

Intro: Garrison. Pastor. **Would love to start this morning with an exercise.** Take a sheet of paper or your notes app we're just going to create a list, 1-9. These 9 categories are going to represent the things in our lives that provide meaning and value.

- First is our family of origin. Parents. Some of you have a good relationship with your parents; some don't, that's ok. Put their names down anyway. No matter who they are, they had a huge impact on who you are. Go ahead and throw siblings down here as well.
- Spouse or significant other. Put their name down. If you're not married, that's okay. We always want to note, the Bible is clear that marriage doesn't complete you. Life is found in Jesus, not a spouse. If you never get married, great. If you do get married, great. But if you do, that's gonna be one of the most important decisions and relationships in your whole life.
- Kids. Put your kids' names. How many kids do you want?
- Friends. Lots of different kinds of friends. Childhood friends. HS + College friends. Adult friends. Mom friends. Dad friends. CG friends. The people who really know you and love you.
- Work – what do you do with most of your life? Could be volunteer work. Stay at home mom. School. What's your work? What career do you think you'll have? What career do you want?
- Hobbies – what do you do with your free time? What do you wish you could do?
- Two from the past. Accomplishments + Memories – what accomplishments + memories give you meaning and identity. Some amazing trip or a season of life. College. Graduation/first job. Newlyweds. New parents.
- One for the future – hopes/dreams and goals. What are you hoping to accomplish, do or become someday?

Ecclesiastes 9. Pray.

I was 17 when my great uncles died. I didn't really have grandfathers. My dad's dad died when I was really young and my mom's dad wasn't in the picture. But I had my great uncles who were my grandfathers. Their names were Johnny and Jimmy. Johnny was a massive man. About 6'5 and as wide as a door. He played football at Ole Miss in the 50s and worked on 18 wheeler trucks most of his life. Johnny got sick. He was old. I remember I went to visit him in hospice and he had grown so weak that he couldn't move or speak and had to have a machine pump oxygen for him. He died that same night.

Jimmy passed a few months later. Jimmy was the patriarch of our family which was centered around the family business that Jimmy grew into a major success. He was beloved in the community. Super sharp but kind. After his wife passed a year or so before him he was never the same. I brought him lunch after he had become a shut-in. They'd brought a hospital bed in and he would sleep for most of the day. But as I laid his plate by his table he grabbed my arm and sat up and with tears in his eyes said "I'm so ready to go. Why can't I go yet?" And fell asleep right after. A couple weeks later we laid him to rest.

Many of you have had experiences like what I just described. Death of loved ones or friends. If you haven't, they are coming. This reality is one of the Preacher's final observations about life under the sun:

Death is Inevitable

There's a 100% mortality rate for all of humanity. This is actually something the Preacher has brought up a lot throughout Ecclesiastes. Death is coming. He has said this is the big issue for human life under the sun. That we try to chase the good life by doing the best things life has to offer. By accumulating as much as possible. By becoming wise and knowledgeable. By trying to control our lives so that we have the best experience possible. He over and over again says you can't find the good life this way because ultimately you're going to die and death will wipe all of what we seek for away.

So if that's true, if 100% of humans will die, if death is coming for all of us, then what does that mean for how we should live? Because after all, this is wisdom literature, remember? It's goal is to teach us how to live.

So: **How to live in light of your impending death.**

Ecclesiastes 9:1-2 *"But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. 2 It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath."*

Picture the Preacher, a man at the end of his life sitting down and pondering all the information he's gathered and experiences he's encountered. An old man trying to make sense of the world. He hones in once again on this theme between the righteous and the wicked, examining the outcomes of their life.

It's impossible to know whether a person's life in this world will be easy or hard, full of joy or suffering, regardless of if they are righteous or wicked. Yet there is a comfort that the righteous are in the hand of God.

Yet, he says the same event happens to them all. The righteous and the wicked both die. Whether they're good or evil, clean or unclean, godly or ungodly, all will die. That's the observation, now look at how the Preacher labels it:

Ecclesiastes 9:3 *"This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. 4 But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion."*

This is profound. So far, it's sort of felt like the Preacher is very stoic and emotionally detached in Ecclesiastes.. But no, he says this is evil. It's wrong. It's not the way things should be.

He's saying this whole death thing; it's not the design. Which is the biblical category. Death isn't natural.

There was no death in the garden before sin entered. Death is part of the curse and the fall. We trace that all the way back to the Garden. What's the warning God gives to Adam and Eve? Don't eat of the tree, surely you'll die. They eat. Sin enters the world. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. We sin therefore we die. But that's not how it was supposed to be.

This is why in Revelation 21 when Jesus restores the original design he says, "death will be no more." We were designed by God to live with Him forever, but we sinned and the wages of sin is death. Physical death and spiritual death. This is part of why we don't like death. Not just Christians actually, everyone. There's almost a universal response that something just feels unnatural about it.

That's because of what the Bible says. It's not natural at all. It's evil. So as Christians we walk in this tension of acknowledging the reality that death is coming, but also not overly embracing death. We mourn it. We hate it.

Which is a unique perspective on death. Much different than what you tend to find outside of the Christian faith. Let me give you a few.

1. Cheapen death.

Some people overly embrace death. And view death as an 'out'. This can play out a few different ways.

Maybe the most common way is very sadly with depression and suicidal thoughts, can have this obsession with death. It is the 'out' you desire because life is too painful.

Another one that's made the headlines in the past few years is 'assisted death'. Where a medical doctor euthanizes a human being. This gained popularity in Europe a few year ago and is actually making it's way through the western world. In 2016 Canada began practicing assisted death as well. It used to be reserved for either the elderly or someone with a terminal illness but Canada actually passed a law in 2021 that allowed for people with for physical chronic pain, even if it wasn't life threatening. And now they're working on allowing for anyone that deals with mental illness as well. This is most likely going to be more prominent in the US soon. Already legal in 10 states.

Which if you're wrestling with any of what I just mentioned. Viewing death as a relief, depression and suicidal thoughts, please come talk to us. This isn't the answer.

2. Ignore death.

The much more common response to death in our culture is to just kinda avoid it, ignore it, run away and hide. Maybe we make jokes about it? Self deprecating humor/dark humor. Kill me now- we say. Which can be high quality content. But let's be honest. Death makes us uncomfortable so we joke about it. It's just a way to distance myself. Keep the discomfort at arm's length.

Or we go with the YOLO method. I'm aware death is coming so I'm going to live life for me! I'm going to make as many memories, achieve as much as possible, have fun. I'm not really going to do anything that's inconvenient for me because life's too short ya know?

3. Delay death.

Now this one is most definitely the biggest. We're still ignoring death, but we're doing it by chasing the fountain of youth. We get obsessed with healthy living, eating right, running, going to the gym. Nothing wrong with all of that at a face value, but I think many people throw themselves into these things because of fear. And if we just do everything right, that's what will keep death away.

But the most clear example we have in our culture of trying to delay death is the anti-aging industry.

As a culture we are obsessed with maintaining our youth. It's actually sort of funny; aging is cool for the first 25 years or so. Everybody's in a big rush. I can't wait to go to school. I can't wait to go to middle school. I can't wait til high school. I can't wait until I can drive. Can't wait for college. I can't wait to get married. I can't wait to have kids. I can't wait ... It's like we want to hold down the fast forward button ...

And then all of a sudden something switches and we want to hit the pause button. I'd like to look like I'm 25 for the rest of my life. Or we even want to hit the rewind button. I want to go back to when my whole torso didn't hurt after walking up the stairs in the lobby ... I want to go back to when my skin stayed in place... I want to go back to when my hair follicles still did what they're supposed to do.

Can any of you guess what the anti-aging industry is valued at in America? As of last year? 63 billion dollars. Expected to surpass 100 billion by 2030. Now this starts with simple stuff like skin serums, hair dye, just for men gel and rogain... and it goes up to botox, hormone treatments and cosmetic surgery. You want 6-pack abs? There's now a surgical procedure to create fake ones.

Now listen, not trying to get into whether cosmetic surgery is right or wrong. But we have to admit it is wild how much money goes into all this. And ultimately, age and death are still going to happen! We try so hard to get our minds and bodies as far away from death as possible.

In contrast, the Preacher tells us to remember that death is coming, and that's actually good for us:

Ecclesiastes 7:2: *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.*

Now we know this guy isn't against feasting. He recommends it throughout the book. But he's saying there's something better than feasting and being caught up in the joy of life. And that's to consider the end of life. When you go to a house where everyone is mourning, it's actually good for the soul.

It allows reality to break in, making us reflect on our own lives, wondering if we're making the most of our time To which the Bible actually gives us amazing advice:

Psalm 90:12 *"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."*

Don't cheapen death, or ignore it or try to delay it. But acknowledge it. We're called to number our days, to see that there's a limit on our time on earth. Psalm 90 says this leads to a heart of wisdom. It's good for us to see that our time is short. There's something about knowing that death is coming that helps you think about life correctly.

Tim graveyard visit. G needs to go before this sermon. In light of death, you see clearly how to live. What matters vs what doesn't. There's something about knowing where we end up that gives a sort of clarity to us now.

Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard sums it up well, "We should live life forward, after we define it backward." I.e., start with the end and then live in light of where you're going. If you want to make a puzzle, it helps to have the box top so you know what it's supposed to look like at the end.

That's what I want us to attempt to do this morning. So I know we don't love to think about death but I want to help us out. I want to help pastor us through what's going to happen as we head toward our end. And this is assuming that nothing abnormal happens and you live into old age and die.

Look back to your list. For most of us the first to go will be our hopes and dreams. You can take your pen and just cross through that. Or if on your phone delete it. And I don't mean this in some horrendously depressing way, but it's just reality. There's something that happens and many of us are feeling it now, and it goes like this—we're a teenager, we go to college and then come into the real world with a lot of ideals and dreams. We feel very strongly and have deep conviction about how everything should work and about how everyone is doing everything wrong, and we're going to be different. We've got big dreams and hopes and then we start living life. We start building our lives. And life starts beating us up. It honestly beats reality and humility into us. We start getting bills, responsibilities, kids. And we'll start looking back on some of those hopes and dreams and be like 'okay, did that, okay can't do that, little unrealistic.' And we'll either accept what we've done or resign that we're not going to do or be what we thought. Most likely is that they're just going to change over time. 10,20,30 years from now we'll have completely different hopes and dreams and wonder what we were thinking in our early 20s. But either way, they're the first to go.

Cross out your hobbies. And next what will start to happen is your physical body is going to start to grow weaker. Wrinkles will start to form and your skin will start to droop. You'll start to notice some creaks and some aches in places... I mean when you're a kid it's like I'm gonna climb this ladder and dive head first into this rock. Wahoo! Give me a snack pack. I want to do it again. But you're going to get older and every fall will start to cost more. Some of you already see this happening. And so as your physical body weakens your hobbies and living how you want to are going to start to become an issue. Hiking mountains is tougher with a walker. And you're going to be watching more and more sports and participating in less and less.

Cross out work. You're going to have to retire at some point. And no matter how much you look forward to retirement, some part of you is going to miss work. You're going to miss the routine and the sense of accomplishment.

And at some point along the way the relationships are going to start to go. Most likely your parents will go first. Some older friends. Even though they'll most likely outlive you, your kids will move out of your house and start their own lives. That's actually a good thing. And they'll visit and if you're lucky they'll live close, but it won't ever be the same. In fact, you actually spend 95% of your time that you have with your kids during the first 18 years of their life.

And I hope by God's grace to outlive Cole. I hope we grow very old and cute and wrinkly together. And I hope by God's grace that she dies first so she doesn't have to deal with the pain of my death and life without me. And then I'll just climb right into her coffin at the funeral. Statistically this is unlikely.

And regardless of which one of you passes first, your mind will start to grow weaker. And even your memories will start to fade. And like all accomplishments do, at some point they won't matter as much and you'll struggle to remember why you ever cared so much about them. - And then you'll die.

All of that to some degree or order is going to happen. No amount of skin cream will keep this from happening. For all of the foolishness of trying to act like we're not dying, we are. And all of this is with the wild assumption that nothing crazy happens and we die before we get old. Because the reality is we've got no idea when this is going to come.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 *"No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death."*

We have no control over our death. We have no idea of the day or the time. That's one of the biggest issues with delaying or ignoring our death. And this is absolutely terrifying.

Charleston wedding drunk driver. Couple weeks ago a post on SM went viral that was a gofundme for this couple. The bride was actually from Charlotte originally, pretty sure. They were leaving their wedding riding a golf cart and a drunk driver struck them, killing the bride. Absolutely horrific. It was honestly hard to read. Horrible stuff like that happens every day but there was something just so tragic about the joy of the wedding exit transforming into the grief of a horrendous death. And as a reader you just sort of experience this dreadful realization that anything like that can happen at any time.

We don't know when it will be. We just know we're 30 min closer than when we walked into the Gathering this morning.

Alright. I've successfully made you very sad and maybe a little anxious. Take a breath. Let's end as we have every week. In light of death, we have the same 3 invitations.

1. Sacred Honesty.

We agree with the Preacher. We do not like this reality. That's okay. We shouldn't! Death isn't good. It's an evil under the sun. But have you been ignoring it? Have you been trying to delay it? Convincing yourself if you just do xyz you're guaranteed to live til your 100? Are you just trying to escape? Are you just saying yolo lets have as much fun as possible?

Whenever you see a tragic headline about some death, how do you handle it? Do you wonder how you can avoid it? Be honest about it.

And repent by actually seeking to live in light of your death. Which leads us to:

2. Sacred Mundanity

5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun."

The Preacher says we all know what's coming. We die and will be forgotten on earth. We feel that. But we have to be careful because that reality can tempt us to think that nothing actually matters.

So we have to choose by the Biblical category of numbering our days. **Re-read** with me. Psalm 90:12 **"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."**

You're going to die. Your days are numbered. See there's something that happens when you understand that Jesus, who is in control of the universe, has numbered your days. There's some incredible clarity and intentionality that come from knowing you've only got a finite number of days.

Parents: You get 6570 days before your child turns 18. That's it. 6570 days before they become an adult. Knowing that # changes something doesn't it? It doesn't feel like you've got forever. How much of that time will you be sleeping? 1/3? You're down to 4400. How much of that time will you be at work and they'll be at school? 1/4? 2760... Naps... hobbies... alone time... That's not much time you've got. It's finite. The numbers change our perspective, right?

If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you say to your kids? Ok, you don't know you're going to die tomorrow, but you know you're going to die someday. You're not going to live forever. So quit wasting time, energy and money on things that don't matter. Cherish what you have. Thank Jesus for the gift of life you've got while you've got it now.

You know what would happen if we numbered our days? If we lived in light of the fact that our time here is finite... We'd stop being so consumed with what's easiest. I mean when you know you're going to die... you don't care about what's most comfortable. You care about what's most important.

- Would we be a little bit more alarmed at the number that pops up for our screen time at the end of the week?

- How would your fight with your spouse go if you fight in light of the fact that you have limited amount of time with them?
- How would you treat your toddler in the middle of an absolute Mount Vesuvius level meltdown tantrum knowing that you both will die?
- How would your friendship with your coworker change if you lived in light of that fact that you're both going to die?

God calls us to number our days because our earthly lives are going to end in death. Now, the truth is a lot of people out there would agree with this philosophy. Live intentionally because life's short. But the call actually goes deeper than living in light of death.

Because what separates the Christian and how we live is not just that we want to live well because life ends in death.

We want to live well because we know that while life ends in death, death for the Christian ends in life.

3. Sacred Joy.

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Death isn't natural. It's the result of sin. And the sting of death is that in our sin we will die and we will go stand before Jesus. But the hope of the gospel is that that moment can be a welcome home instead of a deserved judgment.

See this is why the Christian response to death is so much more helpful. We don't like it. We don't ignore it. And we don't fight to delay it. Because in Christ, we're given victory over death. Which is why the Apostle Paul could look at death and say what the Preacher could not.

Philippians 1:21: *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

In the Gospel, Jesus died for us but is raised to life and promises a future hope that we will rise with him one day. The hope of the resurrection changes our entire perspective on life! Life ends in death. But for the Christian we know that death ends in life. What does that do?

It means we are spurred to live life for God. So in Christ, we see with an eternal perspective. We see the world in light of where we're going. We see people in light of eternity. That changes how we live.

Because just as the Preacher reminds us, judgment is coming. Everyone lives after they die. We as Christians have hope in Christ. And we should also have incredible amounts of fuel in the tank for all of those we love who don't know Him. Your days are numbered and you're not going to be able to share the Gospel with those around you forever. So what should we do?

We live for Christ now. We value what He values now. We lay down our lives now for what matters—that we and those we love are going to live forever. This is what’s unique. The push that we get from Ecclesiastes isn’t just to see that deaths coming so live well. You should! But remember to what end.

So if your takeaway from my sermon is ‘I really need to love on my kids while I have time’ or ‘love on my parents’ or whatever—good! But to what end? The end is an eternity with God. And eternity with God that gives us so much hope to where we can agree with Paul- To die is gain.

What a bold statement. Yet for the Christian death is a doorway into the healing of all our wounds. Into our tears being wiped away. Into our hearts finally being satisfied. Into our worries being taken away. Into restoration with those we love who know Him. Into a homecoming with our God who would stop at nothing to bring us back to Himself.

Only through Christ can living and dying be a win-win. We can live for Christ while we live and we can live with Christ when we die. Which actually gives us the courage today to face death while also living well by numbering our days.

See how theologian Luc Ferry puts it: “The Christian response to mortality...is without question the most effective of all responses. It would seem to be the only version of salvation that enables us, not only to transcend the fear of death, but also to beat death itself, and by doing so in terms of individual identity, rather than anonymity or abstraction. It would seem to be the only version that offers a truly definitive victory.”

What a joy that Christ has made a way for us to live in the face of death.

Will end here. Charles Thomas Studd was a missionary in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Studd was born into wealth and was on a path to be very famous. He was converted during his college years at Cambridge and began following Jesus. In his own day he was the Michael Jordan of cricket. He was expected to grow pro but instead went on to be a missionary in Asia. When his wealthy father died, he got a massive inheritance that he gave away. Studd had eternity in mind. Studd wrote a poem that you’ve probably heard and we’ve referenced before. It’s long but would love to just read the back third or so:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, “twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.
Only one life, yes only one,

Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last. "

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.

Life ends in death. But death ends in life. What a joy it would be to live our lives now in light of what's to come.

Pray.