

Texas Churches Unite for 'One Month to Live' Campaign

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✖ Christians in the town of Sulphur Springs, Texas, will spend next month living as if it was their last 30 days on Earth.

During the One Month to Live challenge, which kicks off Sunday, members of more than 35 churches from diverse denominations will aim to focus their actions around the things they value most. Based on the best-selling book *One Month to Live* by Houston pastors Kerry and Chris Shook, the challenge encourages participants to follow four principles Jesus modeled: live passionately, love completely, learn humbly, leave boldly.

"People are very excited about it," said Joel Tiemeyer, senior pastor of The Way Bible Church in Sulphur Springs and a coordinator of the campaign. "Because we're not presenting it as if you're going to die in 30 days ... we're presenting it in a fashion where it encourages them to begin to live their life like 30 days would be all we had left. So when it's done, it's not to go back to the old way of living but to live every day to its fullest potential."

Tiemeyer expects roughly 4,000 churchgoers-out of 30,000 in Sulphur Springs and the surrounding counties-to participate in the initiative. A crew from ABC News will film the kickoff event and follow three families throughout the challenge to document the change it makes in their lives.

"We just believe that if they live the next 30 days as if it's

their last, at the end of the month they'll be more alive than ever before," said Kerry Shook, pastor of Woodlands Church in Houston and keynote speaker at the kickoff event. "People will be more unselfish. And they'll be making a difference that will last for eternity."

Shook said the One Month to Live initiative started as a personal challenge he and his wife made. Though they felt they had a good marriage and stable family, they believed they weren't being very intentional about how they lived their lives. As an experiment, they asked each other what they now call the "clarifying" question: What would I do if I knew I had one month to live?

He extended the challenge to his church staff, then to the congregation. In 2008, the Shooks published *One Month to Live*, which included endorsements from pastors Rick Warren, Ed Young and Craig Groeschel, and since then some 3,000 churches nationwide have hosted campaigns.

Shook said the challenge often causes people to make small changes, such as spending more time with family. "It's the little things that we neglect to do that really are the big regrets at the end of our lives," he said.

But there have been big changes too. One woman chose to forgive the man who was convicted of murdering her son. "We've heard so many stories of forgiveness, and I think it's because if you really think about if this is your last 30 days and you're going to meet your Maker, you want to be right with everyone else around you," Shook said.

He said the challenge has caused his congregation to get beyond themselves and focus more on others. One Sunday, Shook told the congregation that a local shelter said it needed shoes for the homeless. He asked members who felt led to take off their shoes to donate them to the homeless, and the church collected 4,000 pairs of shoes.

“It made us think, *What else can we do?*” Shook said. “We’ve started many ministries thinking about others and the community and making an impact in the community. There’s so many things now churches can do with the campaign to get their people outside the walls of the church and into the lives of people.”

Tiemeyer said pastors in Sulphur Springs want to use the challenge to let residents know they can “trust in the church once again” and turn to local congregations when in need. The congregations will collect canned goods throughout the challenge. On the fifth Sunday, when the campaign emphasizes leaving boldly, the churches plan to build a mountain of canned goods that will be donated to local food banks.

“That will fill our food bank and our community cupboard for the next, hopefully, three to four months and leave a lasting impact on the city that shows we really do care about everybody in Sulphur Springs,” Tiemeyer said. “Everyone’s coming together for one cause and that’s to do what the Bible says and take care of those in need.”