

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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Series: Ecclesiastes  
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The End of the Search  
Ecclesiastes 12

**<sup>1</sup> Remember your Creator  
in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come  
and the years approach when you will say,  
“I find no pleasure in them”—  
<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light  
and the moon and the stars grow dark,  
and the clouds return after the rain;  
<sup>3</sup> when the keepers of the house tremble,  
and the strong men stoop,  
when the grinders cease because they are few,  
and those looking through the windows grow dim;  
<sup>4</sup> when the doors to the street are closed  
and the sound of grinding fades;  
when people rise up at the sound of birds,  
but all their songs grow faint;  
<sup>5</sup> when people are afraid of heights  
and of dangers in the streets;  
when the almond tree blossoms  
and the grasshopper drags itself along  
and desire no longer is stirred.  
Then people go to their eternal home  
and mourners go about the streets.  
<sup>6</sup> Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,  
and the golden bowl is broken;  
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,  
and the wheel broken at the well,  
<sup>7</sup> and the dust returns to the ground it came from,  
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.  
<sup>8</sup> “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.<sup>[a]</sup>  
“Everything is meaningless!”**

**The Conclusion of the Matter**

**<sup>9</sup> Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. <sup>10</sup> The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.**

**11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd.<sup>[b]</sup> 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.**

**13 Now all has been heard;  
here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments,  
for this is the duty of all mankind.**

**14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,  
including every hidden thing,  
whether it is good or evil.**

We are back in Ecclesiastes wrapping up the book today. And I will just say this up front, the other day I am driving, and I turn down Estates Drive. I am going down Estates, going down the hill. I am going to visit a friend and I miss my turn and I am frustrated that I missed my turn. So, I speed up, right, and I roll that stop sign there at Estates and Bosque. If you are watching online, you don't know where I am talking about but as you go down Estates and you reach that stop sign at Bosque. And in my frustration, I am both speeding and I roll through a stop sign. Which is problematic because geographically why might that present a problem? (Someone in the crowd says police station.) Yeah, I am right in front of the police station! Who does that? This guy, right.

So, I am both speeding and I roll a stop sign. I am breaking the law. Now, let me just insert this here really quick. I have tremendous gratitude and respect for service men and women – like tremendous gratitude. When the kids were younger, I would always walk them up to officers in uniform and say, “Hey these are the heroes. These are the guys that you want to look for if you are ever lost or if you ever need something.” I am so thankful for what they do! BUT – when those red and blue lights show up behind me, I am suddenly 10 years old and just afraid. I assume this ends up with me in cuffs and in the back of the car. I don't know why, that is just where I think this is going. Because I have a past, I assume. There are the skills or the problems of a misdirected youth. I don't know – am I the only one? Whenever you look in your rearview mirror and you are like, “Oh – I am wanted. I am wanted!” Then you pull over. “It wasn't me.” Hands outside of the window. It is just a panic moment for me. It is weird to have this fear of someone that I respect and have so much gratitude for.

And the officer was kind. He gave me a warning and it feels like Christmas. I am like, “thank you!” I had no case to plead – I was guilty. I am completely aware of the wrong that I just did, and I am so sorry. Thank you for taking it easy on me! And I say that because we are talking about the fear of God. I think for so many of us we don't understand what it means to fear God. You probably have heard teaching on this that may have left you even more confused. It's not fear, it's reverence. It's respect. But the interpreters used the word, repeatedly, fear. They could have grabbed reverence. They could have grabbed respect. But all throughout the Bible we see this word fear. That we are to fear God. What does it mean to fear God?

We are moving through the book of Ecclesiastes. We're coming upon the finish line - chapter 12 - and Solomon is going to summarize the previous 11 chapters. And any wisdom that he's gleaned from this experiment is that we should fear and follow God. That we should fear God and follow His commands. He says this is the conclusion of the matter. This is what it means. This is the application. This is what I want you to do. And I think we walk away confused.

There are really two errors here: I think some of you, you have no fear of God. You don't really think about it. Even though you're in church and you're reading the Bible somewhere in the back of your mind you've just kind of written this off as mysticism and you have put Him in a similar category to Zeus or some Marvel comic character. You think, "Well if there is a God, He is powerful, but what can I do about it?" and you just kind of go about your life. You have a really casual relationship - Jesus is your friend, Jesus is your homeboy. Then there's others of you that think God is just waiting to get you. You are afraid of Him, and you think that He doesn't love you or that He's not good. That as soon as He can catch you doing something wrong, He's going to get you. He's just waiting to rip you off, to steal some joy from you. And both of those are errors.

So, I want to better understand what it means to fear God as we move into chapter 12. The subject of this message is "The Meaning of Life is found in Fearing and Following God". How can we follow someone that we fear? How would we possibly follow someone that we fear? I think it's very different than the police or a surgeon or really any metaphor that I could use because it would fall short. Because it is indeed a reverence. It is indeed a respect, but it's the addition of those things to the word fear - not a subtraction or replacement of the word fear. It's more than fear, but it is not less than fear.

Now I can tell you this is one of the things that I struggled with the most. Because, as I moved into college, I believe that God was the "sheriff in the sky" that wanted to get me. He wanted to catch me for doing wrong and when I began to do things wrong in a concentrated form, I didn't want anything to do with God. I gave him the Heisman (JP poses) I hid from Him, and I ran from Him. I didn't believe that He wanted to give me life, I believed that He wanted to rip me off.

The fear of God would be better described as how you might feel when you stand at the foot of the ocean in all of its magnitude. As the waves crash against the rocks you see its power displayed and yet it's beautiful and it draws you to it. With an understanding that there's an undertow that can take you out and pull you under. It is beautiful and it can kill you. What does it mean to fear God? He says, this is the conclusion of the matter. And it's a lean in moment!

By way of review there's boxes on stage because Week 1 - I talked about how I was looking in a box for something and my wife said, "it's not there". I talked about how ridiculous it would be for us to look in a place for something when it's not there. And Solomon is running this experiment where he's trying to find meaning under the sun. Under the sun means detached from God. He's trying to find meaning apart from God, but he's running up empty. He's looking in places like his possessions, in places like his education, in places like his profession. He's looking for meaning in pleasure, he's

looking for meaning in projects. And when I say projects, I'm not talking Fixer Upper. I'm not talking Chip and Jo. Solomon's pools that he used to water his vineyards - he has vineyards. Ok? He owns arboretums - and the pools that he used to water them they're still there. You can go over to Israel, you can hire a tour guide, and they'll take you to see pools that were constructed thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago by this guy. They're still there! He has more than you in every way. He has more money than you and more power than you. He's more married than you will ever be. And he says, "I can't find meaning in these things apart from God."

So why do we walk through those doors... Every week you've sat in here, for 11 weeks now, and you have heard teaching from this book, and you walked through the doors, and you ran the same experiment. You continue to try to find meaning in your health, meaning in your profession, meaning in your projects, meaning in your possessions. "No, not me!" Yeah, you did. You set your alarm for 4:00 AM on Friday and went and tried to save \$50 on a TV. Right? And that's fine, there is no judgment. That used to be a big part of my tradition as well. But why do we continue the experiment that has tragically failed this man? Solomon is a tragedy. He's a tragedy.

So, as we move through this last chapter we're going to talk about when we fear and follow God; how we fear and follow God; and before you leave here in a few minutes what it means to fear and follow God. He says this, Ecclesiastes 12:1 – **Remember your creator in the days of your youth...** It says remember – to be mindful of - not be mindful that there's a God or be mindful of the Lord. It says be mindful that you have a Creator, a sovereign. That you are subject to someone who formed you in your mother's womb and they numbered the hairs on your head. You are subject to them. He's in control, you are not. He made you, start understanding that early. He says, **...before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'.**

Solomon is about to move poetically into a metaphor of showing you the decay of life in a person. He's talking about himself and it's going to feel a little choppy and if you read it at face value you would probably be lost. Like, "I'm not sure what he's talking about." But what he's talking about is how our health begins to fade as our age progresses. He says this, **Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain; ...** He's speaking of a general depression that sets in when you're later in life. It's why we say things like 'grumpy old men'. If you have not found joy at an early age, you will really struggle to find it when your body begins to fail you. **...when the keepers of the house tremble...** Your arms – have you ever seen an older person began to shake? **...and the strong men stoop...** The back sways. **...and the grinder cease because they are few...** Your teeth begin to fall out. **...and those looking through the windows grow dim...** Anybody remember this club? Do we have any other members? Glasses. **...when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when your mouth sinks in and your teeth no longer move as they once did when people rise up at the sound of birds...** One of the greater, grosser, ironies of life. If you're young, you think one day I'm going to be able to sleep in as late as I want to. One day, I won't have to get up and get ready for school and I'm going to sleep till 10 - maybe 11:00 AM. I'm going to stay in bed! One day, when I'm retired, I'll

just be able to sleep in as long as I want. No, you won't. You will get up at 3:00 AM to go to the bathroom. **...but all their songs grow faint...** Hearing loss, you have those devices to help you hear. **...when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets...** It was interesting, my dad was a John Wayne - a strong man - but later in his life we lived in a high-rise condo. He would hate to go up there to visit us because of the heights. I think as you grow older the fear of falling increases. And it has been said that *"One of the worst things about getting older is people stop seeing you as dangerous"*, Clint Eastwood said that. You can become an easy target for someone to take advantage of. **...when the almond tree blossoms...** Gray hair. **...and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred...** What is that one? That is a commercial for that little blue pill – libido. **...when people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.** Where but a memory and we get a rock with our name on it that our loved ones seldom visit. **Remember him - before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well...** He continues to use these metaphors that bring life, but they no longer work. **...and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.** In the end we are all cremated. Ok? And for people asking, Can Christians become cremated? Everyone will be! You will return to the dust that you came from, and this is not a problem for God - to bring back the cellular structure or whatever is required to give you a glorified body in heaven. In the end, we are all cremated. **'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the teacher. 'Everything is meaningless!'**

He is painting this very vivid and poetic picture of you - how you are born, and you grow up, and you begin to decline. Everything that you once knew in your body - your physiological makeup - begins to fail you. He puts this picture in front of you. So, he used words and I want to do it with a video. I think this will help you. It's a visual to the words I just spoke. Watch this. (A video plays of one person from her childhood to her elderhood.)

He's not saying that you're going to die. He's saying that right now, as you sit there and you hear this, you're dying. That you are older right now than you were when I said 'now'. You are dying. So, he's exhorting you to fear and follow God before your body fails.

### *1. Fear and Follow God Before Your Body Fails*

It's an odd point, but it's the truest to the text. It's what the text says, **Remember your creator in the days of your youth...** Your creator is the one you fear, and you follow. It's intentional that you were created and you're to remember Him before the day of trouble comes and you will say I find no pleasure in them. Remember Him early! Find the way to go early! He's saying, 'Hey trouble is coming. Your body is going to fail, you need not expedite it by tearing your ACL or MCL doing silly things. Right?'

When I was younger, I could jump off a 10-foot roof and roll it out and run and go play. Today, at 41, if I sleep wrong, I'm visiting an orthopedic surgeon. You know? There's something that begins to happen in our bodies as they start to fail us, and I think that's important. The point he's making is that it's very easy to question the goodness of God in

the midst of chronic pain. When your health is out the window, it's so easy to look at God and say, 'Do you care? Are you good?'. I can think of few worse things than experiencing chronic pain. With the elderly, as you increase in age, it just happens. It ensues - your eyesight's gone; your hearing is out the window; your legs don't work like they used to. And if you don't have a firm grasp at that time that God is good, then what is going to remind you of that? How will you hold fast to that truth?

You can eat all of the kale and do all of the CrossFit, but you're still going to get to a place where someone has to help you use the restroom. We're all headed there. It is an uplifting thought, I know. You're so encouraged and you're glad you came here this morning. But you don't want to form your theology in your decline, you will get bitter not better. You will waste away in worry. I see it happen all the time. Remember your creator in the days of your youth!

I think it's also important to say that so many people really mess up their life when they're younger. Alcoholics are often born at the age of 18; they love the party, and they feed the party, and they can't find life apart from the party. No 18-year-old is like, 'I want to be an alcoholic when I grow up.' Porn addicts are sometimes born at the age of 11. You began to look at things and can't stop looking at things. Pedophiles are the same way, nobody says, 'This is what I want to be when I grow up,' But something happens at an early age that we don't deal with. You go to the therapist, and they begin to peel back the layers. "Why am I like this?" Oh, this thing happened when I was eight years old, and I never told anyone. I never dealt with it. Remember your creator in the days of youth.

Sow your wild oats when you're young. Stupid advice! There's no fear in that. There's no fear of God in that council. Some of us we're uncomfortable with the council to even fear God. The admonishment, or the instruction, that we are to fear God - is that really what it means? I've heard that it was reverence or respect. Let me read to you the words of Jesus when Jesus was on the earth and he's speaking to His disciples, believers if you will. This is what Jesus said to them, **Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside of your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:28-31** He is saying, 'Hey you don't need to fear men or women or humans. Fear God!'

Do you know what we do? If we're ever looking at something that we're not supposed to be looking at, sometimes you'll have the inclination to look over your shoulder to see if anyone else is watching you. That in and of itself is an act of lack of faith. It is the doubt that has crept in your heart that God does not see everything you think and everything you do. We would be condemned, every one of us would be condemned, by our thoughts alone. If you knew all of my thoughts, there's no chance you would let me up here to instruct you from God's Word. And if I knew all of yours, we wouldn't let you on the property. So, we're even, right? God sees every action. We could debate what is the Greek word for afraid there. Listen it is no mystery what Jesus is instructing us to do there. Fear the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Can I tell you something about that passage? One time my health was failing, and I was sitting at my kitchen table by myself and moved to a place where I was questioning the goodness of God. I began to discuss with Him, "God do you care? Do you not see me here? Why have you forsaken me?" This was my attitude toward Him. It was the conversation that I was having with my Creator. "Do you not care about me, why would you let me suffer? Why would you let me experience pain? Am I not your son?" And I heard from the Lord, some sort of flag should go up when you hear that, but I'll tell you I heard from the Lord. And He said, "Do I not care about the sparrows? Are not two sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them hits the ground apart from my care? How much more do I care about you than the sparrows?"

And I heard it, Matthew 10, right. So I'm thinking, OK where is that scripture? I'm trying to find it and my phone rings. As I'm sitting there at the table, my phone rings. And I answer it and it's a guy that I haven't talked to in a year. I said, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'You are not going to believe this!' He knew of my affinity for birds and so he called me, and he goes, 'Man some dumb sparrow laid her nest in my mailbox and so I'm taking this nest of baby birds and a mother sparrow to some bird sanctuary.' I start crying. He's thinking, man you must really love birds - you know. He had no idea. I'm talking in that moment guys!

See I think that we think that if we are to be afraid of someone that they're not tender toward us. That they don't care for us. That they can't be gentle toward us. But God can both destroy your body and soul in hell and yet He moves towards you like a shepherd that seeks to care for and then love the sheep. Let me show you in verse 9, **Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people.** Solomon, speaking of himself, **He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was up right and true.** Solomon wrote most of the proverbs that we have, and he is saying that he didn't just give you good instruction there, but he sought to make it aesthetically pleasing and beautiful. It's poetry and in so many ways they direct us. This is an illeism. He's speaking of himself in third person. Verse 11 - **The words of the wise are like goads, they're collected sayings like firmly embedded nails - given by one Shepherd.** Now God, who was the Creator - big God, big guy in the sky - is now like a shepherd directing us with a goad. I think we have one. (JP is handed a goad.) Thank you.

So, this would be a 21st century goad. It's a steer staff, but honestly this is what it looked like in any picture that I could pull up. It has a little pointy thing on it, and you would direct oxen. You would poke them and show them where to go, and when they would kick back at you - because they feel like somebody is right behind them - it's an act of futile because they can't get you because this is long. You can kind of tell them where to go if you will. This is why Jesus, you might remember this familiar language, Jesus said this of Saul. Remember Saul was persecuting the church, he's killing people in the church. He's on the road to Damascus to persecute the church and Jesus shows up and says, 'Saul why do you kick against the goads?' He is saying, 'What you're trying to do is an act of futility because my church wins. I'm going to increase these people in number and overwhelm you. In fact, why don't I go ahead and just right now make you the

greatest missionary of all time.' It's easy for Him to do so. Don't kick against the goads! Go in the direction that God's word instructs you.

**Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.** He is saying you don't need to add to the Bible. In fact, many false teachings today will hold the book up on par with the Bible. The Pearl of Great Price. The Writings of Joseph Smith. They say, 'here's the Bible and here's a book that's just as important'. But maybe one more applicable to us today, here at Harris Creek in the 21st century, is that you can go to Barnes and Noble or you can get on Amazon and look at a section called self-help. You will see no shortage of hundreds of thousands of books that seek to help guide your path and help you find your truth. And you don't need a different one other than the Bible. Get to know the Bible. Firmly be rooted in the Bible.

Listen, you want to read other things? Great, as a compliment to the Bible - but never as a supplement to the Bible. Get to know what it says, the instruction that God has for us. I think we love the self-help section and despise Deuteronomy.

## 2. Fear and Follow God by Holding Firmly to His Word

Do you know the problem with that council coming from Solomon? It is that this is a very much do as I say, not as I do moment. Because Solomon is a tragedy. He didn't live this out, I can read to you from 1 Kings 11 - **King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So, Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord...**

There are so many distractions in this world. You're walking a path of faithfulness, one foot in front of the other, and the enemy is sending demonic forces around you saying, "Hey come here! Hey friend - hey chase this. Hey look what I got for you! Come here, come check this out." This is why I want you to understand that your quiet time is not a means to please God, but rather a method of survival in a world full of enemies who hate you. They want to steal your joy; kill your faith; and destroy your families. The suburbs will not protect you! The suburbs will not protect your children from marrying non-believers, from feeding their lives with addiction, from going places that they should not go and loving things that they should not love. The suburbs will not protect you. You have to make sure they are firmly rooted in the Word of God and the best way for you to do that is to make sure that you are firmly rooted in the Word of God. It's not meant just to be read, but to be studied and to be taught and to be instructed and to know it. Know what it says! Live out its instruction.



In a day where everyone is creating their own truth, no one that has ever said in the history of all creation, “Well that's not my truth is living according to God's truth.” Here at Harris Creek, we've done everything we can to make this simple for you. Bree told you about the Bible Reading Plan. You can go to [Biblereadingplan.org](http://Biblereadingplan.org) and you get scripture, and you get commentary. Some of you are like, ‘Yeah - I don't want to do that.’ Well, make sure that you read something, but you have this opportunity to read what most of the rest of us are reading, and what I'm reading every morning. We can go through it together so when we're on an elevator together you can say, ‘Hey what do you think that meant in Ecclesiastes 8? What do you think that was going on?’ And we can talk about it together. Right?

But, let me just say something boldly - if you're not regularly in the Bible you're backsliding. For some of you, that might make you angry - but challenge me. If you show me that I'm wrong, I'll stop saying it. Show me the person who's not regularly in the Bible but they are growing in their love for Jesus; they are growing in their knowledge of God's Word; they're understanding the instruction that He's given us. And it keeps being, “One day! One of these days I'm going to...” What you get here is not enough and I am not in charge of your spiritual growth, you are. So don't look at this place as some *Chicken Soup for the Soul* that you come in and refill on Sunday to get you through the week. It's not enough! You have to be like a nail impressed in the wood that is hard to move, rooted in the Word of God.

I think for so many of us we desperately want God to speak to us. I wish God would tell me who to marry, or where to work, or what to do for a living, or where I should go, or where I should live, or what house to buy, where my kid goes to school. I wish God would just tell me. Why would God make known to you His mysterious will if you have forsaken His revealed will? Why would God make known to you His mysterious will if you have not yielded to what He's already told you to do? Who does that? ‘Who should I marry?’ Stop getting drunk. ‘Where should I live?’ Start falling deeper in love with Jesus. ‘Where should I work?’ Stop having premarital sex. Stop looking at porn. Why am I going to tell you anything when you don't listen to me?

There are those times in life, where you lean in, and you want to listen. You want to hear every word. You want to understand what's being said. Our Thanksgiving looked really different this year. My wife had surgery - she had her parathyroid gland removed. You have four, she had one of them removed and she had a nodule on her thyroid that was also removed. For those of you that prayed and knew that, thank you. It went well as far as we can tell, but you know that's one of those fear and follow moments. When you meet someone who's going to put a knife to your throat and begin to remove parts of your body, there is some fear and trepidation there, but you know you need them. And after when we meet with that surgeon and she's saying, ‘Ice pack for 15 minutes.’ We are writing specifics down. She says, ‘Every three hours.’ Okay, every three hours. She says, ‘Take this pill at this time.’ We note to take this pill at this time. We ask what we need to do because she's instructing us toward a path of healing. We're leaning in; we're listening closely because this is instructing you toward a path of healing.

An understanding of who God is, what He's done for you, and what he desires for you will lead to spiritual healing. You're going to want to lean in and begin to apply it to your life. Verse 13 - **Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:** You ready? Here it is, 11 chapters summarized here in verse 13. 'What is it God? What is your will for my life? What is the chief end of man? What do you want me to do? What do you want my life to look like? **Fear God and keep His commandments...**

Meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless, meaningless!

Where is there meaning? **Fear God and keep His commandments... for God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.** One day, everything will be known. This is good news because if you've ever done something good and you haven't gotten credit, don't worry. One day everyone will see it you need not get the credit here. And you also need not hide things, you need not keep secrets. If you have sinned, you have the freedom to confess it because one day everyone will know what you did, what was done to you, where you went, what you said, what you thought. I think that we think fear leaves no room for intimacy and yet we can love someone and move close to them when they have the ease and ability to destroy us. It is vulnerable and it is beautiful, and it is our relationship with the Creator.

### 3. Fearing God and Following Him Means Living by Faith

Living by faith, that is to see the world through the lens of God - His word and even His judgment. That every deed will come under judgment. There are some of you here and you want to live a life of great meaning and what I want you to know is you do not need to know a lot and you do not need to do a lot to have a life of great meaning. It's really just a few things: fear God and keep His commands. And then, there are some of you here - you do not care to live a life of meaning. You would much rather have a life of comfort. You want to be in a place where everyone leaves you alone, where you can do the simple things. You want good kids and good grades and a good house in a good neighborhood. You want to be safe, and you want to be comfortable, and you want a good marriage, and you just want these simple things. And you get to the end of your life, and you have no act of faith to look back on. There was never a moment in your life where you did something that you would not have done had you not believed there was a God. You had nothing! You stand before the Lord in judgment and all you really wanted was comfort and no Hell and that's a tragedy. It is a tragedy.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000, a sermon was preached that created ripples in a generation and impacted millions. I think it's so aptly true and applicable for us today that I want to show you just a snippet. This will be weird because it's like a sermon in a sermon - inception if you will - and it's dated. So, I don't want to be distracted by the video quality I want you to hold fast to the words. Would you watch this?

(A video of a sermon by John Piper is shown – read transcription below).

About three weeks ago we got news at our church that Ruby Eliasson and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon. Ruby Eliasson - over 80, single all her life, a nurse. Poured her life out for one thing, to make Jesus Christ known among the sick and the poor, in the hardest and most unreached places. Laura Edwards - a medical doctor in the Twin Cities, and then in retirement partnering up with Ruby, also pushing 80. Going from village to village in Cameroon and the brakes give way, over a cliff they go, dead instantly. I asked my people, is this a tragedy? Two women in their 80s almost - a whole life devoted to one idea Jesus Christ magnified among the poor and the sick, in the hardest places. And twenty years after most of their American counterparts had begun to throw their lives away on trivialities in Florida and New Mexico fly into eternity with a death in a moment. Is this a tragedy I asked. It is not a tragedy.

I'll read you what a tragedy is. I've got a little article here from Readers Digest. You don't read Readers Digest, I know that. But there is a generation who does. This is a tragedy. The title of the article, *Start Now Retire Early* - February 1998. Bob and Penny took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast 5 years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, FL where they cruise on their 30-foot Trawler; play softball; and collect shells. That's a tragedy! That's a tragedy! And there are people in this country that are spending billions of dollars to get you to buy it, and I get 40 minutes to plead with you don't buy it. With all my heart I plead with you don't buy that dream. The American dream - nice house, a nice car, a nice job, a nice family, a nice retirement collecting shells - as the last chapter before you stand before the Creator of the universe to give an account with what you did. 'Here it is Lord, my shell collection! Look Lord, my shell collection and I've got a good swing. And look at my boat, God, look at my clothes God.'

Well not for Ruby and not for Laura. Don't waste your life! Don't waste it!

(Video ends and JP speaks.)

When I hear that, I can't help but think about that couple in Readers Digest. Like they had to that they had made it. Look at our lives? We got it. We did it, even Readers Digest says so! And a year later, they were used in Christianity as an example to millions as a tragedy. A tragedy.

I think the problem with the next generation is that they have so few examples of people living by a radical faith. Here's what I want you to know guys, here's the really bad news. That God to whom you are to fear, He hates your sin. His anger and His wrath burns against the things you've done, that you've thought, where you've been, all of the evil and wickedness that you have given yourself to. He's so angry at it! The way that you have found identity in your projects, and the wealth that you've built, and your rebellion, and the things that you thought. He's so incredibly angry at it! But that same God dealt with it.

It's a complex thing that you can move toward a deity who is so powerful and so mad at the things that you've given yourself to but loves you so much that He took the payment that you deserve upon Himself. That's the cross. You can't find meaning in projects apart from the cross. You can't find meaning in your profession apart from the cross. Or in pleasure apart from Jesus. Or your possessions apart from the cross. You have no power apart from the cross.

So, when you look at circumstances and situations under the sun you have to see them through the lens of forgiveness. Anyone who can come back from that, (picture of Jesus on the cross) they endured that, you should fear them! But anyone who would do that for you, you should follow them. You should follow them. That's why we can fear God and follow Him. His own wrath at you was satisfied on Himself - that's the gospel! That's the good news!

So, when you face judgment there is now no condemnation for those of you who are in Christ. He's no longer counting your sins against you! You can walk toward the Creator and approach the throne of grace in a way that doesn't make sense. Your perversion is lost, you've been washed. You are as clean as the purest of pure. He did that. He did that for you.

So, as you live here is the conclusion in the matter: fear God and follow His commands. We pray that you would.

Father, it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. The life I live in the body, I now live by faith in your son Jesus Christ. Father, would you fill my heart, their heart, our heart with that truth? Help us to be rooted deeply in it as a nail buried into a 2x4. That our feet would not move from it and our eyes would not wander from it. Impress it deep upon us. I pray that your Holy Spirit would make known to us the mysteries of you through your word and your people. Speak to us now, Lord. Show us the way. Direct our steps and lead us in the path. Guide us, as you might poke us when we get off course it is not pleasant but help us to know that it is for our good and for your glory. Help us to appropriately fear you and follow you as you make a way for us through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen