

What Are Life Messages?

by Tony Stoltzfus

Lord, create in me a pure heart.

A Life Message is a place in your heart where you have deeply met Jesus, his life has replaced your natural life, and that incarnation flows out as a Message of Christ to others. Together, these Messages combine to form your being call—the essence of the Christ-in-you that is channeled through your calling role to impact others. Life Messages are individual facets of Christ’s character you specially model, while your being call is all those messages rolled together.

Life Messages aren’t formed where the best of your natural abilities are *refined*, but where the worst of the natural you is *replaced*. They are not principles you’ve learned, disciplines you’ve mastered or even trials you’ve overcome, but the product of an encounter with God that transforms your innermost self and redefines who you are.

Life Messages are rooted in our core identity. Since changing our identity is extraordinarily hard work, we rarely do it without an extraordinary stimulus. A great touch from God happens most often through an act of extraordinary grace or in the midst of unusually trying circumstances.

Such experiences give you the gift of a platform. People who have been in similar circumstances to you will listen to you because you met God there. You have real, tested wisdom to offer, and not just platitudes that have never been through the fire. An important by-product of the story behind your Message is that it draws the very people to you who need what you have to give! They sense the power you gained from meeting God in the same difficult place they’re in, and you have what they are desperately looking for.

Repeated Processing

The power of a Life Message is proportional to how much of Jesus is in us in that part of our heart. Therefore, in the most important areas of our call, God is going to process us repeatedly, driving his life deeper and deeper into us each time. This pattern of unusually intense, repeated dealings of God in a particular area of our life is not a sign of sin or weakness, but a sign of call. God has chosen us to go extraordinarily deep with him in this specific place, so that we will have an extra-ordinary revelation of who he is to share with the world.

All ministry is a function of who you are. You impact people for Christ to the degree that Christ has impacted you. That’s what Life Messages are all about—identifying the areas God has most deeply impacted you so that you can build your life mission around them.

Examples

Paul’s ministry offers us a good biblical picture of a Life Message. A key shaping event for him was the extraordinary circumstances of his conversion. He had been persecuting the Christians, thinking that he had all the right answers about what God wanted, and it turned out that he was totally wrong. Paul was the Pharisee of Pharisees, full of religion but empty of love, until God knocked him off his high horse, blinded him, and showed him the depth of his dependence and the ugliness of his religious arrogance. Is it any wonder that Paul’s most important Message is about God’s unmerited favor, since he experienced grace in such a profound way? Nobody needed grace like Paul, the foremost of sinners, so nobody

grasped it so deeply and nobody can speak about it with as much power as he can. Paul's ministry was built around bringing the Message of grace to those who most needed it—the Gentiles.

Martin Luther is an interesting parallel. Luther was morbidly obsessed with his own sinfulness. He tried literally everything to get rid of his sense of guilt: becoming a priest, confessing every sin he'd ever committed for hours on end, saying "Hail Mary's" while going up and down the steps of St. Peter's on his knees, fasting and engaging in all the "buffeting of the flesh" that was common among monks of that age. No matter what he did, Luther could not feel right with God.

It was not until he began teaching the book of Romans that he was impacted by Paul's Life Message of grace. And as with Paul, that grace found a perfect vehicle—nobody wanted it or needed it as bad as Luther. Embracing the concept of unmerited favor changed his life, and Luther appropriated Paul's Life Message as his own. *The power of the Protestant Reformation is directly proportional to the depth of Christ's touch of grace in Luther's heart.* The Message that birthed a movement came from the story of Luther's life.

Life Message Characteristics

You can begin to discover your life messages by looking for some of the following key qualities of a Life Message:

- **Places of Power**—This is where your story and what you have to offer has the deepest impact on others.
- **Drawing**—People who need your Message are instinctively drawn to you, and you are drawn to them.
- **Qualification**—You are qualified to speak profoundly to people in similar situations because you've been there and met God in it.
- **Soapbox Issues**—Every serious conversation you have seems to get around to your Messages. These are themes you return to over and over; because they represent the most important work God has done in you.
- **Tied to Shaping Events**—They tend to be tied to the important shaping events of your life (the crucible they form in).

As you become aware of your life messages, take note of the details of how God met you, commit those details to memory and integrate them into your daily life. While the Message itself comes from a God-encounter, you still have to steward what you've been given through discipline and reflection until it is firmly implanted in your habits and your heart. The more you are conscious of your Messages, know the story behind them and have studied their application, the more powerful they are.

What are your "places of power?"

What is it that "draws" people to you?

In what areas of your life do you feel you have been "qualified?" How?

What are your "Soapbox issues?"

Name several "Shaping Events" of your life. How have they shaped you? What have they shaped you to do?