

YOUR LIFE IS YOUR MESSAGE

Clip of Persons Who Died in 2022

So, what do you want?

I'm not asking, "What do you need?"

We all need the same things.

We all need

air to breathe,

food to eat,

a place to sleep,

a sense of security,

a feeling of self-worth.

When it comes to needs,

we're all the same.

It's your wants that make you different.

It's your wants that determine who you are
and the choices you make.

It's your wants,

that create the life you live.

Every life tells a story.

What do you want –

What story do you **want** your life to tell?

Those whose pictures you just saw –

their stories are over.

Some lived lives that were long.

Others were cut short.

Two died at the age I am now.

Some made people laugh.

Some made people cheer.

Some made people think.

Some made people feel.

Some led nations.

One died at the hands of another.
Two died in accidents.
One died of an overdose.
One killed herself by jumping out of a 60-story high rise
in mid-town Manhattan.

Their stories included their hopes and their hurts,
their successes and their failures,
their virtues and their vices,
things that were done to them
and things they did to others.

But they all wanted something.
And it was their “wants” more than anything else that determined
how they lived and
who they became.

And now they’re gone.
All that remains are the stories their wants and desires created.

Every life tells a story.
You’re telling yours right now.
One day, it will be over,
and it will say,
“I was here.
This is what I believed,
this is what I valued,
this is who I was.”

Your life is your message.
More than your words,
more than your promises,
more than your hopes and your dreams –
your life is your message.

So, back to the question.
What do you want?
When all is said and done,
when your life is over,

what do you want your life to say?

I believe your story is meant to say something important.
I believe your life was created so you could give voice
to something the world needs to hear.

If that's true,
the question becomes: What story are you telling?
Is it in line with what you say you believe?
Is it in some way the gift you were meant to bring into the world?

When you look back one day on the story of your lifetime,
will you be happy with its message?
Or is it time right now
to change the script
and rewrite the story
before that final day arrives?

This morning we are beginning a new session of Quest,
the last one that I will lead.
I know I told you that last time,
but this time, I'm really going.

I'm glad you're here.
I've told you before
that I consider it one of the great privileges of my life
to be able to speak to men I love and respect
about things that matter.

Welcome: New guys
Help with Breakfast – pay

I've picked eight sessions from the past twenty years
to update and redo.

Today's message comes from a series we did in 2015:
The Story of a Lifetime.

Today's title "Your Life is Your Message"

comes from a statement made by Mohandas Gandhi.

A journalist once asked Gandhi: What is your message to the world?

I read his answer when I was in India on a mission trip.

It was displayed on a wall in a museum

located on the grounds where he was assassinated.

What is your message to the world?

Gandhi responded:

Mohandas Gandhi: My life is my message.

When I read those words, honestly, I couldn't move.

I just stood there and reread them

and thought about their meaning.

At the time I thought

that on just about anyone else's lips,

those words would sound arrogant.

But coming from this humble man,

they were inspiring and compelling.

They had the ring of authenticity.

He preached nonviolence.

And he lived nonviolence.

He called upon his followers to suffer for their beliefs.

And he suffered for his.

He told others

they should oppose oppression

but at the same time

they should treat their oppressors as they would want to be treated.

And that's exactly what he did.

His moral authority came from the fact that

he practiced what he preached.

His life was his message.

As I have thought about it, though,

I have come to realize that
those words are not unique to Gandhi.
Not really.

The truth is: every man's life is his message.

If a father tells his children he loves them,
but he's never there for them.
What's his message to his kids?
His words or his life?

If a husband tells his wife that she means the world to him,
but he is inattentive,
or constantly critical,
or unfaithful,
what's his message?
His words or his life?

If a man says integrity comes first
but he's dishonest with others
or he compromises his principles for financial gain,
what's his message?
His words or his life?

If we say we follow Jesus,
but we live like everyone else,
what's our message?

What we say we believe;
what we tell others about Christ –
maybe they're all the right things.

But how we live –
that's our message.
So, what is the message of your life?

If someone who didn't know you looked at
how you spend your time,
what you do with your finances,
the places you go,

the relationships you nurture,
 the things you read,
 the stuff you watch,
 how often you do or do not pray or read the Bible,
 what would he conclude
 that you believe and value?
 What story would he see you telling?
 What would he conclude you want –
 more than anything else?

That, my brother, is the message of your life.

That, my brother, is the message of your life.

Proverbs 27.19: As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart.

Our lives,
 not our words,
 our lives,
 how we live,
 the choices we make,
 the actions we take,
 reflect and reveal our hearts.

You hold within your hands a human life.
 Nothing on this planet is more valuable;
 nothing possesses more potential;
 nothing can do more good or more evil.

The life you possess is at the same time
 a wonderful gift and a terrible responsibility.
 You get to live it just once,
 and then it's over.

You can give it to any cause you desire,
 use it for any purpose you wish.
 You can tell any story you want.
 But you get to tell your story one time,
 and then it's done.

Psalm 90.10,12: Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures ... Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

We tell our story once
and it will be done before we know it.

So, it's an important question –

What do you want?
What do you want your story to be?
What do you want the message of your life to say?

Imagine it's your last day on earth.
You are dying
and you know it.
Your children are around your bed.
If you don't have children,
then your best friends are there.

And they ask,
“Before you leave us,
before you go to be with God,
tell us what you have learned.
Tell us how we should live.
Tell us what matters most
and what we should want with all our hearts.”

What would you tell them?
That's an interesting question.

But there's a more important question.
It's this.
Is what you would tell them as you're dying
what you are telling them by how you're living?
Is what you would say on your death bed –
is that the message of your life?

John Eldredge wrote in *Wild at Heart*

John Eldredge: There is no other man who can replace you in your life, in the

arena you've been called to. If you leave your place in the line, it will remain empty. No one else can be who you are meant to be. You are the hero in your story. Not a bit player, not an extra, but the main man.

You are to be the leading man in your life.
You are to be the leading man in your wife's life.
You are to be the leading man in your children's lives.
You are to be the leading man in fulfilling God's vision for your life.

And if you are going to be the leading man,
then YOU must LEAD your life.

That means you cannot let your circumstances lead your life.
You cannot allow your hurts to lead your life.
You cannot allow your disappointments
or your failures
or your mistakes
to lead your life.

You cannot let what you have become comfortable with
or what you have settled for
lead your life.

You must get a clear picture in your heart and mind
that answers the question:
What do I want?

What do I want to live for?
What gift was I meant to bring into the world?
Who was I created to be?
What do I want my life to say?

Many guys never answer that question.
Either they don't think about it seriously
or if they do, they don't know how to answer it.
And so they never do.

And the result is that what they were meant to bring into the world
is never born.
And something inside them dies.

Here's how the movie American Beauty begins.

Clip: American Beauty.

It sounds hopeful and it's true.
 It's never too late to get it back.
 He doesn't know what it is,
 but at least he knows that whatever "it" is,
 he's lost it.
 At least he's asking the question.
 And that's more than some men do.

How Do Men Deal with The Question: What Do I Want?

1. Many Men Never Ask the Question

At least not seriously.
 They get a job,
 pursue a career,
 get married,
 raise a family,
 find a hobby, and
 try to be a good guy.

Nothing wrong with any of that.
 And if you really are a good guy,
 a really good husband,
 a really good father,
 a really good friend to others,
 that's not a bad story to tell with your life.
 Not bad at all.

And many guys that's where they stop.
 They get on the same path as every other decent man they know.
 And they think,
 that's it, right?
 I'm moving forward professionally,
 making more money,
 accumulating more stuff.

I'm respected at work,
 I have my home in the suburbs, and
 my wife has her pruning shears and her gardening clogs,
 so I guess we're doing ok.

Guys, if that's the life you settle for,
 it won't be a bad life.
 It won't be a life you have to be ashamed of.

But is that what you want?
 Is that all that you want?

Don't ask the question
 and you may settle for that.

But ask yourself:
 What do I want my story to be?
 What was I created to bring into the world?
 When it's over,
 what do I want the message of my life to say?

Ask that question,
 and I don't think the American dream will be enough for you.
 That's because God did not create you to live the American dream.

He created you to dream a Kingdom dream and
 to live for a purpose that in some way will bring his grace and truth into the
 world.

2. Some Men Look to the Passions of the Flesh

The Kevin Spacey character –
 it's never too late to get it back,
 whatever it is that he has lost.
 He admits that he doesn't know what it is,
 but he's going to find it.

Sounds hopeful,
 as I said.
 But the movie is anything but.

He quits his job
becomes enamored with one of his teen-age daughter's friends,
starts working out to impress her,
begins to smoke pot, and
throws off the responsibilities of his adult life.

Of course, all that does is make him look juvenile and foolish
to everyone else.

If you begin to feel
that something's missing from your life,
it will become painful.

It can be the pain of
feeling sedated and dead inside.
Or it can be the anxiety of sensing that life is passing you by,
that it will be over quickly
and you will have missed out on whatever life is supposed to do for you.

And one thing I have discovered,
is that when people are in pain,
physical, emotional or spiritual,
they will do just about anything they can to change the way they feel.

And one of the quickest ways out of emotional pain
is turning to a physical pleasure.

Decades ago a woman in our church told me
that her husband had had an affair.
When I met with him,
what he said was so sad and disturbing
that I have always remembered it.

He said,
I had an affair,
but it wasn't about the sex
and it sure wasn't about the other woman.
It's just that I didn't feel anything
for my wife or

for my job or
for myself.
And I hadn't for a long time.

I think I had the affair
because I wanted to see if I could feel something again.

Sounds like the Spacey character.
Sedated.
Dead inside.

And he turned to something like the Spacey character's solution.

Drink, drug, sex, pornography.
The latest and greatest technological "must have."
Bigger, better
this or that.
They all promise to change how we feel.

But, maybe the problem
isn't how you feel
as much as it is what you're living for.

Maybe the natural inner state of someone who is dead to their great purpose in life
is feeling dead inside.
Maybe that feeling isn't a problem.
Maybe it's a sign
that something needs to change.
that you need to ask the question:
What do I want,
what's worthy of who I am, and
what story do I want to tell with my life?

3. Some Men Become Distracted

It can be a hobby.
We commit ourselves to it
and it gives us a sense of progress
and purpose.
As we get better at it,

we gain a sense of satisfaction.

We feel like we're winning at life
because
we're getting better at golf or
we're travelling more, or
we're learning all about fine wines
or some other esoteric topic.

I got no problem with hobbies.
I enjoy playing poker.
Played last Saturday
and I can't wait to play again.

I love playing
and I love the way it makes me feel when I win.
King of the World,
brother.

There's a movie probably you and your wife would enjoy called
Up in The Air.
I don't have time to set it up for you,
but George Clooney has purposefully created a life for himself
that has no attachments.

Nothing to slow him down,
nobody to hold him back.

Every day he is on an airplane
flying to a new destination for work.
But he has one goal that means something to him.
You could say it's what he's living for.
You'll laugh,
you'll think it's silly,
but to him – it means the world.

Clip: Up in the Air

How is he keeping score?
That's what he's doing isn't it?

He's accumulating points.
 He trying to beat everyone else,
 boldly go where few have ever gone.
 You look at him and think,
 Well, good for you.
 Yawn,
 that's great.
 If it makes you happy,
 go for it.
 But don't you think that just maybe
 you were made for something more?

It's always easier to see in other people.
 How little the things they live for are,
 how pointless accumulating points are
 when the points don't really matter.

Do you think if the character Clooney plays,
 when he was a young man
 if you had asked him, "What do you want your life to say?",
 do you think he would have responded:
 I want my message to the world to be:
 Frequent flyer miles is a goal worth living for.

Of course not.
 Well, how does a man end up there?
 How does a man end up defining himself
 by the mile he accumulates,
 the house he lives in,
 the car he drives,
 the trips he takes,
 the chicks he beds, or
 how well he does at golf or poker?

He gets distracted,
 somehow.
 The feeling of having lost something important to who he is,
 that thing he was created to be and do and give birth to,
 that feeling – he is able to avoid it
 by looking to lesser things

that give him the sense of success and meaning.

It's always easier to see in other guys.
It's always hard to see in ourselves.

What do you want?

Really?

On your death bed you would answer that question
by telling your children about
a car you wanted to own, or
where you wanted a second home, or
a position at work you wanted to reach?

You wouldn't tell them
about a difference you wanted to make in the lives of others,
or a cause you wanted to fight for,
or a change you think God wants to make in the world?

You get one life to live,
one story to tell.
And then your message will be determined forever.

Eternity is happening right now.

Please don't let your story be that you were distracted by things
that hardly matter in this world
and that no one,
not even yourself,
will care about in the world to come.

First Steps To Answering the Question: What Do I Want?

1. Take Responsibility

No one can answer the question but you.
No one can tell you what you want
or what your life is meant to say.

No one can
and no one should.

It's your life.
It's your responsibility.

Your past is not responsible for the life you live,
your hurts are not responsible for the life you live,
your disappointments are not responsible for the life you live.
Your present problems are not responsible for the life you're living.

You are.
You are the leading man in your life.
You are the one who is responsible for leading it.

There's not one person in the world whose job description includes
discerning God's will for your life,
setting your course, or
deciding what story you are to live for.

Not your wife,
not your boss,
not your friends,
not your parents,
not your pastor.

The difference between boys and men
is that men accept responsibility for themselves, their actions and their story.

Nobody can ask the question for you
and nobody can answer it for you.

It's possible to be here every week
and hear every story,
and never ask the question: What do I want?

Some of us will,
some of us won't.
Who decides which group you'll be in.
You will.

You're responsible.

It's that simple.

2. Take an Honest Inventory

Go back to the question I asked earlier.
If an outside observer was looking at your life,
what would he say you were living for?

Not what do YOU say you're living for.
But someone who looked at
how you spend your time,
what you do with your money,
where you go,
what you watch and read –
if all he had were your actions to go by,
what would he say matters most to you?

That's what you're living for?

Listen, I have to ask myself these same questions.
I'm a man like you are.
I'm messed up like you are.
I'm a work in progress like you are.
I get distracted like you do.
I may be up on stage right now,
but I'm not up on a pedestal.

I have rarely given you an assignment for Quest.
But this week take 15 minutes and do this exercise.
Take an inventory of how you're living
and determine if it's expressing what you believe
is most important for you to achieve with your life.

3. Ask the Question

What do I want?

I don't expect you to come up with an answer between
today and the next time we meet
if you don't know it already.

But this is how it starts.

Deep inside there is an answer
 waiting for you.
 It's God's answer
 and it's down inside of you somewhere,
 written into the fiber of your being.
 And it will make itself known
 if you ask and keep asking.

Matthew 7.7-8: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

The verbs in this passage “ask,” “seek” and “knock”
 are in a Greek tense that is best translated as
 keep on asking,
 keep on seeking,
 keep on knocking.

So ask and keep on asking:
 What do I want?
 What is in my heart to do,
 who am I really,
 what gift am I to bring into the world?
 What do I want the message of my life to be?

4. Pray

Lord God, you are my creator and you know me better than I know myself. Reveal to me who I am to be, what I am to do, what message I am to give, what gift I am to bring into the world. Little or small, public or private – reveal it to me, and even before I know what it is, my promise to you is: I will do you will.

The movie *Up in the Air* –
 well, the George Clooney character gets his miles.
 10 million.
 The captain joins him there in first class
 and tells him that he's the youngest ever to make it.
 Turns out,

it wasn't quite as satisfying as he had expected.

Something else happens in the movie.
He becomes disenchanted with his life
and wonders if he's not made for something more.

Here's how it ends.
Remember what his young apprentice said she would do
if she had all those miles.

Clip: Up in the Air

That's you, dude,
This morning you walked into the airport,
and you and I just looked up on the big board
and there are all kinds of places you can go.
So, pray.
Listen to the Holy Spirit.
Listen to your heart.
And answer the question:
What do you want?