one day alone, May 11. Rob Hall had ascended Everest more than any other non-Sherpa, having led over 30 expeditions up Everest. He was leading an expedition on May 11 as well. His wife, also a climber, would have been with him but she stayed home, pregnant with their child. Everything that could go wrong on that day did. At some point, battling severe frostbite, Hall realized he would not make it down Everest. He contacted the base camp and asked them to contact his wife via Satellite phone. He tells her he is reasonably comfortable, to sleep well and not worry. I can't even imagine making that kind of call.

Louis Mulkey was an assistant football and basketball coach for Summerville High School in Charleston, SC. Espn.com tells his story: "His day job was as a firefighter for the city of Charleston. He worked on Engine 15. His world revolved around Summerville High and B Shift. Then, on June 18 last summer, he and many of his colleagues responded to a fire at the Super Sofa Store. Some of you know what happened. The blaze grew out of control. A flashover, firemen call it, and when that happens, you've got two seconds to escape. Two seconds wasn't long enough for Mulkey. In the moments before he died, he clicked on his microphone.

"Car 1! ... Tell my wife I said ... I love you."

I intentionally share two stories about guys. Guys, we may be more prone than gals to be distracted from relationships by other stuff, but when faced with death, that changes, even for us. Bottom line: death has a way of reminding all of us how deeply people matter to us. And there is this deep pull to speak words to these people that matter. Invariably, what is it that we want to tell them? What are the words? "I love you." No, invariably, we want to tell people we love them.

In fact, one of the deep regrets people have when a loved one dies is that they failed to convey their love enough. In his moving song about his dad, Dan Fogelberg laments: "Papa, I don't think I said 'I love you' near enough."

In the face of death, we are reminded of how vital it is to love each other. We begin to love more deeply. We verbalize our love more. We spend more time with the people we care about. The truth is that we should be doing those things on a regular basis.

Let me share another story with you about a guy who knew he only had a few weeks to live. It's a story that's told in the Bible. It's a story that can change us...if we'll pay attention.

*It was just before the Passover Feast. 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. (The Bible, John 13:1-2 NIV)*

I don't know if you've thought about the fact that Jesus knew exactly when He was going to die. That is a weight I would rather not carry, but Jesus did carry it. To be more specific, Jesus knew that he was going to die the next day. This, then is roughly 24 hours before Jesus would die. How he lived his last 24 hours can be very instructive for us. More specifically, how he loved in his last 24 hours should be very instructive for us.

"Having loved his own...he now showed them the full extent of his love." There is an important note here. Over his last 24 hours, Jesus expressed very specific love to people, but it was his pattern long before that. He had loved deeply, he had "loved like he was dying" all along. I want you to see how he loved people in his last 24 hours, but you will find that it is the same way he had loved them for years.

### **Jesus spent meaningful time with close friends.**

In the hours before he died, he had a special meal with His friends. This, however was his regular practice. He especially enjoyed eating meals with people—and not just His good friends. Jesus enjoyed meals with almost anyone, even when eating with them hurt his reputation and got people to whispering.

Meals can be a great relational time, but you have to be there...in more ways than one. I would urge you to make meal times with family or friends a high priority. And then, when you are there for the meal, "be there," and value the moment. I'm not trying to go overboard here, but it may help to think: "what if this was my last

meal with my family?" You'd probably listen to the conversation more. You'd probably stay at the table longer. You'd probably enjoy the moment more.

Beyond meals, loving people means blocking off more time for them, doing things that matter to them even if they aren't our favorite things. I think of those words: "All the sudden going fishin' wasn't such an imposition; I went three times that year I lost my dad." In light of death, relational time matters so much more. Jesus lived this way all the time. He spent meaningful time with people on a regular basis; it was his life. Time with people always mattered more than applause or money or personal image.

I listened this week to man-on-the-street interviews of people who were asked what they'd do if they had one month to live. There were a couple of funny answers like "I'd max out my credit cards," but almost every person alluded to spending more time with family. So why wait until you get a negative cat scan? Make relational time a high priority. Be more present for your family. Enjoy the moments more.

Here's another thing Jesus did in his last 24 hours.

### **Jesus gave and encouraged love.**

He talked a great deal about love in His last hours. I encourage you to take a Bible some time this week and read a "book" of the Bible called "John." It's numbered in sections 1-21. Read sections or chapters 12-17. It's almost all dialogue, the things Jesus said to his closest friends in the hours before He died. He talked about a lot of things, but he often mentions love.

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (The Bible, John 13:34-35 NIV)*

His key word is this: "I want you to love people as much as I love you." He goes so far as to say that the one quality which will mark you as my followers more than any other is how you love people.

It was important for Jesus to remind His friends that He loved them, but it seemed even more important to Jesus that they loved others. You have to love people deeply now; don't wait until your last 24 hours.

### **He prayed for his dear friends.**

When someone is dying, it's common to try and make sure the people you love are provided for when you're gone. Jesus was no different. He made sure that his widowed mother would be taken care of. He also gave parting words of wisdom to His friends, which could be summed up: Love people deeply." It is common for a dying person to pass on some important life instruction. Jesus did the same. Then he did something that isn't so common. He prayed over his friends. It's not a

short “bless my friends” prayer. It actually takes up an entire chapter in the book of John—chapter 17. What an awesome idea, not just for when you’re dying, but all the time.

Think about this. How would you pray for the people you love on your last day alive? Maybe it’s a good idea to pray that for them every day. I urge you to try it. Each day this week when you pause to pray, try praying for the people you love as if it were your last time to pray for them. I believe that we usually underestimate the power of our prayers in the lives of the people we love. Jesus didn’t do that. He spent a significant piece of his last day to pray.

There is one last relational thing Jesus did that we must imitate.

### **Jesus extended forgiveness and pursued reconciliation.**

There are few things worse than being betrayed. Jesus knew not only how He would die, but he knew the people who were scheming to bring it about, and one of the people was his good friend, Judas. So, how did Jesus treat Judas in the last twenty-four hours of his life? Well, first of all, Jesus invites Judas to the special holiday dinner that night. We have come to call it “the last supper,” and it was a big deal. On this night, one of the people Jesus most wants to be with is Judas. Don’t miss this: Jesus loved Judas to the very end.

Not only did he invite him to this meal, he honored Him. And when Judas came to the garden as guide for the soldiers who would arrest Jesus, how did Jesus respond? He called him friend. Jesus loved Judas to the very end. He extended grace and forgiveness.

Of course, Judas was not the only one who wronged Jesus. There is the matter of the soldiers who took his life and the religious leaders who tried Him illegally, paid people to falsely accuse Him, and pressured Roman authorities to execute Him. How does He respond to them?

“Father, forgive them. They have no idea what they are doing.”

Once again, this was His entire life. Nothing changed when He came down to the last twenty-four hours of His life. It is remarkable, nonetheless—forgiving the people who want Him dead.

Jesus went to His death seeking to reconcile with every person who ever hated or wronged Him. Friends, that is what He calls us to do as well. The call to follow Jesus is a call to imitate Him. That is our call. This is hard, but it is the best way to live life. It really is. I cannot tell you how important and even how freeing it can be to extend forgiveness to people who have deeply wronged you. The Bible says:

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (The Bible, Romans 12:18 NIV)*

Several months ago, I heard a gal named Holly Delich share how God moved her heart to do this very thing. When Holly was just two years old, her dad had an affair, left her mom, moved away, and eventually re-married. She talks about the pain of the Dad who wasn't there: limited contact, missed child support, forgotten special days, and remarkable insensitivity, especially on her wedding day. After years of trying to reconcile with him, she was ready to throw in the towel. A funeral, however, changed her thinking—the funeral of her dad's dad.

She tells how he died suddenly. She talks about her dad reaching out to her for support and how she resisted. Then there was this moment standing at her granddad's grave, her dad standing next to her. God brought the thought to her. "If this was my dad's grave, there would be some critical things left unsaid. I want you to keep fighting." So she did. She wrote a long letter. She had received so many empty apologies and promises from her dad that she asked him not to respond to her letter, but to let her call him when she was ready. He honored her request. One night, nudged by God, she called him and described the call as "the first real conversation we ever had." The very next morning, her dad's best friend called her and told her that her dad was dying. But that's not the end of the story.

It turned out that he hung on for several weeks, weeks in which she flew out to visit him frequently. He cashed out an insurance policy for her, and he gave her his baby grand piano, which touched her deeply. Then, she says, this wonderful memories began to surface. She remembers giving him a book about television, and she wrote the following note inside:

"Dad, this book celebrates great moments in television. I give it not only because you love a lot of these shows and would value a gift, but because you and I have our own series of great moments, and these need to be celebrated. I have a memory of you picking me up at preschool and hanging out with me at your apt. I remember the keyboard you gave me to play piano on. I remember you always letting me eat Lucky Charms for breakfast. I remember being in the car with you when you let me name Lindsay. I remember singing "I'll be there for you" and "father's eyes" on Father's Day at your church and thinking that you were just the coolest. I can never watch any man play the piano without thinking of you. I remember you sitting on a bed listening to a song I wrote to you about how I didn't want to say goodbye again. I remember sitting with you at the Brian Wilson concert when you bought me a sweatshirt. I remember playing poker with you and a bunch of guys and winning. I remember you coming to Chattanooga to visit me and me getting us lost. I remember how great it was to climb into your truck, sit next to you and just talk. I remember the Amy Grant concert when you got us in the skybox at the United Center, riding in Dennis's boat, you taking me shopping at the Limited and buying this horrible miniskirt that we were convinced looked cool. I remember how happy you were when you found out I was engaged. I remember crying every time I got on a plane to fly away from you. I love these moments; these are what make life good, and I wanted you to know that I remember them, that I don't believe you've been a bad father to me, that I choose to remember and celebrate our unforgettable moments. No matter what, I'm still gonna be your daughter and you'll always be my dad. Love Holly."

Her grandmother later told her that her dad read those words every night before he died. Her dad then became extremely ill. One evening, he woke, sat straight up in bed and said, "Holly, call Holly." Once again, Holly got a call from her Dad's best friend saying her dad wanted to talk to her. He put her dad on the phone. She recalls hearing a horrible wheezing painful sound, but no words. She tried to fill the void: "I hope you have a good night's sleep." Then she says her dad said something as clearly as anything she had ever heard in her life. He said, "Holly, I love you," and he hung up on the phone. He died a moment later. She says: "The last thing my dad did on this planet was to tell me he loved me."

And then came another memorable moment. Her dad died six months to the day after her granddad did. Her dad was cremated and his ashes buried with his father. So, six months after she stood at her granddad's grave, she stood at the exact same grave, the grave where God nudged her: "Keep fighting. Don't leave things unsaid."

Jesus didn't leave anything left unsaid. He said what he needed to say to His closest friends, and He said what He needed to say to people who were out to get Him.

Jim Keller talks about regrets: "Say what you want to say when you have the feeling and the chance. My deepest regrets are the things I did not do, the opportunities missed and the things unsaid."

I want to help you do that. I want to help you reduce the regret factor at the end of your life or at the end of the life of someone you know. I want to help you say what you need to say long before you die. I want to help you do it this week. That is why—when you came in today—you were given a "Say What You Need to Say" card. Would you please pull that out now?

On your card, list the handful of people that vitally need to hear an affirming word from you on a frequent basis:

Next on the card, note this: Is there any person(s) with whom you need to pursue forgiveness or reconciliation?

Close with the song: "Say What You Need to Say."