



#3: Love Completely, Pastor Joe Wittwer

January 11, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Spending time with those we care about and sharing how we feel about them is obviously an important part of living a no-regrets life. People on their deathbeds are not likely to wish they had spent more time at the office, but rather that they had spent more time with family and friends. When Jesus reached the end of His life, He zeroed in on His closest relationships. Consider **John 13:1**: *"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."* If you had just 30 days to live, wouldn't you want to love completely, love to the end, finish well? Here are some ideas on how to love completely:

1. Spend time with family and friends.

If we knew we had thirty days to live, chances are we would spend most of that time with our loved ones talking and sharing. The filter of having "the rest of your life" would be removed and we would look through a different lens; looking at life through this lens—one month to live—is clarifying. Making memories would take precedence over watching TV. On the last night of Jesus' life, who was He with? His closest friends. What did they do? They had a meal together—we call it "The Last Supper." It was so memorable that Jesus' followers still talk about it 21 centuries later! Jesus said things such as: *"Take and eat, this is my body. . . . This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (**Matthew 26:26 & 28**); *"Do this in remembrance of me"* (**Luke 22:19**); *"Love each other as I have loved you"* (**John 15:12**). Jesus was very intentional about being with those He loved and deliberately making memories.

2. Share your heart.

To love completely, you need to share your heart. Let people know how you feel about them. Some people have a hard time expressing love and affection. But facing mortality forces us to share our hearts and feelings with the ones we love. If you had one month to love, you'd share your heart; you'd tell people how you feel about them. What are you waiting for? Tell people this week how much they mean to you. Tell them you love them. Remember **John 13:1** above about Jesus' final days: *"he now showed them the full extent of his love."* John 13-16 contains some of Jesus' most important and beautiful teaching. There in the upper room with the end in sight, He shares His heart with His followers.

3. Mend broken relationships.

If you had one month to live and desired to love completely, you would seek out those you've offended and ask forgiveness. You'd seek out those who offended you and offer forgiveness. You'd bury the hatchet. [Say the **Lord's Prayer** together from **Mathew 6:9-13**.] Do you really want to ask God to forgive you just as you have forgiven others? If you nurse a grudge, if you hold bitterness in your heart, if you refuse to forgive, you are telling God, "Don't forgive me either, God." Of all the things in the Lord's Prayer Jesus could have commented on, he picks this one: forgiveness. *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (**Matthew 6:14-15**). We must forgive others. We cannot afford to hang on to our hurts and grievances. Bitterness will poison us. We want to punish the other person, but we end up hurting ourselves. That is why Jesus says, *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins"*

(Mark 11:25). To love completely means that you forgive anyone, anything, anytime you pray. That covers all people, all sins, all the time. When you have one month to live, a lot of grievances look silly. But some don't. Some run deep and are not easy to forgive. Our challenge is simply to make the effort and ask for God's help. It won't be easy, but the God who commands you to forgive will help you.

4. Thank people who contributed to your life.

If you had one month to live you'd want to say some "thank yous." To leave without saying thanks would be rude. Jesus talked about this factor in a story in **Luke 17:17-18**. Ten lepers asked Him to heal them. Jesus told them to go to the priest to be examined and declared clean, and as they went—as they obeyed—they were healed. Only one of them, a Samaritan, came back to say thanks. The others left without saying thanks—rude. Maybe only 10% of the people in this world are fully alive and appreciate the gifts God has given them. They celebrate each new day and are grateful to God for it. Perhaps about 90% of the world never stops to thank God for the blessings in their lives, never savor the rich gifts that God has given them. How about you? Are you a one-in-ten person, or part of the 90%? And it's not just God who deserves thanks; there are many people who have contributed to our lives. If we lived like we only had 30 days left, we would want to thank them.

5. Find lost friends and make a final appeal.

Most people know of lost friends who need one more chance to hear the Truth and accept and follow Jesus. **Luke 19** tells the story of Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus. In the last weeks of His life, Jesus passed through Jericho where crowds gathered to see Him. Because of the crowds, a vertically-challenged man named Zacchaeus had climbed a tree to get a better look at Jesus. Zach happened to be the wealthiest man in town—and also the most hated. He was a tax collector for the Romans, so he made his money by working for the enemy and fleecing his own countrymen. So when Jesus stopped and invited himself to lunch at Zach's house, everyone in town was offended. But Jesus knew what he was doing; He explained, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (**Luke 19:10**). That lunch changed Zach's life. On His way to the cross, Jesus stopped for lunch with Zach; He made time for a redemptive conversation. Who do you need to invite to lunch?

C. Life Group Questions (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. If you only had one month to live, with whom would you want to spend time? What would you most want to do together to make lasting memories?
2. Who needs to be assured that you love them? Who will you share your heart with this week, and what kinds of things do you want to tell them?
2. If you had one month to live, from whom would you ask forgiveness? Whom do you need to forgive? Does our ability to forgive require repentance from the other person?
3. Whom would you want to thank today if you only had one month to live, and why are you grateful for them?
4. Whom do you know who is still far from God? What would be a good setting for meeting with them and talking about God's love for them?

D. Personal Application (1-3 Minutes)

- Spend time with family and friends, and tell them how you feel about them.
- Determine whom you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from, and get in contact with them.
- List the people for whom you are the most grateful, and tell them.
- Who do you know who is still far from God? Set a time to meet and talk, to share God's love from your heart.

E. Prayer Time (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Pray that God will show you some areas in which to act today in order to love completely—whether spending time with family and friends, telling them you love them, mending broken relationships through forgiveness, or sharing the love of Christ.
- Ask God to also give you His attitude, strength, and courage for acting on these promptings.
- Bring other praises and requests before God that arose during your discussion.