

Lesson 8

A Different Outlook on Death

Living with Purpose: Embracing Each Day as a Gift from God

Before You Begin

Read: Psalm 90:12; Hebrews 9:27; Philippians 1:20-23; 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

Pray more thankfulness for the precious gift of each day that God grants. Pray for help in restoring strained relationships or unresolved conflicts in your life. Ask God to heal your damaged relationships and give you the strength to seek reconciliation. Ask God for guidance on living out your purpose—using your talents and resources for His glory.

Set Your Intentions: What do you hope to achieve from this lesson?

Journal Your Thoughts. Journaling can be a valuable tool for spiritual reflection and growth.

Introduction

Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts (Psalm 90:12).

One day, you will die. It's a cold reality, but it's the truth. We don't like to think about this. It is easy to see how everyone else is headed that way, but it is hard to envision the reality for ourselves. Have you ever returned to your high school class reunion, looked around the room, and stared? *Who are all these old people?* They're doing the same thing and thinking the same thing about you.

It has been said there are three stages to life: youth, Middle Age, and finally, "My, you're looking great today." All of us are somewhere along that continuum.

As you read Psalm 90:12, the writer stresses that we do not count the days ... but make the days count. What is called for is for us to lead a life of significance—living outside of ourselves. This is what it means to *live like you are dying*. How would it change your life today if you received word that tomorrow, next month, or next year would begin without you? Would it change your priorities?

Would you be thinking more about your relationship with God? *Are you ready to meet Him face to face?* This is life's priority. In the end, nothing matters but this. Hebrews 9:27 says you will die, judgment will come, and your eternal destiny will be realized.

Would you be thinking more about your relationships with those you love? Are there any situations you need to repair? Who would you need to thank, apologize to, extend forgiveness, or remind that you love? Before you go, you want to clear up those things as much as possible.

Would you embrace excellence by rejecting mediocrity and complacency? Would you be true to yourself, embracing the talents you have? Would you bloom where you're planted and do what you could for others in the place you are? Would you concentrate on what you have, not what you don't, and

use all you have to serve others? Would you do it with urgency, knowing that every day, every hour, is precious?

Would you work to approach death positively? No one wants to head into death with regret. I believe everyone wants to head into eternity without regret, saying *I lived my life well*. We all want to be like Paul, who got to the end and said:

There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

Paul approached his death with confidence, assurance, and hope. He demonstrated a spirit of positivity and optimism. So, *how do we get there?*

In this lesson, we'll learn how.

Your Life Belongs to God

The life of every living thing is in his hand, as well as the breath of all humanity (Job 12:10).

God made you. You belong to Him by His creation. Your life is not your own. *In him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28). Your breath is in the hand of God (Daniel 5:23). The sooner we can figure this one fact out in life, the better our life will be. Your life is not your own; *it belongs to God*.

Since this is true, we must not waste our lives. At best, it is uncertain and fragile. It may end at any moment – whether we are young or old. It is very possible to waste a life. Jesus said that one's life does not consist of *the abundance of his possessions* (Luke 12:15). The person who lives like he is dying understands this. Accumulating things is not what this life is for. No sane person on his deathbed ever found comfort in his possessions. It is scary to think that we could take the one-time gift of life and squander it. But it happens. All around, we see people who gave in to addiction and destroyed their lives through drugs and alcohol. Countless people die in the commission of a crime. A life can end in seconds.

But it's not just about life ending in tragedy. Americans have a mindset of preserving comfort, safety, security, and ease ... at all costs. There is no better illustration than how culture shapes our view of retirement. The cultural view is that people should have 20-30 years of leisure and pleasure. The image is of healthy older people living in Florida or Arizona who are busy living in an RV, fishing, cruising, golfing, playing bingo or shuffleboard, and living with no thought whatsoever about the reality of waking up on the other side face to face with Jesus and his nail-scarred hands. When they retire, some people retire from everything, including the Lord. That is retirement *wasted*.

Instead, may we all make the radical decision to walk another way so that when we advance to an older age, with fire in our bones, we say, "I am, with my remaining energy, going to pour out my life for God and His kingdom." The last thing a person would want to hear is, "You fool, how did all that pointless play bring glory to my name?"

Life is a Gift to Display the Image of Christ

This should be the goal of every person's life: to display Christ's infinite value for the world. Your possessions have been given to you so that you can demonstrate that Jesus is your pleasure—not your

things. Money, things, and treasure have been given to you so that they may be used in service of the kingdom. Your passion—in everything—is to magnify Christ.

What was Paul's passion?

My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all courage, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20).

For Paul, nothing else mattered but that Jesus be honored, i.e., that He be made to look like the treasure He is. That's why you have life – to bring glory to God. This is to be the driving force behind every decision.

Whether by Life

Do we count *everything as a loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ?* (Philippians 3:7-8). Money, houses, land, cars, computers – everything we have needs to be used to show Jesus as more valuable than things. Family, friends, and even your life should be used for His glory. *How do we do that?* By treasuring Christ above all. We must make the life choices that demonstrate this fact.

Whether by Death

Paul said, in Philippians 1:21, that *death is gain*. How? It is far better to *depart and be with Christ*, 1:23. When Jesus is more satisfying to you than all life can give, being with Him at death will be gain. Death will be gain to us when:

- Our life is lived to display the supreme value of Christ.
- We treasure Jesus above all earthly things and persons.
- We are willing to take risks and sacrifice to enjoy Him more.

This is how Paul could say:

I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Paul would do whatever it took to magnify Jesus – including personal pain and sacrifice.

How You Can Approach Death Positively

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

If you were reading verse 7 out of Young's Literal Translation, it would say:

The good fight I have fought.

The course I have finished.

The faith I have kept.

The Fight

If we were to transliterate Paul's fighting the good fight, he would say, "I have agonized the agony." In other words, he sustained maximum effort in his struggle for victory. He struggled mightily with his flesh and all its problems of lust, laziness, and misplaced priorities. He engaged in daily combat with Satan. In Colossians 1:29, he said he had "labored unto weariness."

Notice also how he calls it the "good" fight. What he engaged in was a noble calling. The calling we have received from God is noble and high. You have been chosen for the task of working to spread the message of reconciliation. You are an ambassador of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). Your spiritual work is the best thing you can do in life.

The Course

Paul had the discipline to stay on track. The time you stay off the course is time lost. What are some things that can knock you off course? There are many, but let's focus on two for a moment:

- The unnecessary baggage you choose to carry throughout life. This could be harboring resentment, holding on to hurt, picking up worldly habits, or *anything* that distracts you from the mission of loving God and others.
- Sin.

Since these things are true:

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The Faith

Paul lived under the authority of the Word. He finished his responsibilities toward God. He says *he kept* the faith. This was written in present-perfect tense, demonstrating a past action with continuing results. He is saying that, throughout his life, he had done these things until they had been finished.

What Can we learn from this?

Here is Paul at the end of his life, with no regrets. There is no sadness, remorse, or sense of unfulfillment. There is no sense of being incomplete. The closest I've ever experienced something like this is with my dad. My dad died on the Friday before Christmas in 2013. Earlier that week, on Monday, we had our last private conversation. He talked about his life, and I remember him saying he was ready to go. He had done all he could do. He knew where he was going. He had no regrets. When you get to this moment, you only have *trust and hope*. What I remember most as we talked was his absence of worry and no regret. There was just simple trusting, abiding faith.

This was despite the fact he had yet to be perfect. My dad would be the first to speak of his many failures – but in the end, he was still committed – he was still fighting – and *he was as strong as he had ever been spiritually* – even though his body was the weakest it had ever been. For Dad, he died without even a hint of the smallest thing being undone.

Indeed, this was the way it was with Paul:

- What God called him to do – he did.
- What God equipped him to do – he did.
- What God gave him the opportunity to do – he did.

And by this, he faced death with genuine satisfaction. He died triumphantly – a life's work completed.

This should be our goal. It's what we've been called to do. It's the way God is preparing you to leave this world. Are you committed to:

- Doing what God calls you to do?
- Trusting in God's equipping you as you serve?
- Going where God presents you with the opportunity to go?

What's In This For Us?

Live Intentionally for Eternal Values: Understanding the fleeting nature of life as highlighted by Psalm 90:12, strive to live a life that reflects significance and purpose beyond earthly achievements. This includes building relationships, serving others, and engaging in activities that align with eternal values rather than accumulating material possessions.

Prioritize Relationships and Reconciliation: As you contemplate your mortality, it's crucial to prioritize relationships, make amends where necessary, express gratitude, and offer forgiveness. This ensures you leave no regrets or unresolved issues, building peace and love with family and friends.

Embrace Excellence in All Endeavors: Reject mediocrity by fully utilizing the talents and opportunities God has given you. Strive to excel in your personal and professional life, not for personal glory but to honor God through your work and interactions, showcasing the power of living a Christ-centered life.

Prepare Positively for the End: Inspired by Paul's example in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, approach the end of life with confidence and hope. Engage in spiritual disciplines that strengthen your faith and character, ensuring that you can face death without regret, having lived a life that glorifies Christ in all aspects.

Conclusion

Will you focus your life on the temporary, such as accumulating material wealth or building bigger barns, or will your primary endeavor be to lay up treasures on earth? Will you seek the fleeting approval and praise of men? Or, will you choose a path that leads to enduring fulfillment by making Jesus the all-satisfying treasure of your life?

For Discussion

1. What does it mean to "number our days" according to Psalm 90:12, and how can this perspective change your daily priorities?
2. As you reflect on the idea that "one day you will die," how does this reality influence your decisions and interactions with others?
3. How can you shift your focus from accumulating possessions to building lasting relationships and spiritual wealth?
4. Discuss how living like you are dying can lead to a life of greater purpose and significance. What changes might you need to make to live this way?
5. How can we ensure our relationships with loved ones are in good standing without waiting for the urgency of life's final moments?
6. What does embracing excellence look like in your day-to-day life? How can you reject mediocrity and complacency in a practical sense?
7. Paul talks about being poured out as a drink offering at the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:6-8). How can you apply this metaphor to your spiritual life?
8. How can you demonstrate that Jesus is more valuable than your possessions or achievements?
9. How can the fear of death or the end of life be transformed into a positive force in your Christian walk?
10. Discuss practical steps to prepare spiritually for your eventual meeting with God. What does this preparation look like in everyday life?