

THE LIVING YEARS (Inspired by the Mike and the Mechanics Song)

Week #6 of a 7-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, June 1, 2025

LYRICS to "The Living Years"

Every generation

Blames the one before

And all of their frustrations

Come beating on your door

I know that I'm a prisoner

To all my father held so dear

I know that I'm a hostage

To all his hopes and fears

I just wish I could have told him in the living years

Oh, crumpled bits of paper

Filled with imperfect thought

Stilted conversations

I'm afraid that's all we've got

You say you just don't see it

He says it's perfect sense

You just can't get agreement

In this present tense

We all talk a different language

Talking in defense

Say it loud; oh, say it clear

You can listen as well as you hear

It's too late, oh, when we die

To admit we don't see eye to eye

So we open up a quarrel

Between the present and the past

We only sacrifice the future

It's the bitterness that lasts

So don't yield to the fortunes

You sometimes see as fate

It may have a new perspective

On a different date

And if you don't give up, and don't give in

You may just be O.K.

Say it loud; oh, say it clear

You can listen as well as you hear

It's too late, oh, when we die

To admit we don't see eye to eye

*I wasn't there that morning
When my father passed away
I didn't get to tell him
All the things I had to say

Think I caught his spirit
Later that same year
I'm sure I heard his echo
In my baby's new born tears
I just wish I could have told him in the living years

Say it loud; oh, say it clear
You can listen as well as you hear
It's too late, oh, when we die
To admit we don't see eye to eye

Hey, so say it, say it, say it loud (Say it loud)
Say it loud (Say it clear) Oh no, say it clear*

MESSAGE

So, how many people have had someone in your life that you love, but you just didn't see eye to eye? You didn't get each other? How many people have ever had something important that you wanted to share with someone, but you allowed fear to stop you from saying it? Anybody even rehearsed it in your head and still chickened out telling them? And last one, how many people have someone in your past that you wish you had a better relationship with? That you were sad and even regretted you couldn't make it better? Anybody?em

This morning we're going to talk about regrets, because we all have some regrets. Mark Twain says, *"The things we regret most in our lives are not the things that we did, but the things we didn't do."* Not the things that we said, but the things that we wished that we had said.

Today we are in Week #6 of our seven-week "Songs of Life" series. And today we're looking at the 1988 hit by Mike and the Mechanics ... this song, "The Living Years." Now, this song is about a son's regret of not sharing many things he wished he had shared and said with his dad; his regret of the things he would have loved to have done and experienced with his dad, but he didn't. You can feel his regret in the haunting words:

***I wasn't there that morning
When my father passed away
I didn't get to tell him
All the things I had to say ...
I just wish I could have told him in the living years***

I mean, I don't know about you, but this song brings tears to my eyes over all these years. You know, it stirs something in us, and it hits us in a place where we've all experienced someone that we wish we've shared more with. More of our feelings or thoughts or desires or ask them about theirs. We've all experienced the sadness of regret and the sadness of wishing that relationship was better than it actually was.

"The Living Years" was co-written by Mike Rutherford, who co-founded the rock group, Genesis (Peter Gabriel and Phil Collins) and B.A. Robertson. Interestingly, they had both lost their dad right around the same time. And B.A. Roberts actually wrote the first verse before his father died, and he was actually in

Los Angeles in a hotel working when he got a phone call that his dad died. And that's how that line, *"I wasn't there that morning when my father passed away,"* got in there. And, in fact, most of the words actually came from B.A. Robertson, because it was about his unresolved issues with his dad.

And Paul Carrack, who actually sang the song, also lost his dad. He lost his dad when he was 11. So, it's interesting the two writers and the singer of the song all had issues with their dads who died that they wish they could have made better; that they wish that it could have experienced in the living years.

You know, regret can really be painful. But I think regret, in some ways, is vital and necessary in our lives for us to grow; for us to learn. Because we all make mistakes.

So, I want you to think of something you regret in your life right now. And let me ask you the question: Why do you think we have regret? I think it's because we know we could do better. I think we have regret because we want to be better people. We want to live better lives. We don't want to hurt others or ourselves. That we truly want to live full and happy and healthy lives.

To me, regret gives us the opportunity to look at ourselves; to look at ourselves and ask how we're living, and if we like the way we're living/ And to be able to make adjustments so we could do it better next time; we could say it better next time; we could handle it better next time.

I mean, regrets can hurt us when we hold on to them. They can keep us stuck and in pain. But when we are willing to learn from them, they actually can propel us forward to something greater and better. To make new choices and to bring forth new possibilities and experiences.

This morning, we're going to look at four life lessons that are inspired by this very emotional and powerful song, "The Living Years."

The first thing I think it teaches us the importance of in relationships and not having regret is **ACCEPTANCE**. There's this woman who was in therapy with many issues, and the key one was her relationship with her dad. She always wanted her dad's approval and never felt like she got it. She wanted his attention; his time. She wanted him to say, *"I love you"* more. But that isn't the behavior she got from her dad.

And so, she complained it in the therapy sessions, blaming him for unhappiness, wishing that he was different than he was. And as a therapist saw this, he was moved to say, *"You know, we will not be able to make any progress in your relationship with your dad until you accept him as he is, and the relationship as it currently is. and to also accept that you may never get the relationship you're hoping for with your dad.."*

She was devastated to hear this news but, over time, she found it very liberating and healing. Over time she was able to accept him just the way he was, realizing that awkward kind of distant connection was maybe just the way it was always going to be. Over time she actually was able to make peace with it. And eventually, it gave her the ability to actually see the good in him. And to see the good, even in the relationships that she had.

Acceptance is a powerful and amazing thing. So I ask you: What person or relationship in your life are you having a hard time accepting? Who are you wishing was different? And are you willing to make peace and accept them just as they are, and to enjoy the relationship and the aspect of it that *are* working and that you are enjoying?

In the book of AA, it talks about how powerful the important acceptance is. It says, *"Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I'm disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation -- some fact of my life -- unacceptable to me. And I can only find serenity until I accept the person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it's supposed to be at this moment."*

So, what in your life are you willing to accept that you've been resisting? Who in your life are you willing to accept, rather than complain about or blame?

You know, I read an article on the importance of accepting our parents. And here's what it said: *"Few steps in the journey of personal growth and self-discovery are as transformative as fully embracing our parents. The act goes beyond a mere acknowledgement. It is about accepting them with all their imperfections, histories, and complexities of the familial relationships."*

When you think about it, our relationship, our parents were the first relationship we ever had. It influences every area of our lives: our development, our self-image, and our future relationships. And for those who have been hurt by family -- who have been mistreated or wounded by parents -- acceptance is absolutely crucial. To be able to see our parents and to acknowledge the hurt that we experience without blame is powerful and can only happen until we have acceptance.

And it's to get ... Acceptance is to get to that place of understanding that that relationship may never be able to be fixed. That it may never change, but we could still find meaning and healing through it.

You know, family relationships -- particularly with our parents -- are powerful and have a huge lasting impact. And it's important for us to find that place of acceptance so we can begin the healing.

Three ladies are sitting around a table playing bridge and bragging about their sons. "My Freddy," says Margaret. "Everyone should be so lucky to have a son like my son Freddy. You know, he brings me once a week a bouquet of beautiful flowers, and he's constantly taking me to nice restaurants. And if you just say a hint of something you want, the next day it's delivered to your door."

"That's very nice about your Freddy," says Gertrude, "but with all due respect, when I think of my Sammy: the way he takes care of me! He treats me like a queen. Every morning he brings me eggs for breakfast. He cooks me a wonderful gourmet lunch. And for supper we go to the best restaurants."

"Well," Barbara says, "that's really nice. But I don't want to make any of you feel bad. But wait 'til you hear about my Harry. Twice a week he pays someone \$200 an hour so he can lie on their couch and talk to them. And all that money he spends on you know what he talks about the most? He just talks about me." [Congregants laugh]

You know, everybody's got some family stuff. There are wounds, there are pains. They say things like we sometimes marry our dads, or we marry our moms, because they were so sometimes bonded and imprinted with some of those good and not so good experiences that we've had. The first relationship we had with our parents, and it's an important thing for us to find acceptance and peace so we can work to not regret those relationships.

The second thing I think it teaches is the importance of **HEALING** from those. John James and Russell Friedman -- in the book, *Grief Recovery Handbook* -- say, *"Many people labor under the misapprehension that, once someone has died, there is no way to complete any unfinished emotional business. Happily, this is not true, or we would have to stay incomplete forever."*

The Grief Recovery Method helps grievers identify and complete undelivered emotional communications that kept them tied to the pain of the past with people who have died or with whom relationships have ended or changed.

And so, what they're saying is: it's powerful and important, even if the person dies, to do your healing work around that relationship; around that abuse or woundedness or negativity. And it's four things. Number one: write out and fully express the hurt that was experienced. Number two: say what you need to say to that individual. Three is to forgive and have compassion for them. And four is to write down the things that you needed to receive so you can give it to yourself. And that could be acceptance; it could be

support, or encouragement, or affirmation, or comfort, or being nurtured. To literally give ourselves what our parents were not able to do.

And the important thing, it says, is that we're all being called to heal, and we don't need the other person to be alive or even around to do that important healing. Because what happens is: we think, because they're no longer in our life -- whether through death or moving away -- that that healing can never take place. And that's not true. The thing is: it's an inside job, and we have to admit it, own it, feel it, acknowledge it, process it, and release it so we can be healed.

In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 7, Verse 10, it says, *"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* And what it's saying is: when we grieve and process things of those relationships, if you grieve with blame and sadness and upset, that we're going to stay stuck in it. That's worldly grief. But with godly grief, we are able to heal. We are able to love; we are able to learn. And it is with that godly grief that we are able to experience salvation ... that we are able to experience healing.

To me, working on our healing reconnects us with our sense of wholeness, and not feeling that we're incomplete. It reconnects us with that sense of peace and love and joy within ourselves that is our nature. And if we want to have healthier relationships, we have to take time to heal those old wounds ... particularly the family ones and the ones with our mother and our father.

And so, whether the person is alive or not, healing is possible. And again, it is an inside job.

And the third one is to **LISTEN**. The song says:

***You say you just don't see it
He says it's perfect sense
You just can't get agreement
In this present tense
We all talk a different language
Talking in defense

Say it loud; say it clear
You can listen as well as you hear
It's too late when we die
To admit we don't see eye to eye***

What I love about this: this is the beginning of hope in this song. Because to say, *"You can listen as well as you hear,"* it means that we all have the ability to truly listen with our hearts. To listen with compassion.

Paul Tillich said, *"The first law of love is to listen."* And, you know, to listen is to love. Tillich said if the first law of love is to listen, then the greatest commandment or two commandments -- which are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your mind and your soul and strength, and to love others as yourself. He said it would be just as true if we said to *listen* to the Lord thy God with all your heart and soul and strength and to *listen* to others as we listen to ourselves.

I would say the greatest skill that we all could improve on in terms of communication is to listen. Sometimes we are so busy wanting to get *our* thoughts, *our* opinions, *our* ideas out that we really don't listen to what the other person is saying.

In the Book of James, it says, *"Everyone should be quick to listen; slow to speak; and slow to become angry."*

Rachel Naomi Riemann says this: *"Listening is the oldest and perhaps the most powerful tool of healing. It is often through the quality of our listening, and not the wisdom of our words, that we are able to affect some profound changes in the people around us. When we listen, we offer sanctuary for the homeless parts within each person which have been denied, unloved, devalued by themselves and others. When we listen generously to people, we can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time."*

So the question is: Who in our lives do we need to listen to with our hearts? Listen with care and compassion? Just the act of listening would transform all of our relationships and transform ourselves, as well.

True listening is about being present; being engaged. It's saying, *"I can see you. I hear what you're saying. You know, I feel what you're saying."* Even if we don't agree with them, being present and fully engaged and listening is one of the most healing and powerful things that we can do.

So again: which relationship in your life could you spend more time listening with your heart and with compassion? And including listening to ourselves with our hearts and compassion.

And so, the last one -- the fourth -- is to **KEEP LOVING**. Here's what it says:

***So don't yield to the fortunes
You sometimes see as fate
It may have a new perspective
On a different date
And if you don't give up, and don't give in
You may just be O.K.***

The fact is: we don't know how to love that well. We make mistakes loving one another, making all kinds of different assumptions. And it's an important thing to keep loving; keep learning. Don't give up; don't give in. You know, maybe on a different day, it'll be better.

Here's what Thomas Edison said. He said, *"If I find 10,000 ways that don't work. I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."*

Just because something doesn't go how you planned to do it does not mean it was useless. That every act of love you give -- even if it's not returned -- is love well spent; time and energy well spent. We're different. We have different love languages. And so, we need to be able to share our love in a variety of different ways. You know, sharing it, with a card or a message or a text or a gift or a smile or a pie. You know, or a poem. GPT Chat, or whatever that is, can help you write one if you need one. If it's silly or clumsy -- or whatever way -- sharing and expressing love and not giving up is huge and important. And one day it'll stick and it'll help and click in better ways. But we just got to keep loving; keep sharing.

There are all kinds of ways to love. It's endless the ways we can show our love and our kindness towards other people. We need to just open our heart and keep loving, keep loving, keep loving, even if it scares us.

Several years ago, my father was dying. He had diabetes, COPD, and chronic heart failure. So, he had a triple crown. And so, he was not given much time to live. And he had less and less energy. And it was Christmas time, and he was not able to come to the dinner table because he was so weak. And he was struggling.

You know, my sister and her kids came from, I think it was Montreal, and I think there were four or five of the grandkids. And he didn't come to dinner, but he came out afterwards and he played with those kids. And he summoned the strength somehow. My father wore a Santa hat. My father was not a Santa-hat-wearing kind of guy ... but he was loving and playful and smiling and as cheerful as that. He really

kicked it up a notch or two. And I was so proud and my heart was filled with such love to see him giving of himself and putting their happiness first. And so I wanted to write him a card. And so in the next day or so, I wrote him a card just to tell him how much I loved him and how much I admired him. And how impressed I was that he was able to set aside his own pain to be there for the grandkids and be playful and silly for them. And I told him, *"I am so proud to be your son"* and how much he means to me.

And so, I wrote the card and then I went into his bedroom and put it on the nightstand and snuck out. And my heart was racing. I don't know why I was, like, nervous and scared to share this with my dad. And after about five or 10 minutes, my dad comes out and the card's in his hand. And he's walking towards me, and he's got this serious look on his face. And my heart's just pounding. And then he puts his arms around me, and he just starts to cry. And we held each other and we cried. We didn't say a word; we just cried. And it was probably the most tender and vulnerable moment that I ever had with my dad. And it was just about sharing a card of how I felt! And we held each other and cried.

He died three weeks later. And that is still one of my most treasured memories of my father ... is that he was willing to go there. Because he was not a guy that was very demonstrative in his love. He didn't say, *"I love you."* He wasn't physically affectionate. He showed his love in different ways. Like, if you were going to take the car and it was snowing, he'd go clean the car, and warm it up for you, and give you the keys. And he'd tell you what the traffic report was, and the weather condition was.

So, he would do these things. And there is not one of the 10 of my siblings that would doubt my father loved us. But he loved differently. You know, the classic one was my mom and the hugs and the affection and all that stuff. But my dad didn't love that way. And, you know, sometimes people don't know how to love. But it's in there. We've got to think: it's not that our parents didn't love us; it's they loved differently, and based on their own wounds that keeps them back and living in fear.

And so, it's an important thing for us to keep loving. Don't give up; don't give in. Keep loving in all the simple ways. And give our loved ones the benefit of the doubt that, even though they can't show it the way we want it to be, that they actually still do and truly love us.

And we are here to love. That's the thing we all seek more than anything else in the world. We are told that God is love and we are created in the image and likeness of God, which means that we are created in the image and likeness of love. And yet, we're scared to love. We're scared to share our love and our vulnerabilities with the people that we love. But we've got to keep trying; we've got to keep loving, And we got to do it without regret. We got to do it with acceptance and healing and listening. And keep on loving with our hearts open.

You know, somebody said, *"Love is the currency of the soul. Spend it lavishly."* And love fully in the living years. God bless you all.