

The Measure of a Life

1. Warm-up question: When Jeff was a kid, his favorite recording artist was Neil Diamond. When you were a kid, who was your favorite recording artist?
2. Neil Diamond's song "Done Too Soon" begins with a litany of famous names – Jesus Christ, Fanny Brice, Wolfie Mozart and Humphrey Bogart, Genghis Khan and on to H.G. Wills, etc. – then ends with these lines: "Each one of them has one thing they shared. They have sweated beneath the same sun, looked up in wonder at the same moon, and wept when it was all done, for being done too soon." Life on earth is precious, and when we come to the end, it always seems too soon. Even Jesus seemed to have experienced those same feelings. Read Matthew 26:36-47, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Based on what is said in this passage, how would you describe the emotions Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane?
 - b. Jeff suggested that although Jesus was willing to die (if that's what had to be), he nonetheless wished he had longer to live and wasn't yet ready to die – in the sense that there was still so much he wanted to do and so many who still needed him. Given what our Scripture passage says, do you think that's a fair assessment of Jesus' state of mind in the Garden of Gethsemane? Why or why not?
 - c. Have you ever been close to someone who died young? What did that feel like?
 - d. When your time comes to die, do you think it will feel like it's "done too soon," even if you live to be 90? Explain your answer.
3. All the foregoing raises the question: Why did Jesus die so young? If God went to all the trouble to send us Jesus, and if we need as much of Jesus as we can get (which we do), why didn't God let Jesus live to be 80 years old. We all understand that Jesus needed to die for our redemption. But why couldn't he have lived to be at least 50 or 60 or 80, then die for us, after we had all those extra years to benefit from his presence? Nevertheless, Jesus died at age 32 or 33, causing us to wonder why. If you had to come up with a reason why Jesus died young, what would be your best guess? What are the possibilities?
4. As Jeff pondered the foregoing question, he came to the conclusion that, if nothing else, Jesus' early death makes clear that the quality of one's life is not measured by longevity. Despite his short life, Jesus managed changed the world, change innumerable lives, and continues to change lives and our world to this day. Jesus lived what is probably the most impactful life ever, and did it all in 33 years, leading to the conclusion that: Quality of life is not determined by quantity. So what does make for quality of life? By his example, Jesus showed us the answer. His formula for abundant life can be captured in two key points. **First, Jesus was a giver – and so should we who follow him.**
 - a. In Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." If you were to explain the meaning

of that verse in a way simple enough a child could understand, what would you say it means?

- b. In Luke 6:38, Jesus also said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap, for the measure you give will be the measure you get back [in life].” What do you think that means?
 - c. Tell us about a time in your own life when you followed Jesus’ example and served sacrificially. What happened? How do you feel about that experience? Are you glad you did it? Did you get back more than what you gave?
 - d. Mr. Rogers said, “Life is for service.” Jeff told how he once had a well-bred Labrador Retriever who came alive when she discovered what it means to fetch and retrieve – because that’s what she was created to do. Jeff suggested that we humans experience the same thing when we discover that life is for service because service is what gives our life deepest meaning. Think of someone you know who lived a life characterized by service. What was their quality of life? Were they happy and fulfilled? Alternatively, think of someone you know who lived a life centered around themselves and their personal wants. What was their quality of life? Were they happy and fulfilled?
5. The second prong of Jesus’ formula for abundant life is: **Jesus embraced and celebrated life’s simple pleasures – and so should we who follow him.** In support of this assertion, Jeff pointed to a passage where Jesus described his way of life in contrast to John the Baptist. Jesus said, “John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” Matthew 11:18.
- a. What does that verse tell us about Jesus’ approach to life?
 - b. While acknowledging that this is a provocative way to describe Jesus, Jeff said, “I think it’s fair to say that Jesus was something of a ‘party animal’ – in the highest and best sense of that term.” How do you feel about that statement? What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
 - c. Do you allow yourself to embrace and celebrate life’s simple pleasures? Would you rate yourself as: (a) good at it; (b) ok at it; or (c) bad at it? Why is it so important to open ourselves to life’s simple pleasures? And how can we get better at it?
6. Sunday’s sermon ended by noting that even in Jesus’ sort life of 33 years, the vast majority of those years – 30 of them – were spent in obscurity being a carpenter, as God quietly prepared Jesus for his intensive three years of high impact. That’s 10 years of prep for every one year of high impact. What, if anything, do you think we’re supposed to draw from that for ourselves?

Matthew 26:36-47

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' 37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38 Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.'

39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' 40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' 43 Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.' 47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.