



*Thoughts on the Sabbath
School Lesson*

*For
May 18, 2019*

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Want to get this in an email?
E-mail me at winegardner.lopez@gmail.com

7:00

6:59

6:58

Waaaaay back in the early '80s, my brother was a newly minted pastor in Houston, Texas. During those early years he delivered a couple of sermons that have stuck in my mind for all of these years.

One of those sermons was based on a purely hypothetical question that, at that time, felt so extremely unlikely that it was almost a joke:

What would you do if you knew you had seven minutes to live?

That's not a sermon anyone would preach in our post 9/11 world. I believe there would be little of the congregational interaction that occurred when my brother preached this sermon – people jumping to the hypothetical spirit of the

question and calling out ideas – but a general solemn, introspective silence as members of the congregation as they contemplated the very non-hypothetical reality many faced during the 9/11 attacks.

We learned in the most horrific ways what people said and did when they realized that they were about to die...and remembering still breaks my heart, for more than the obvious reasons.

“Kevin Cosgrove, a 45-year-old father-of-three, was still on the phone to emergency services when the South Tower collapsed. ... ‘Come on, I can barely breathe now – can’t see. It’s really bad, it’s black, it’s arid. We’re young men, not ready to die.’

“Melissa C. Doi was a graduate of Northwestern University, with dreams of becoming a ballerina. ... The terrified young woman phoned 911 from the 83rd floor of Tower 2.

MD: I’m going to die, aren't I?

911: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, say your, ma'am, say your prayers.

MD: I’m going to die.

911: You gotta think positive, because you gotta help each other get off the floor.

MD: I’m going to die.

911: Now look, stay calm, stay calm, stay calm, stay calm.

MD: Please God...

“Melissa Harrington Hughes was only in New York for one day on business. ... ‘I just wanted to let you know I love you and I’m stuck in this building in New York.

‘There’s lots of smoke and I just wanted you to know that I love you always.’

“CeeCee Lyles, a mother-of-four, was one of the flight attendants working on board Flight United 93.

“CeeCee, the rest of the crew, and the passengers aboard the plane decided to try and overpower the hijackers, in a bid to stop them crashing the plane into another building.

“This is the message that CeeCee's husband found on his voicemail.

“Hi baby. I’m, baby, you have to listen to me carefully. I’m on a plane that’s been hijacked. I’m on the plane, I’m calling from the plane.

“I want to tell you that I love you. Please tell my children that I love them very much. And I’m so sorry baby. ... there’s planes that have been flown into the World Trade Centre.

“I hope to see your face again, baby. I love you.”

“Brian David Sweeney was a passenger on Flight 175, one of the planes hijacked by terrorists on 9/11 and flown into the World Trade Centre’s South Tower.

“He left a voicemail for his wife Julie that day.

“Jules, this is Brian. Listen, I’m on an airplane that’s been hijacked.

“...I just want you to know that I absolutely love you.

“I want you to do good, go have good times - same to my parents and everybody.”¹

Now, please don't think I'm faulting anybody anywhere for what they do when faced with death. I have no idea what I would do – very possibly, absolutely nothing. But as I thought about these messages and the responses that my brother got all those years ago ... well, lets just say, sitting in a safe, air conditioned church, we often believed that we would spend time telling the people around us about their need for Jesus. I realize now that that is extremely wishful thinking. And yet, ...

“If you saw the movie “Titanic,” you know much of what took place 87 years ago tonight, when the ship that even God couldn't sink, DID sink. Of the 1,528 people who ended up in the icy water, only six were rescued. But did you know that one of those six was actually saved twice that night?

“His story is an inspiring reminder that there's more to life than mere survival.

“To tell this man's story, though, I have to first tell you about another man, a Scot named John Harper. Harper, a minister of the Gospel, boarded the Titanic with his six-year-old daughter, Nana. He planned to travel to the Moody Church in Chicago, where he'd been invited to preach for three months. When the ship struck the fateful iceberg and began to sink, Harper made sure his daughter

¹ Kayleigh Dray, “Remembering 9/11: The final messages sent by victims of the Twin Towers attack,” Closer Online, 07 09 2015, closeronline.co.uk/real-life/news/remembering-911-final-messages-sent-victims-twin-towers-attack/

was placed into one of the lifeboats. He then began what would be the last evangelistic work of his young life.

“As the freezing waters began to fill the ship, Harper was heard shouting, ‘Let the women, children and the unsaved into the lifeboats.’ Survivors reported that Harper took off his own life jacket and gave it to another man. ‘Don’t worry about me,’ he reportedly said, ‘I’m not going down, I’m going up!’

“When the ship began to sink, more than 1,500 passengers jumped or fell into the icy waters. As they gradually drowned or froze to death, Harper was seen swimming from one passenger to another, pleading with them to accept Christ.

“Only six of the 1,500 people struggling in the water were later rescued, including a man who later identified himself as Harper’s last convert. This young man had climbed up on a piece of debris. Harper, who was struggling in the water near him, shouted out, ‘Are you saved?’ ‘No,’ the man replied. Harper then shouted the words from Scripture: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ The man did not answer, and a moment later he drifted away on the waves.

“A few minutes later, the current brought the two men back together. Again Harper asked, ‘Are you saved?’ Once again, the answer was ‘no.’ With his dying breath, Harper shouted, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.’ He then slipped under the waves for the last time.

“Then and there, the man he had witnessed to decided to turn his life over to Christ. Four years later, at a Titanic survivors meeting in Ontario, Canada, this man tearfully gave his testimony recounting how John Harper had led him to the Lord.”²

Who knows, maybe there were folks on those airplanes or in the towers who were leading people to Jesus with their last breaths ... I kind of hope so.

How can I get to the place where my first thought in a crisis is not about myself, but about sharing Jesus? I have to think that a big part of that is spending the safe moments of my life creating the habit of talking about Jesus – not just when I’m in church, not just with my Christian friends, but in every situation of my life so that when I am faced with the surety of death, the words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” will come spilling out of my heart.

That is my prayer; is it yours?

Lillianne Winegardner Lopez 5.10.2019

How we deal with death is at least as important as how we deal with life.

Admiral James T. Kirk

Don Spangler, also known as Spanky, retired from Southern California Gas Company in 1998. One of the first things he did was to throw out all his suits and ties. Spanky planned to retire to a life on the river, wearing shorts or bathing suits.

Spanky spent his days on the Colorado River, boating, water skiing, and partying with his friends. He was also building his dream house. Spanky lived his fantasy life for five years. Right after moving into his huge new

² Charles W. Colson, “Twice Saved – On the Titanic,” faithHUB, faithhub.net/twice-saved-on-the-titanic/

home, he found out he was dying. A year later, at age 60, Spanky was dead.

Spanky had always lived larger than life. His booming voice and large 6-foot-3-inch frame, made him a monstrous presence. Wherever he went, a party followed, even at a child's soccer practice. When he partied, he wanted the music at top volume. When he bought a boat, he wanted it to be the fastest. When he got interested in salt-water fish tanks, they had to be huge. He rode anything that went fast—high-powered dirt bikes, dune buggies and boats with super-charged hydro engines. He was fanatical about his equipment. It had to be the best, and it had to be perfectly maintained. His cars had to be black or white, and his boats, bathing suits, and caps had to be red. It was a declaration of his love for life. Robin Hinch writes:

Death didn't come as easily to Spanky as life. He could not acknowledge the seriousness of his illness and called it "just a little inconvenience."

"Next week, I'll be back on the river," he insisted toward the end.

And he did not, as the famous Dylan Thomas poem suggests, "go gentle into that good night."

Spanky, in fact, fought death for hours after his family assured him it was okay to let go. And at the very end, he threw his arms up over his head, as if to ward off the angels that were coming for him, and uttered one last word: "NO!"

Robin Hinch

Weep not for me, but for yourselves. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through the mediation of His blessed Son, receives me, though a sinner. We shall meet to sing the new song, and remain everlastingly happy.

John Bunyan

I am ready to die for my Lord that in my blood the Church may obtain liberty and peace.

Thomas à Becket

I go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school. I feel so strong in Christ.

Adoniram Judson

I will see Jesus; I shall see Him as He is! I have had the light for many years. Oh how bright it is! I feel so safe and satisfied!

Sir David Brewster

If it were God's will to raise me up [from this sickbed], I should like to preach from the text, John 3:16. Praise be to the Lord.

Henry Moorhouse

My affections are so much in heaven that I can leave you all without a regret; yet I do not love you less, but God more.

William Wilberforce

Beyond the grave comes heaven. Well, it will be strange to find myself in Heaven, but it won't be a strange Christ—One I've known these many years. I am glad He knows me. I have a deep peace, which you know.

John Nelson Darby

Most of the death row inmates were in their bunks wrapped in blankets, staring blankly at little black-and-white TV screens, killing time. But in one cell a man was sitting on his bunk, reading. As I approached, he looked up and showed me his book—an instruction manual on Episcopal liturgy.

John Irving, on death row for more than 15 years, was studying for the priesthood. John told me he was allowed out of his cell one hour each day. The rest of the time, he studies.

Seeing that John had nothing in his cell but a few books, I thought, God's blessed me so much, the least I can do is provide something for this brother. "Would you like a TV if I could arrange it?" I asked.

John smiled gratefully. "Thanks," he said, "but no thanks. You can waste an awful lot of time with those things." For the 15 years since a judge

placed a number on his days, John has determined not to waste the one commodity he had to give to the Lord—his time.

Charles Colson

The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. That is the verse on which I am now dying. One wants no more.

Brownlow North

This letter was written by Southern Baptist Missionary to Iraq, Karen Watson, prior to leaving for the Middle East. The letter was dated March 7, 2003. Karen was killed, along with four other missionaries, on March 15, 2004.

Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger:

You should only be opening this letter in the event of my death.

When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward, his glory my reward.

One of the most important things to remember right now is to preserve the work....I am writing this as if I am still working with my people group.

I thank you all so much for your prayers and support. Surely your reward in heaven will be great. Thank you for investing in my life and spiritual well-being. Keep sending missionaries out. Keep raising up fine young pastors.

In regards to any service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply, just preach the gospel....Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.

The Missionary Heart:

Care more than some think is wise.

Risk more than some think is safe.

Dream more than some think is practical.

Expect more than some think is possible.

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience....There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him. I love you two and my church family.

In his care,

Salaam,

Karen

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us.

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate.

I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ...

My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain Jon & Kate Plus Eight to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put Christianity Today on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go.

I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway?

I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it. Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much on-line shopping we do.

I ran back in and picked up a bunch of shoes left by the door. Tried to stuff them in the front closet, but it was overflowing with heavy coats and work coats and snow coats and pretty coats and raincoats and extra coats. We live in the South; why'd we buy so many coats? I squeezed the shoes in with two minutes to go.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.

Doug Mendenhall

Our God is the God from whom cometh salvation. God is the Lord by whom we escape death! Into Thy hands I commit my spirit; God of truth, Thou hast redeemed me!"

Martin Luther