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ONE
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True stories of
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30-day adventure!

Live

THIRTY DAYS
TO A
NO-REGRETS LIFE

KERRY & CHRIS SHOOK



ONE
MONTH
TO
Love

THIRTY DAYS
TO A
NO-REGRETS LIFE



KERRY & CHRIS SHOOK



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For Ryan, Josh, Megan, and Steven



*As we have raised you, in many ways you have raised us.
We pray that you will always live with no regrets.*

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Foreword

Nothing focuses a person's priorities in life like learning he is about to die. Many of us would suddenly realize we have spent our lives on things that were not very important. So many of us waste our lives with "when and then" thinking, believing that "when" this or that happens, "then" we will really start living and do something for God that really matters.

That approach is guaranteed to leave you with regrets. At the end of your life, the only thing that will matter is whether you accomplished God's purpose for your life. Jesus was just twelve when He said, "I must be about My Father's business." Just twenty-one years later, He could say to the Father, "I have completed the work You gave me to do." If we all had that kind of focus and concentration in our lives, there's no telling what God would accomplish in the world!

The fear of death paralyzes most people, preventing them from taking the risks necessary to fulfill God's plan for their lives. Kerry and Chris Shook want you to grasp an amazing insight: embracing your mortality sets you free to live a meaningful and satisfying life without regret. As He did with Queen Esther, God put each of us in the world "for such a time as this." *One Month to Live* is a great way to discover the purposeful, joyful, abundant life God created you to enjoy!

Rick Warren

Founding Pastor, Saddleback Church

Author, international bestseller *The Purpose-Driven Life*

A Note from the Authors

If you only had one month to live, what would you change?

This book is unique in many ways. Foremost, as the title and the question above demonstrate, we're not afraid to ask hard questions. As our first book, one we've waited more than ten years to write, these pages carry the vital message to which we're devoted—how to experience life to the fullest by living passionately and purposefully, the way we were created to live. By embracing the fact that our time on earth is limited, we can live deliberately, no longer postponing the joy and peace that come from fulfilling our God-given destiny. Unless there's nothing you want to change about your life, we look forward to exploring with you what it means to experience the one-month-to-live lifestyle.

This book is also unique because of the way we've written it. Both of us, Kerry and Chris, consider our lives and ministry to be an equal partnership. Married for over twenty years and ministering together for the entire time, we truly function better as a team. As we've struggled and stretched, grown and celebrated, we've lived the message in these pages. Therefore, about half the experiences and insights we share in these pages came from Kerry, the other half from Chris.

For your reading convenience, however, the book is written in one, first-person voice. This avoids the confusing shift between "I" (Kerry) and "I" (Chris) and eliminates an unnecessary distraction from the vital message we want to share. By combining our two voices into one, we also want to emphasize that our message transcends all demographics. It affects both men and women, singles and couples, rich and poor, and people of all cultures around the world.

Wherever you may be in your life's journey, we invite you to turn the page and begin answering this question that will forever change the way you live.

Kerry

Chris

THE ONE-MONTH-TO-LIVE CHALLENGE



I commit with God's strength to live
the next thirty days as if they are my last
so I can experience life to the full!

Your name

Partner's name

Kerry & Chris Shook

*Take the one-month-to-live challenge with a
friend and log on to OneMonthToLive.com for
daily encouragement from Kerry and Chris.*



ONE
MONTH
TO
Live

Introduction

LIVING THE DASH

Death is more universal than life;
everyone dies but not everyone lives.

—ALAN SACHS

I am convinced that it is not the fear of death,
of our lives ending, that haunts our sleep so much
as the fear...that as far as the world is concerned,
we might as well never have lived.

—HAROLD KUSHNER

*Y*our time on earth is limited. No matter how much this idea makes you squirm, it's a fact. No matter who you are, how young or old, what measure of success you've attained, or where you live, mortality remains the great equalizer. With each tick of the clock, a moment of your life is behind you. Even as you read this paragraph, seconds passed that you can never regain. Your days are numbered, and each one that passes is gone forever.

If you're like me, you may be tempted to view this reality as harsh and unwelcome, to let it overwhelm and even paralyze you. But that's not my purpose in writing this book—just the opposite. I'm convinced that rather than inhibiting us

to play it safe, *embracing our time on earth as a limited resource has incredible power to liberate us*. Most of us, if we knew we only had one month to live, would live differently. We would be more authentic about who we are and more deliberate about how we spent our time. But such a contrast begs the question: *what keeps us from living this way now?*

My motivation to find the answer—and better yet, to live it and help you live it—is born in part from my experience in ministry. In this role I’ve been privileged to spend time with many people as they face the imminent end of their lives on earth. While many of them struggle through the stages of grief—shock, denial, bargaining, guilt, anger, depression, acceptance—most of them make radical changes as a result of their awareness of their terminal conditions. They take license to say what they really feel and do what they really want. They ask for forgiveness and forgive others. They no longer think only of themselves but reach out to those they love and let them know how much they mean. They take risks they would never have taken before and allow themselves to lay worry aside and gratefully accept each new day. They seem to gain a new clarity about their priorities, like their relationship with God and leaving legacies that will endure.

Over the years of watching others live out their last days, I began to ask myself, *Why can’t all of us live more like we’re dying? Isn’t that how we were meant to live in the first place? To discover what we’re made for and to utilize our unique gifts in the limited amount of time we’re given?* So last year at a staff retreat I tried a little experiment and asked our team members this question: If you knew you had one month to live, how would you live differently? I gave everyone a journal and challenged them to live the next thirty days as if they were their last and to write down what happened.

The results were nothing less than life changing! At the end of the thirty days, we all had a greater clarity of purpose and a renewed passion for the things that really matter. Many people did big, once-in-a-lifetime things, like going on a dream vacation to Hawaii with their spouse, finally getting serious about a healthy lifestyle and losing twenty-five pounds, or reconciling a relationship with a parent that had been neglected for years.

For me, the little, daily things took on a whole new meaning and forever changed my life. Taking my youngest two children to school every day became a real joy. I became keenly aware of what a sacred moment it is every morning to

play twenty questions with Steven and to make up silly songs with my teenage daughter, Megan. I made sure that I met my two oldest sons, Ryan and Josh, at their favorite restaurant once a week after school just to connect. Many of our staff members did whatever it took to be at all their children's ball games, recitals, and school events. At the same time, I noticed that the team was more productive than ever, wanting the things they did at work to make a lasting impact.

I've since come to believe that the one-month-to-live lifestyle is universal in principle but unique in its expression. If we all lived as if we had one month left on this earth, we would each spend our days differently, in ways unique to us, and yet I believe we would all experience more fulfilling lives that could leave a legacy for eternity.

One Little Dash

Perhaps no place echoes with eternity quite like a cemetery. Not surprisingly, I'm fascinated by old gravestones and the lives they represent. The dates on some of the old monuments and grave markers in the Houston area where I live go back to the eighteen hundreds. My imagination launches me into the various stories the markers tell. I find myself pondering what life was like in 1823 or 1914. I know people back then had the same problems and pain as everyone does in life, but I wonder if they felt as stressed and pressured as I do. Our technology and modern conveniences have revolutionized our twenty-first-century lives but at what price?

Looking at old tombstones, I can't help but recognize that entire lives are now reduced before me to two dates and one little dash. Some monuments include facts or sayings, Bible verses or poignant memorials, but each person's life really comes down to what transpired between those two dates. It comes down to what's in the dash. I look at the dash of a particular person's marker and wonder, *What did he live for? Whom did she love? What were his passions? What were her biggest mistakes and greatest regrets?*

When you think about it, we don't have control over many things in life. We didn't get to decide where we were born, who our parents are, or which time period and culture we face. We don't get to decide the dates on our gravestone. We don't know when our time on this earth will be up. It could be next week or next year or decades away. Only God knows. Our lives are in His hands. But there is one

thing we have a vast amount of control over. We get to decide how we're going to use our dash.

You get to choose how to spend that little dash of time between the two dates of your earthly existence. What are you spending yours on? Are you living the dash, knowing fully who you are and why you're here? Or dashing to live, hurriedly spending precious time chasing things that really don't matter to you? The psalmist prayed, "Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are; help us to spend them as we should" (Psalm 90:12, TLB). God wants us to realize that our time on earth is limited so we will spend it wisely. But He gives us the choice about how we spend this most valuable currency.

No Change Required

While many of the people I've known who are facing death make radical changes in order to die well, occasionally I meet some who change very little. It's not that they are unwilling to change. It's that they have lived so deliberately and so authentically that the news of the end of this life doesn't turn them upside down. Of course they grieve and struggle with the news. They ache for their families and the people they love. But they take comfort in knowing they have been living focused on what matters most to them: their relationships with the ones they love, their relationship with the God of the universe, and the fulfillment of their unique purpose on this earth.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to spend your life so that if you discovered you only had a month to live, you wouldn't need to change a thing? What's holding you back? What are you waiting on? Repeatedly in Scripture, God reminds us that our lives are short compared to eternity. "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

Of course I'm not encouraging you simply to live for today. Most of us can't afford to quit our jobs overnight, say what we're really feeling all the time, or act on every spontaneous idea. This kind of a lifestyle seems selfish and wildly indulgent and may indicate that such a person doesn't believe there's anything beyond this life. But life is more than what we know of it on earth. Even as we engage ourselves in the present, we must think through the eternal impact of how we live. The Bible tells us that God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). He created us in His own image as spiritual beings but in fleshly bodies. If we're

honest, most of us sense there has to be more to our existence than what this world can offer.

This is the point where many people turn to faith. But just as some people live like there's no tomorrow, others use their faith to live like there's no today. They're always thinking about heaven "someday" instead of fully engaging in life today.

The only way we can live for eternity is to embrace each day as a gift from God. We must live in the tipping point between the everyday and the eternal. He created us and has given us another day to live—to know and experience His love, to love and serve those around us, to live passionately the life He made us for. The temporal nature of our lives should keep our focus on what matters most.

Thirty-Day Challenge

Be brutally honest with yourself. *Your time on earth is limited. Shouldn't you start making the most of it?* If you knew you had one month to live, you would look at everything from a different perspective. Many of the things you do now that seem so important would immediately become meaningless. You would have total clarity about what matters most, and you wouldn't hesitate to be spontaneous and risk your heart. You wouldn't wait until tomorrow to do what you need to do today. The way you lived that month would be the way you wished you had lived your whole life.

If you knew you had one month to live, your life would be radically transformed. But why do we wait until we're diagnosed with cancer or we lose a loved one to accept this knowledge and allow it to free us? Don't we want all that life has to offer? Don't we want to fulfill the purpose for which we were created? Wouldn't life be a lot more satisfying if we lived this way?

I'm challenging you to start living your life as though you have one month to live, and I've designed this book to help you. There are four universal principles in the one-month-to-live lifestyle: to live passionately, to love completely, to learn humbly, and to leave boldly. I've divided this book into four sections or "weeks" accordingly, and I encourage you to live these next thirty days as if they were your last. For each day there's a chapter designed to help you focus on that week's principle.

Each chapter also contains two features to inspire your thirty-day life experiment. Throughout each chapter, you'll find "Make It Count Moments" with questions

designed to help you examine your life and focus on what's most important. The other feature, called "Make It Last for Life," comes at the end of each chapter and offers ways to act on that day's focus. These action points don't require homework so much as they inspire *lifework*, ways for you to personalize the material to your life. You may want to allow time to think through these items, to journal about them, and to pray about them. If you're reading this book with others in a group, then this will be a great place to focus your discussion.

Regardless of how you use this book, my hope and prayer is that you'll think seriously about what you want most out of life and what keeps you from pursuing it. I hope you'll embrace the fact that someday your life will come to an end so you will begin to live each day more fully.

You don't have to wait until there's a crisis to consider how you can experience life to the fullest. If you're willing to take this thirty-day challenge, be prepared for life to radically improve. You can live with no regrets and embrace a life so abundant you'll wonder why you ever settled for less.

There's no time like the present—right now!—to get started. Reading this book takes time, your most precious commodity, and I promise not to waste one second you spend on these pages. As you discover the life you were made for, today can truly be the first day of a life with no regrets. Claim today as the start of a month that's guaranteed to change your life!

Make It Last for Life

1. As quickly as possible, without thinking too hard or too long, make a list of five things you'd change about your life if you knew you only had a month to live. Choose at least one to begin changing today, right now.
2. Describe how you would like your life to be different at the end of reading this book. What drew you to open these pages in the first place? What's going on in your life now that has prepared you to think about who you are and why you're here?

3. Tell at least one other person—friend, family member, or co-worker—that you're reading this book. Ask that person to circle on the calendar the date for one month from today and to ask you then how your life has changed.



PRINCIPLE 1



*Live
Passionately*

Roller Coaster

RIDING THE BIG DIPPER

Life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take,
but by the moments that take our breath away.

—ANONYMOUS

Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives,
that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit,
every minute of every day. Do it, I say!
Whatever you want to do, do it now!
There are only so many tomorrows.

—POPE PAUL VI

As a kid, I loved going to the Spring Lake Amusement Park every summer—the smell of cotton candy, the carnival-type games with prizes, the Ferris wheel, and the bumper cars. But the main reason I loved the place was the roller coaster. To this day, the Big Dipper remains the scariest roller coaster I've ever ridden!

Now, I consider myself somewhat of a coaster connoisseur and have ridden several dozen, most of which I categorize as either “old-school model” or “new engineering feat.” Sure, I like the sleek, state-of-the-art roller coasters with their steel tracks. They ramp up to new heights and reach breakneck speeds on the

drop-off and turn loops and corkscrews and flip upside down. My kids love these, and we have a blast riding them.

The Big Dipper, however, was definitely old school and had none of the features of its modern counterparts. This baby was one of those old, wooden, traditional roller coasters, with slatted tracks and rickety scaffolding, chipped paint and cracked wood. No matter how jaded you might've been by other coasters, the Big Dipper guaranteed an adrenaline rush every ride.

As soon as the other thrill seekers and I boarded and left the station, I could feel my heart begin to race. We'd go up that first hill—*click, click, click, click*—until we got to the top, and then it would just stop, and I'd wonder, *Did it break? Are they going to come get us? What's going to happen here?* Then *BOOM!*—the bottom would drop out, and we'd take off, and my stomach would bounce into my throat. I had to close my eyes and mouth just to keep the bugs from flying in!

Hanging on for dear life, I felt so exhilarated and excited and genuinely afraid for my safety—all at the same time. We'd go around the first curve, and the wheels on one side would actually come off the track a little bit, and on the other side they would whine as sparks flew. Just as I got my bearings—*BOOM!*—another dip and another hairpin curve. I'd raise my hands to impress my friends, but, man, was I scared!

Even if I'd ridden it just the day before, I always felt disoriented enough to wonder what was next. The turns would keep coming so fast as my heart raced and my hands sweat on the little safety bar across my lap. We'd go into a tunnel so dark I could barely see the car in front of me and then out and into another curve and then—*SCREECH*—we'd slam to a stop back in the station.

Typical roller-coaster experience, right? Yet the Big Dipper's distinction, the unique feature that set it apart, was its age and visible lack of maintenance. It looked so bad that some of my friends wouldn't even ride it. Anyone could tell by looking, let alone riding, that it was just a matter of time before it jumped the track. OSHA hadn't inspected it in years! My friends and I had no idea if we'd be on the Dipper when it happened, but we definitely knew that one day it was going over the edge. In fact, years later a friend told me that once when he was riding it, the vacant seat next to him literally flew out of his car on the first curve!

Make It Count Moment

Do you see your life more as a safe ride or a trip on the Big Dipper? What areas of your life are safer than others? For example, maybe you take huge risks to advance in your career, but you overly protect your heart and risk little in relationships.

Someday Syndrome

As I enter middle age, I'm convinced that my favorite roller-coaster ride serves as an analogy for the way we were made to live. With both, it seems we just get started, and then it's over. You knew it had to end sometime, but it just went by so quickly. It seems as though the longer you ride, the faster it goes. Both rides can be dizzying, disorienting, and exhilarating.

Just as the roller-coaster ride passes in a flash, our lives on this earth are temporal and finite. It's a natural part of being human; we're born, and eventually our bodies will die. Instead of finding this depressing or paralyzing, if you're willing to face and own this truth about life—that it will end as you know it here—then you can be truly free. Instead of limiting us, our mortality can consistently remind us to be all we were made to be.

Often we're tempted to play it safe and settle for far less than we were made for. I know so many people whose favorite day of the week is Someday. Countless people in every stage of life say, "Someday I'm going to go for all that life has to offer." "When I retire, then I'm going to enjoy life." "Someday I'm really going to live for God and get my act together. I'll start loving my family better." "When I make enough money, then I'm really going to spend more time with my kids." "Someday when my schedule slows down, then I'm going to get involved at church." "When I have more time, then I'll focus on being more spiritual."

Someday. One day. When. If. Then it's over. When are we going to wake up and realize *this is life*?

This is your life, right here, right now. Wherever you're reading this page, feeling whatever you're feeling, facing whatever you're experiencing, *Someday is right now*. We'll always be tempted to resort to the Someday Syndrome, but this

mind-set robs us. Someday, when whatever we're looking for happens, then we'll start living. When everything settles down someday, then we can savor life. *But things won't settle down.* Once we attain what we think we want—more money, a less hectic schedule, the right job—we'll soon realize that it doesn't fulfill us, and we'll begin looking for the next big thing.

God did not design us simply to stand by and watch life pass as we wonder why we aren't more fulfilled. God created us to take risks in faith and to conquer the giants that paralyze us with fear.

We're to be like the teenage boy who stepped forward to challenge the giant Goliath in the ultimate death match. Despite all the thousands of men in the Israelite army, David was the only person who had the courage to face the giant. King Saul should have been the one to fight the Philistine giant, but he had long ago stopped following God with reckless abandon and was now playing it safe. Saul told David, "Don't be ridiculous! How can a kid like you fight with a man like him? You are only a boy and he has been in the army *since* he was a boy!" (1 Samuel 17:33, TLB).

When you think about it for a moment, you realize Saul was right in his assessment. What David was doing looked ridiculous! If you had been there, you would have said the same thing: "David, don't be ridiculous. Be reasonable. He's going to tear you apart limb by limb." Saul and the army of Israel were operating on the basis of reason. David was operating on the basis of faith. When you're operating on the basis of reason, all you can see is how big your giants are. If you're operating in faith, all you can see is how small your giants are compared to God.

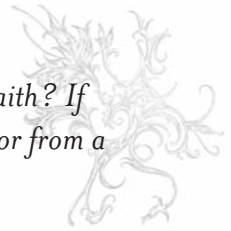
The one thing that separated David from the thousands who were there that day was ridiculous faith. Let me humbly suggest that the only way you can slay the giants that stand between you and the life you were made for is "ridiculous faith." Saul and the army of Israel were looking at life from a ground-level perspective. When you look at life from the ground level, giants fill up the screen. David, on the other hand, was looking at life from a God-level perspective. When you look at life from His perspective, giants become really small. As I look at life from a God-level perspective, I begin to understand that the life of faith that everyone else calls ridiculous is the only reasonable way to live.

The world says, "Don't be ridiculous; be reasonable. Don't stand out. Don't take risks; play it safe, and make security and comfort your primary goals in life."

God calls us to a life of faith, living every moment all out for Him. God didn't create us to coast along on the "kiddie rides" as we called them at Spring Lake—those safe little rides that barely got our pulse up because they moved so slowly. He has promised us an abundant life if we'll get on board for the great adventure for which He designed us. Such a life of ridiculous faith is every bit as exciting as riding the Big Dipper!

Make It Count Moment

Are you doing anything in your life right now that requires faith? If not, why not? Are you looking at life from God's perspective or from a ground-level perspective?



God has set the track for you with clear guidelines, and He promises to be the ultimate engineer. He wants you to get on board and allow Him to take you to places you never dreamed you could go. Sometimes He goes at breakneck speeds so that your breath catches in your throat and you're holding on for dear life. You feel totally exhilarated and fulfilled and scared to death—all at the same time. *This* is what life is.

Life is unpredictable; you never know what's coming next. Sometimes you go around sharp turns and think the wheels are coming off, but God is an expert driver. He knows right where He's going, and He's in total control when you feel afraid. Sometimes you go into dark tunnels where you can barely see your hand in front of you, but that's when you feel His strong hand on your shoulder. Soon, though, you pull into the station, and the ride has ended. It seems as though the ride of life just gets started, and then it's over! If you've made the commitment to follow Jesus, however, the ride continues; God takes you with Him on to heaven for eternity.

Maybe this seems far removed from where you see yourself right now. Because of your life circumstances, you may feel like you've already jumped off the roller-coaster tracks and crashed on the pavement. As difficult and frightening as your life may be right now, God is still there. He cares about you beyond what you can understand or even imagine. If you knew you only had a month to live, wouldn't you want to leave the safe ride behind and get on the one that makes your heart

come alive? Wouldn't you want to be on the ride that fulfills you—with joy, with fear, with a level of engagement that allows you to savor each moment? If you knew you only had a few weeks before this life ended, I don't think you'd be stuck in the Someday Syndrome. Today I want to challenge you to face your fears with ridiculous faith and experience the ride of your life!

Make It Last for Life

1. If you were certain your life as you know it would end in a few weeks, what would be your biggest regret? Why?
2. In what area of your life are you suffering from the Someday Syndrome? Make a decision today never again to use the phrase “someday, when things settle down.” Realize that today is your someday!
3. Instead of a roller coaster, what symbol or metaphor would you choose to describe what your life would look like if you were fully engaged? Try to come up with something as unique as you are. Find a picture of that symbol, place it in a spot where you will see it every day, and use it as a reminder to live with no regrets. Go to www.OneMonthToLive.com for suggestions.

