

Could These 5 Final Words Be Your Deathbed Declaration?

One of baseball's greatest hitters of all time died recently at the age of 54. Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn hit over .300 for 19 consecutive seasons, something only the legendary Ty Cobb accomplished.

Before passing away, he recorded a video message appealing for baseball players not to follow his example with smokeless tobacco, which most certainly was the cause of his death from mouth cancer.

Dying declarations can have a profound effect. It's the time when people are most honest, and what they say matters the most. Already, All-Star pitcher Stephen Strasburg has vowed to quit his nasty tobacco chewing habit!

When the time comes for your grand finale, have you ever pondered what you would want to say? While claiming the promise of Psalm 91:16, "With long life will I satisfy him," there is merit to reflecting on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Knowing that dying grace doesn't come till the dying hour, don't project yourself into the circumstances but do give some thought to what you'd want to say. In a moment, I'd like to offer a suggestion.

Departing Declarations of Those Who Didn't Live Lives for Christ

Before engaging in the exercise, let's pause and examine some of the sad statements left by those who apparently led lives apart from the loving lordship of Jesus Christ.

- Music legend Kurt Cobain of Nirvana blew his brains out with a shotgun after writing he was a "miserable, self-destructive, death-rocker... hateful towards all humans in

general.”

- Freddie Mercury was the flamboyant frontman for supergroup Queen (a male homosexual). The bisexual glam rocker was said to have the greatest pure voice in rock-n-roll history. His life of narcotics and debauchery caused Elton John to declare, “He could out-party me!” He died of AIDS and was in excruciating pain even when clothing touched his skin. His parting statement is best captured by the title of his final video, “These are the days of our lives.” Makes you want to weep.
- Actress Joan Crawford rebuked her housekeeper who began praying as Joan was dying: “Damn it... don’t you dare ask God to help me!”
- Lecherous King Henry VIII pleaded for spiritual support in beseeching, “All is lost! Monks! Monks! Monks!”
- Author of the dark side, Edgar Allan Poe, cried, “Lord, help my poor soul!”
- Occultist Aleister Crowley shrieked, “I am perplexed! Satan get out!”
- Pop megastar Michael Jackson desperately pled for relief from more of the drug Propofol, on which he fatally overdosed, “More milk!”
- Archenemy of Christianity Voltaire, when begged by a priest to renounce Satan, declined saying, “This is no time for making enemies!”
- Frank Sinatra, who “Did it My Way” with his serial affairs, lavish escapades and four wives, succumbed sorrowfully uttering, “I’m losing” then breathed his last.
- Elizabeth I, Queen of England, proclaimed before dying, “All my possessions for a moment of time.”

One more?

- Comedian W.C. Fields, when asked why he was reading the Bible on his deathbed commented, “I’m looking for loopholes!”

Contrast the above final statements with Christians like George Washington saying, "I am not afraid to go," or scientist Michael Faraday declaring, "I shall be with Christ, and that is enough." Slight difference, huh?

Now it's your turn.

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More than 30 years ago, a Christian leader who was very influential in my life spoke on a college campus and was asked this question in closing out his evening session, "Sir, if you had one message to leave with us before you depart, what would it be?"

Shortly thereafter, this nationally known leader was killed in a tragic car accident. Three decades later, the response he gave the collegians still reverberates in my heart. It's a great sayonara statement worthy of emulating.

"If I had just one sentence to deposit in your hearts as I exit tonight it would be... 'My life is my message!'"

Billy Graham once was asked what he wants on his tombstone. He replied, "He was faithful. He walked in integrity."

The similarity is striking. Both men committed to practice what they preach. Authenticity is the core. Shouldn't it be the magnificent obsession of every true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ?

One day as we lay on our bed ready to pass "through the valley of the shadow of death," may those gathered around us affirm that our words were authenticated by our witness.

"The years of a man's life are threescore and ten, or by reason of strength fourscore"(Ps. 90:10). Moses penned those words thousands of years ago and they remain oh, so true. He went on to say, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (v. 12).

God equates wisdom with the stewardship of our days on earth. Are you wisely investing your time for His glory? Are you living a sincere (literally a “sun-tested”) life that draws people to Him because observers know you’re the real deal? Do you pass your days with eternity in mind, ever conscious of life’s brevity?

“The shoes you tie in the morning can be untied by an undertaker in the evening.”

I’m not being morbid but simply challenging all of us to identify with the words of the departed leader speaking through the corridors of time, “My life is my message.”

Is yours? And if you are falling short, will you make any necessary course corrections to align with authenticity?

There are two Sauls in the Bible. One’s exit statement was a pathetic, “I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly” (1 Sam. 26:21). The other’s was a triumphant, “The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Which Saul reflects your life and the legacy you’ll leave? Determine today that “when your time comes,” your life will have truly validated the gospel message we are privileged to proclaim.