

What Would Get Your Attention?

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If any of us were told this week that we were facing imminent death, what would we change or how would we live? Someone may say it is not a fair question, since we may do a number of things that in any other context would be considered irresponsible. And while that is true, the real question is how much time would you need to be given before it had a meaningful impact on you! What if you had six months to live? Or five years? What about thirty years? At what point would death no longer threaten you?

When we are young, healthy, or both, it is easy to dismiss death, yet the Bible gives us many warnings about such an attitude:

- *“The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life”* (Genesis 47:9).
- *“Our days on the earth are like a shadow”* (1 Chronicles 29:15).
- *“Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived”* (Job 14:1).
- *“You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away”* (James 4:14).

Even more important to remember is that even youth is seen as brief. *“Childhood and the prime of life are fleeting”* (Ecclesiastes 11:10). The stage in our lives that is supposedly the most carefree and energetic is just as futile as our final days. It is very foreign to many young people to be told that they, too, are aging day by day. Every moment brings us closer to our eventual, unavoidable demise. What surprises me, though, is how easily young people forget the example of their peers who fall prey to an early death. When teens die in drunk-driving incidents, why do their friends still drink? It is really easy to talk about mortality and perspective but much harder to apply it on a daily basis. The sobering thought is, some of us may only have one day or one week left to live, we just do not have the luxury of being told in advance!

It is a moot point, anyway

I am not impressed by most people when they talk about all the things they would change if they had one week to live. Basically, what they are saying is, “These are all the things I am never going to change unless I am given one week’s warning before my death.” Our character flaws, superficialities, and the spiritual truths that we neglect will come back to catch us when we are least prepared for them. Very few of us are ever going to have the luxury of planning for our deaths as precisely as the question proposes. Quite disturbingly, actually, the only way to plan for the exact time of your death is suicide or capital punishment! *“Moreover man does not know his time; like fish caught in a treacherous net, and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them”* (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

What would you leave unchanged?

A good barometer of whether or not your life will be filled with regrets is what you would *not* change with one week left to live:

- I would not start attending services less.

- I would not spend less time in prayer.
- I would not spend less time studying the Bible.
- I would not spend less time with my children.
- I would not express my love for my spouse less.
- I would not change a thing about my relationship to other Christians.
- I would not spend less time evangelizing.

At times the world thinks we are wasting our lives going to church, praying, studying, and loving, but the real test for the value of anything is what I would do if my time was limited. This means that if I am already worshipping (Hebrews 10:25), already praying earnestly (1 Thessalonians 5:16), already studying diligently (2 Timothy 2:15), already loving my family (Titus 2:4-5), already involved with and loving my brethren (Hebrews 12:12-15), and already spreading the gospel as much as I can (Mark 16:15), then I already know that I am living a “regret-free” life. I should already be living like a man who knows his days are numbered, like David in Psalm 39:4, *“Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the extent of my days, let me know how transient I am.”* Notice that David’s request is not “Lord, help me forget...” but to be reminded of the transitory nature of human life.