**LIVING YOUR DASH**

James Dorsey Walker July 22, 1926 – August 19, 2017
Mary Camp Walker March 9, 1927 – July 14, 2019
Earl Russell Lanning July 24, 1925 – January 23, 2017
Richard Earl Lanning October 18, 1952 – \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I know it sounds a bit macabre or ghoulish but I have always enjoyed touring cemeteries. While I was in a gospel meeting in Springfield, Illinois I had the opportunity to visit the historic Oak Ridge Cemetery where Abraham Lincoln is buried. Look at the dates on his tombstone. It reads:
 ***Abraham Lincoln 12 Feb 1809 – 15 Apr 1865***

If you have access to a library or the internet you can very easily learn the entire life of the 16th President of the United States. Virtually every moment of his life has been meticulously documented from his birth in Kentucky, to his young life in Indiana, to his career life in Illinois, to his presidency and assassination in Washington DC. The life of Lincoln has been studied and debated for the past 155 years.

But if you were to go to the library, or even the internet, and type in the four names listed at the top of this article you would not be able to reconstruct those lives at all. For example, if you typed in *Richard Earl Lanning* you would not even get a picture of me (you would see one of my dad – Earl Lanning), although you would find in the news section some guy with my name who had a warrant out for his arrest (I now jump at the sound of all sirens). I hate that guy! 😊

But if you were to do some digging, especially with interviews of family and friends, you would be able to fill in a fairly accurate portrait of who those people were. But even then, so much would be left out of their true legacy. In other words, you would not fully know their Dash.

I’ve heard a number of funerals (and given some) where the phrase “Living Your Dash” is used to tell a person’s life. Photos are displayed, on boards in the lobby, and through video presentations on a screen, to give a “picture” of who that person was and what he believed. The obituary and memorial service help fill in the blanks. “Living Your Dash” is the dates between the DOB and the DOD. It’s only a dash, but represents your entire life – the good, bad and ugly.

When I tour a cemetery I like to stare at the DOB – DOD. Especially the –. That dash makes my imagination reconstruct who they were and how they lived. I want to know, and believe, they were not just good citizens, but faithful Christians. I want to believe I will one day shake hands with them as we are “*caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (I Thess. 4:16-17). As I wander the rows of grave-markers and see the hundreds of names, I picture the possibility of getting to know their conversion story and hearing the Lord say to them, then to me, “*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord*” (Matt. 25:21,23).

Touring a cemetery, like attending a funeral, is a healthy dose of reality. The word cemetery is from the Latin and is broken down as “ceme” (half) + “tery” (earth), thus “the earth half.” Cemeteries hold our earth half. God holds our spirit half. *“Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it”* (Eccl. 12:7). James reminds us, “*the body without the spirit is dead*” – Jam. 2:26. When the spirit departs to God, we bury the body to await the resurrection (I Cor. 15).

But it is proper and fitting to give a farewell to the departed spirit. We call that a funeral, or memorial. Some dread such events and avoid them like the plague (or coronavirus). But, it is good to be reminded, “*It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men, and the living will take it to heart*” (Eccl. 7:2). At the funeral, then later at the gravesite, we are called “*take it to heart*” the Dash that person lived. We need to “see” that Dash and know it represents every day of our life. We need to “hear” that funeral and know that Jesus is the guest speaker. Here is how He begins our memorial:

2 Corinthians 5:10
“*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

Hebrews 4:12-13
*“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”*

He then proceeds to give a day-by-day account of all “*the things done in the body… good or bad*” and reveal all our “*thoughts and intents of the heart*” that were not hidden from His sight.

But there’s one caveat. If we had “*walked by faith*” (2 Cor 5:7), were “*saved by grace*” (Eph 2:8), were “*faithful unto death*” (Rev 2:10), then our sins were “*remembered no more*” (Heb 10:17), and our Dash will be honored with “*an imperishable crown*” (I Cor 9:27), “*a crown of righteousness*” (2 Tim. 4:8), “*the crown of life*” (Jam. 1:12; Rev 2:10), and “*a crown of glory*” (I Pet. 5:4).

Benita’s dad and mom have lived their Dash. My dad has lived his Dash. I’m still working on my Dash. So are you. But, just as it is “*appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27), so one day our Dash will be followed by our DOD and we must then kneel before the Lord *“who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts”* (I Cor. 4:5).

Until then… “Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready for the judgment day?”

God loves you, and so do I. Live your dash well.

Rick