

Living Your YOU-logy

(How the Prospect of Death Can Influence the Accomplishment of Incredible Dreams)

by Rashad Jennings

01/21/2019

Introduction - MLK Quote About Death

In a powerful message he once delivered called “Drum Major Instinct” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about “greatness” and how Jesus redefined it as being a servant. In a part of that message, he talked about the topic of his death. It was during that portion, that he said the following:

“Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life’s final common denominator... That something we call death. We all think about it, and every now and then I think about my own death... and I don’t think about it in a morbid sense. Every now and then I ask myself what is it that I want said [at my funeral]... If you get somebody to deliver the eulogy... Tell ‘em not to mention that I had a Nobel Peace Prize. That’s not important... tell ‘em Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others.”

I was graciously asked to come speak to you today about a principle I gleaned from the incredible life of Dr. King. I believe that King was a man who had such an impact on this world both during and after his life because he recognized that there were so many great life-principles found even in the normally taboo topic of death. But don’t worry. I’m not going to focus totally on death from the average perspective. I’ll talk about how powerful it is in helping us to *LIVE* for something that will positively impact the world, and outlive us.

I’ll focus on how the topic of death fueled Dr. King’s great dream. His was a dream that became a reality, and will continue to positively impact the world forever. So let’s do this. We will take each letter of the word dream, and look at five key components that are critical to making a great dream a reality that will outlive us and inspire others to do the same. It is my hope that what I share today will help you to further honor Dr. King’s great memory by living a life worth mimicking by generations to come.

LIVING YOUR YOU-LOGY

I’d like to call this talk “Living Your YOU-logy” As you know a eulogy is a speech or writing used to commend someone at their funeral. And by the way, I’ve replaced the “E-U” in eulogy with “Y-O-U”. I’ll give you a second to let that sink in...

I have no doubt that Minister Benjamin Mays had little to no trouble coming up with a eulogy for Dr. Martin Luther King's funeral. Reverend Mays knew Dr. King as a man who lived for a better world that would long outlive him.

As we know, Dr. King was assassinated at just 39 years old. *In regular years he lived a very short adult life, but in experience, he lived many lifetimes.* And in many ways, he still lives today.

As a great scholar and minister, Dr. King gleaned from volumes of books and other writings from all around the world. He was a gifted speaker, and a man of wisdom far beyond his years. But more than all of that he was inspired by God to devote his life to non-violently bringing about racial equality for blacks and for all people. And no one else in the history of this country has been more effective in doing just that. No one.

However I'm not here today to talk about non-violence and racial equality. Dr. King has said and done much more than I could ever cover in a speech. We all know that there's still much more work to do in the area of racial equality. And I'm determined to continue doing my part. As I'm sure you are too.

Today I'm here to honor Dr. King's legacy by focusing on the power that fueled his dream. It was his ability to look death in the face, and remain steadfast.

Dr. King's legacy proves that dreams can and do come true. Despite the attempts on his life, and the continual death threats he received, he would not be deterred. Therefore, we would be remiss in our individual duties of living out our purposes, if we didn't also learn from him how to dream our own dreams, and make them a reality. *We all have a responsibility to in some way leave this world a better place than we found it.*

So by show of hands, how many of you can say that Dr. King's legacy impacted your life? Okay. Then what this whole speech is essentially going to do is ask you to prove it. It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Don't be remiss in your duty to your fellow man and to the world by just knowing Dr. King's legacy. Show it by building on it. The world needs what you are meant to offer.

DEATH RELATES TO LIFE

And death is one of the most constant reminders of our responsibility to life. So let's use the letters in the word "dream" to present five key components that put us on the proper course to not only making our dreams come true, but also positively impacting the people around us. And right off the bat, the first letter—the letter "D" represents the topic of **DEATH**. As I said, I will not dwell directly on death throughout. I just believe the idea of death has more of an impact on how we live than we care to admit.

In his book, "Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman", a well-known Japanese writer Haruki Murakami wrote that, "Death is not the opposite of life, but a part of it."

And I agree. Death is a very important part of life. Again, we don't like to talk about it. We'd rather not deal with the truth that death will come. But if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that it deserves much more of our respect and attention. I'll prove it to you.

What usually happens when someone has a near death experience? What happens to their moods, their energy, or their attitudes? After they recover, do they end up a better person or worse? Do they end up happy or angry? In most cases, they end up happier. They end up being appreciative and they stop overlooking the small things in life. They long to interact more with their loved ones. They are inspired with a new zest for life. They end up doing more positive things for others.

So, why is that usually the result? There could be many reasons. Some say that in a near death experience, they see their whole lives flash before them. Others say they see visions of heaven or perhaps even hell. Some say they become more aware than ever before that they don't want to leave a loved one in grief of their loss. Whatever the case, death has the ability to cause us to value life like nothing else.

The late actor Michael Landon of Little House on the Prairie said that, "*Whatever you want to do, do it now. There are only so many tomorrows.*" People all over the world know that this is true. Yet so few ever really set out to achieve anything of real significance in life. Most just settle. Most are satisfied with the mundane. We must remember that our lives are far too valuable to just live and then die without doing something that will outlive us.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Dr. King said that every now and then he thought about his own death, but not in a morbid way. Dr. King thought of his death like Landon suggested. He realized that he only had so many tomorrows, and if he was going to make the world a better place for people of color, he was going to have to get to work right away. He knew that life is short. And he realized that it is even shorter when you resolve to shine a light into the darkness of this world.

So let's be real for a second... You will **die**. You don't get to choose when. But with every second you get to live, you get to decide the substance of your **YOU-logy!**

RESOLVE TO LIVE FOR SOMETHING WORTH DYING FOR

And that brings me to the next letter in the word dream. The letter "R" stands for **RESOLVE**. Merriam-Webster's defines the noun form of resolve as a "fixed purpose". The verb form is defined as to reach a "firm decision" about. In short, it is

a resolution. And unlike many of us do each “January”, King never backed out of his resolution.

On Sept. 20, 1958, while signing books, a woman approached Dr. King and asked if it really was him. When he confirmed that it was, she said she’d been looking for him, and she plunged a letter opener deep into his chest. Dr. King was told that the blade was so close to his heart that if he so much as sneezed, he would have died.

Of course he survived. Remember, I said, he died at the age of 39. This stabbing incident happened ten years before his death when he was just 29. He didn’t let the threat or even the reality of death stop him. He resolved to keep on pursuing his dream, no matter what.

Dr. King once said that, “No one really knows why they are alive until they know what they would die for.”

King was obviously willing to die for freedom and equality. What is it that you are willing to die for? Take a moment to imagine it a year after you died. What is it that you would hope to have instilled in the hearts and minds of people that can inspire them to live an extraordinary and giving life? What principles? What morals? What legacy might you leave behind? Would it inspire others to even pick up your mantle, and carry it on to bigger and better things than you imagined? Or will it leave us wondering what your life was really about.

When you figure out what that looks like, you will begin to know why you are here on earth. And when you know why you are here, what you may have thought to be a great sacrifice reveals itself as your purpose. The clock is ticking... Right now, even as I speak, what are you **resolving** to add to your **YOU-logy**?

EXECUTION IS REQUIRED

I often tell people concerning their dreams that if you want to accomplish your dreams, the first thing you gotta do is wake up. But if dreaming is all you’re infatuated with, then by all means, hit snooze. A dream is nothing without execution. Daily, coordinated, calculated, disciplined steps have to be taken if you want to be true to your dream.

With all of the access we have to information today, there is no need to wait until you have all the details. The late tennis legend Arthur Ashe said, “Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” I’m sure Dr. King felt the same way.

Let’s be clear. When Dr. King gave his most memorable “I Have A Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he wasn’t speaking about something that was just in his head. The reason there were over a quarter of a million people listening to him there was because he had been faithfully executing his plan.

Now this thought is even convicting to me. But if we really want to honor King's legacy, then maybe we should ask ourselves... How can I have more freedom than he ever had, but do less than he ever did, and yet complain more than he ever dreamed?

Remember, this was during segregation when lynching of blacks still happened around the country, and physical assaults occurred simply because of race. And yet, Dr. King encouraged hundreds of thousands of people to show up at the risk of harm. By his lack of fear of death, he encouraged millions to be unafraid of life in a country that was hostile to them.

Even before his death, his dream was already being realized. And this was all because he remembered how **DEATH** was a part of life, he **RESOLVED** to do what he could to improve others lives, and he faithfully **EXECUTED** his plan. Without even thinking about it, he went to work every day on what we all now know as his great **YOU-logy**.

TAKE IF FROM ME AS AN NFL RUNNING BACK, WHEN YOU HOLD SOMETHING OF VALUE, WHETHER IN YOUR HANDS OR IN YOUR HEART, AND YOU DECIDE TO MOVE FORWARD WITH IT, ADVERSARIES WILL ATTACK

As you pursue any noble venture that stands to benefit the world or your fellow man, you must realize that for whatever reason there will always be **ADVERSARIES**.

It may be something as simple as the lies you believe within yourself. It may be lies like, "I'm nobody", or "I'm not important enough", or "Someone else will do it." It may simply be laziness or procrastination. Or it may be an outside enemy who is jealous or envious of you because of their own insecurities.

Again, there will be adversaries. But I have a very, very important question to ask you. It might be a little too deep for many, so you might want to pay close attention... Here it goes...

"So what?"

And believe me, I understand that when I ask this question, some of you have an excuse ready. But if you know what you're living for, and what you're willing to die for, that question becomes powerfully irrelevant. You do it anyway!

It is said that anything worth having is worth fighting for. I'd like to add that anything that's worth fighting for will usually HAVE TO BE fought for. The fact remains that good and evil exist in the world. And they will always be at war with each other. We just have to do all we can do to make sure that our dreams, goals, and efforts remain on the side of good and right.

Dr. King said that, *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”*

Know that your noble dream to do things that outlive you is a light just waiting to be turned on through action. It can't wait to come into the world and to begin to chase the darkness. Your worthy dream is love just waiting to be activated so that it can rush in like a mighty river to begin to drive out whatever hatred is standing in the way of the faith, hope, and love that somebody else needs in this world.

Dr. King regularly had to check his car for bombs before he got into it. He had to regularly check on his wife and family to make sure the house wasn't fire-bombed or broken into by those who wanted to do them harm.

Dr. King experienced racist people in the highest positions of government who were constantly plotting and scheming ways they could hurt, hinder, or stop him cold. Even news sources used slander and bogus headlines to ruin his reputation. But it didn't stop him.

In fact, even as he gave that great “I Have a Dream Speech” he all but said in his words that he would likely not live long enough to see his dream come to pass. He knew they were gunning for him. But he didn't miss a beat. He just kept on with that faithful, undeterred “Drum Major Instinct” he preached about. And that is what you have to do if you really want to positively impact the world. You gotta keep beating that drum...

Because Dr. King had it deep in his heart to change a prejudiced world, and because he knew that it would likely take longer than he had to live, he dedicated every day of his life to the cause. He lived every day reminding himself that the clock was ticking. And might I add that *he didn't do all of this just for the oppressed, he did this to help cure the heart of the oppressor too! He wanted his YOU-logy to benefit you and me ...*

And that brings us to the final letter of the word “dream...”

MISSION IS A MUST

You can successfully keep your dream alive when you stay ever mindful of the fact that **D... DEATH** can come upon us at any time. So allow that to inspire you to **R... RESOLVE** to do something for the world that will far outlive you. And when you begin to consistently **E... EXECUTE** your plan. And you don't kid yourself, you know all along that there will be **A... ADVERSARIES**. And yet you remain undeterred, THEN you will find that you are already on **M... MISSION**. Stay on mission no matter what! **Quitting is not an option!**

Just know that you will need to clearly define your mission though. Dr. Martin Luther King's mission was primarily the pursuit of freedom and equality for people of color. There is no mistaking that. And even though he served as pastor of Dexter Avenue King Memorial Church, and co-pastored with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church, he never lost site of his own personal mission. Neither must you.

Financial expert Dave Ramsey said that, *"Without a mission statement, you may get to the top of the ladder and then realize it was leaning against the wrong building."* As you pursue your dream, be careful to continually evaluate to insure that you are heading in the right direction. How you do that will be dictated by your dream and by those with whom you pursue it.

What I've shared with you today are just five elements that show you how death and life are connected, and how they work together. They can work together to inspire and encourage us to pursue dreams that are bigger than us, and that outlive us. The fact of death also reminds us that whatever your dream is make sure that it includes helping somebody else. It is the best motivation there is to go for it!

And please know that if you truly live for something worth dying for, you never really die. Your dream lives on in the hearts and minds of all those you've helped, and as they pass it on, you live on!

With that in mind, I'll leave you with one more quote by the great Dr. King. It speaks of putting others first. It says...

"Ten thousand fools proclaim themselves into obscurity, while one wise man forgets himself into immortality."

Will you be wise and not make life all about you? Will you forget yourself enough to serve others and lift them up in ways that will far outlive you? Will you live in such a way that whoever gives your YOU-logy will have no problem preaching a truly amazing and inspiring sermon? I hope so!

Thank you for having me. And Happy Martin Luther King Jr. Day to you all!