



Living with the End in Mind

9 – Enjoying Life Together

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I love the internet. The internet is undefeated. Maybe you've heard that phrase before, but it has this unique ability to make humor and uplifts seemingly normal things to internet history, right? One of those things happened six years ago. In Hong Kong, the weather had no forecast for rain, but a big storm came in and there was a ton of flooding that happened.

This picture was taken of a gentleman at Starbucks who became known as Uncle Starbucks because as you can see, there was flooding happening throughout the mall and the Starbucks area. This gentleman did not care one bit. He's got his coffee, he's got his newspaper, and he is enjoying what he came there to do, flood or not. The story goes that he just kept sitting there until the floods had receded and everything had been cleaned up, and then he walked on out and went about his day. I show you this picture because I think it's a great picture to what I believe the text we're going to jump into today illustrates.

If you've been with us for the last couple of weeks, you know that we've been walking through the Book of Ecclesiastes. Today, we find ourselves in Ecclesiastes 9. I think this picture shows that there is some bad stuff going on, some bad news, not always right. But that this gentleman is enjoying himself through the bad situation he finds himself in. I think it's a good way for us to think about Ecclesiastes 9 today.

So, if you have your bibles, open them up to Ecclesiastes 9. We're going to start in Verse 1 this morning. We're going to run through the first five or six verses to get to the meat of the text, but as we do that, I want to explain what Solomon is talking about in these first couple of verses.

1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands... Solomon is acknowledging God's sovereignty here when he's talking about this concept of "in the hand of God." God is over all things, he's in control of all things, God is sovereign over all.

...but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them. 2 All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked... Now, when Solomon is talking about this event that happens, he's talking about death. He's talking about passing away, dying. It is the same for all. Then he goes on to describe. It's the same for ***the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.*** They are all going to die. Your clean, you're unclean, your good, your evil doesn't change the end and that is death for all of us. ***As it is with the good, so with the sinful; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.***

Picking up on the next verses – Verses 4 and 5 **4 Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!** Interesting little proverb there. **5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.**

So far, Solomon has given us that whether you're clean, unclean, good, evil, you're all going to die. It will not change. Has no affect whether you're going to skip death or not. But in this next portion, he's giving us something different. He's saying, "Listen, there is an advantage to living compared to the dead."

Alistair Begg, one of favorite pastors, when he was talking about this proverb, put it this way. "I've never walked out of a Dunkin Donuts and asked somebody, "Hey, how are you doing today, and their response be, "Well, I'm a living dog, right? Better than a dead lion." To put it a different way in a context that you may have heard sometime this week, this month, this year, "I'm vertical, aren't I? I'm breathing. I'm health?" Many of those responses are normal. But Solomon is comparing it. He says, "The living have hope. They have hope to grow, to be redeemed, to be saved. They have hope." So, Solomon has compared these two things.

Now, he begins to take a turn. I believe that not only does he believe that the living have hope, but that they also have the opportunity to enjoy their life, enjoying what God has given them.

He picks up in Verse 7. He says, "In light of these truths, you're going to die, it's good to be living, **Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. 8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.**

Solomon is imploring us that in this brief life that we have, we are to enjoy what God has given us as gifts – good food, linens, oil, and our spouse. To put it another way, we are to be aware that our days are numbered, but instead of lamenting this fact, we are to see that in this brief span allotted to us, we have that opportunity to rejoice in God's generosity.

To even phrase it in a different way, we are to treat every single day as a special occasion. I don't know about you, but I have this habit when I wake up. I grab my phone, and I look at my calendar. I look at what is on the docket for today. I have a bad tendency to predetermine whether my day is going to be good or bad, based upon what's on the calendar. *Oh, this is going to be tough day. I have that really hard meting and then I gotta go do this. Then we have to run and rush and go over here.* I do the opposite as well. *Today is going to be a great day. I've got nothing on the calendar. I get to do what I think needs to be done.* I think what Solomon is encouraging and imploring us to do is to treat each and every day as a special opportunity to enjoy God's great gifts that he's given us. That is what I think he's doing here.

Now, if you've been around Woodland Hills very long, you know that this church has done a phenomenal job of honoring, uplifting, and cherishing the great gift we've been given in marriage. I stand before you as like this moment in time is like a really cool full circle moment because twelve years ago, a message was preached that really got the ball started for my wife and I to get together and

get married. I'm so grateful for that. I'm so grateful for this church's commitment to be speaking on marriage and the biblical principles and truths that go along with it. I'm so grateful for that. I'm honored by it, I'm honored to be up here. But I think it begs a question for us that we all, in some ways, have to answer. Yes, Scott, yes, Solomon, let's enjoy. Easier said than done, right? Why is enjoying these things so hard? I love my wife. She is the absolute bomb.com. But I also have to acknowledge that marriage is hard, it's difficult, and enjoyment can be tough at times. My thought is this. the game of life is a grueling game. Work is hard, relationships are tough, family dynamics, health concerns; the list is endless. We have multiple things knocking at the door that are all over the map in the game of life, aren't they?

Any of you chiefs' fans out there have a moment in the Bengal's where you didn't think we were going to win? I was all over the map. I'm thinking *we gotta break this down, we gotta rebuild it. No way Joe's going to do it again. Oh my gosh!* I'm screaming, I'm yelling, I'm jumping. My kids are crying. We're all over the map. And much like the game of life, we experience the same thing – these highs and lows, these tough things, these heartbreaking things. And those things have tendency and ability to take away from the enjoyment of God's great gifts. The task oriented – *I've got to fix this. I've got to keep this plate spinning. I've gotta go over here and work on this.* I often forget to slow down and experience and enjoy what God has put right there in front of me to enjoy. Enjoyment is difficult.

James 1: 2 says, ***Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind.*** I've heard this scripture a ton of times. Every time I hear this scripture, I just think if I didn't know Jesus and somebody came to me and said, "Hey, listen, you should be enjoying these trials." I'd be like, "What?! What are you talking about? I'm doing everything I can to get away from chaos, destruction, heartbreak, let down, disappointment. I'm doing everything I can. You want me instead to consider it joy? You want me in life to know that I'm going to die someday. That whether I'm good or bad or clean or unclean, the end is death. What a foreign concept. What a crazy way to enter into the idea of this life we've been given. Considering it joy, pursuing enjoyments of the gifts that God has given us. How crazy is that.

My wife and I started watching this new show. Raise your hand if you've seen *Alone* on a tv series. Netflix suggested it to us. I can't believe I clicked it. I feel like I fell into their trap. But I loved it. This TV series is about ten contestants given 10 items, dopped in the middle of really harsh conditions to figure out who can survive the longest. The last person standing wins half a million dollars.

Those of you that know me are shaking your head thinking, *why in the world would you be watching this, Scott?* I'm the kind of guy from Overland Park, Kansas City that if you gave me good fire, good kindling, matches, lighter and gasoline, I would still struggle to light the fire. It's not like I'm critiquing this guy like, "You should have killed the moose this way." I'm just sitting there going, "He killed a moose!! Oh, my gosh, this is incredible!" I was so enthralled with their mastery and their ability to hunt and gather and built shelter; keep off other animals from eating the food that they had gathered. I was so taken back by that. But the majority of these contestants, in the middle of nowhere, by themselves, waved the white flag, not because they couldn't gather food, not because they were too afraid of the bears. It was more so because they were tired of being alone. They had missed their family, they had missed their kids, they had missed their spouse and they waved the white flag.

Genesis 2: 18 talks about this very concept. ***Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man to be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."***

When Nichole and I got married, we both played high school sports and loved sports. I've always thought of us as a team. We're teammates in this thing called life. She is my ultimate teammate, the best teammate. As I've already mentioned, I'm from Kansas City, so I am a die-hard Chiefs fan. I've got my brand-new Patrick Mahomes white jersey. Now, I've only been able to wear it four times because I've spilled something on it every single time. But I love my Chiefs, right? I'm a big Jayhawk fan, right? National champs. Huge. I also don't understand, you know. The Chiefs are in the Super Bowl, the Jayhawks have a national championship. The Royals... I don't know what they're doing. They have not gotten the memo that the point is to win and try and win, so... But I love jerseys. I love wearing my jerseys. I bring this up because I heard a dad one time talk about this to his son. He was going out on Friday night.

He said, "Son, I want you to think what you're wearing tonight as you go out and hang out with your friends."

The son said, "Why is that, Dad?"

The dad said, "When you wear a jersey, the front of the jersey displays what team you play for. You, son, have committed your life to Christ. You have decided to follow Jesus in all of his ways."

You see, the Royals, the Chiefs, and the Jayhawks, when you put that on, you are fighting, competing, going out to redeem the goals of the organization. You're going out to win a World Series. When my wife and I have given our life to Christ, we have laid down ourselves, we're following Jesus. And it is to hit goals and desires that we now pursue. Making disciples, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. You see, the front of the jersey tells what team we play for, but the back of the jersey tells who we get to do it with. When Nichole and I said I do, we left our parents and became one. She took on my last name and we get to do it together – Team McElvain. What an honor to get to do that with her. What a great gift that God has given us in marriage. An opportunity to walk through the grueling, the trials, the joys, the ups and downs of marriage together.

Today, I want to spend the last couple of minutes just talking together about how we might do a better job enjoying the great gifts that God has given us. And specifically in terms of marriage. I have four things in the idea and illustration of the idea of being teammates with my wife.

1. Teammates enjoy one another. We're going to start every one of these that way. Enjoyment grows when teammates see each other as teammates and not as enemies. I recently read a study about successful couples and some of the characteristics and viewpoints that they have. The study was done with many, many couples. Their criteria was 10 plus years of marriage. Some of the characteristics and qualities that helped them in that longevity and successful and healthy marriages. And the number two indicator was that they demonstrated or had the understanding of a team approach to marriage.

My marriage is not perfect. Nichole and I are broken sinners and we are working through that through sanctification. Sometimes, there is a tendency to where I go, "Are you wearing the same jersey? It feels like you're on defense right now and I'm on offense. We're not on the same page."

I generally go through my message and kind of walk through all of this and get some feedback from her. I said, in my example with her, "It feels like you're wearing a Bengal's jersey sometimes." And she stopped me and goes, "Bengals? Don't you ever say that. If I'm playing for any team, I'm playing for the Raiders." There were like six different emotions that went through me when I heard that. The first one was just absolute confusion. The second one was I want to know more. I ultimately ended up in a place where I was like, "I don't know, but I like it. I don't understand it, but I like it."

We must see each other as teammates. God has given me Nichole to walk through the grueling game of life together with. When I go out and I get beat up or disappointed, she's the one I come home to and I want to confide in, I want to be encouraged and supported. She does that for me on the regular. So, it's to see her as a teammate and not an enemy.

2. Teammates enjoy one another when they study and know each other. If you watch Chiefs or watch any sports at all, at some point, some commentator will say something like this. "They just know each other. That play was unscripted but they've spent so much time together that they knew that they would go outside of the gameplan and make that move. They talk about it all the time with Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce. Just listen for it at the Superbowl. "Unscripted play." "He knew he was going to do that." That's because of the time they spend knowing how each moves and what they want to do.

I think it is on me to be a consistent student to understand who my wife is. I admittedly love my personality tests. I love those things. I love them for sometimes they put language to things about myself that I knew, but just couldn't describe it that way. And vice versa. When my wife takes those and I read those, I'm going, "Do you agree to that?" And she's like, "Yeah." That's such a helpful way to think about it.

To give you a practical example in terms of that and studying her, money, as we all know, can sometimes be a tough spot within marriage. God seemingly has this ability to put two people together that have the same front (same team) but are completely different in their personality and nature, the way they see things and do things. That's the way it is for Nichole and me in regard to money. I am a certified goblin. I am a saver. I'm like, "Take the money and put it down. I don't care if the kids have holes in their socks. Just wait six years and we'll get you that." Peanut butter and jelly and Romine, here we go, kiddos." That's me.

My wife is not that way. In a good way. But when she would come home and she'd buy these gifts for people, right. She'd buy me stuff. I'm like, "That's not really in the budget." I'd get really mad and frustrated about these things. It was a lot of consternation for us early in our marriage. But we started learning about each other, we started doing some of these personality things, we started understanding a little bit more about each other. What I came to learn is that Nichole sees money as a way to bless people, to create memories that will last forever, a way to love on people. She's huge into gift giving. I didn't see that. I just thought, *where is this in the budget?* When I recognized that and I understood that about her, it made me appreciate her, it made me enjoy that about her. What once was a point of frustration I now love what about her. I don't necessarily have that inclination, but I appreciate that

she'd do that. That's so healthy and awesome. Are we perfect in our finances? No. Are there still little fights about that? Absolutely. But as I get to know her better, as I understand her, my enjoyment of who God has created her to be and how thankful I am because we need that in our marriage. It's not healthy to just be me. Again, my kids eating Romine every night is not good. I need that. She balances me in that way, and that's really helpful. So, I think teammates enjoy one another when they know who each other are and how they act.

3. Teammates enjoy one another when they have a gameplan. You know this. The Kansas City Chiefs this week have an absolutely, down-to-the-minute, detailed schedule on how they are going to spend their week before the Super Bowl. That includes their practice schedule, coaching sessions, figuring out their strategy and gameplan for the big game, their rest and recover times, when they are going to eat, what they are going to eat. What the summer looks like. They have it all scheduled out. They know that prioritizing and knowing those things means success.

One of the leaders I've been reading in a book called *The 100X leader* by Jeremie Kubicek, he kind of talks about this idea of prioritizing and making sure on scheduling and gameplans. He talks about accidental leaders, and that accidental leaders often fall into positions of leadership and when they get there, they're either unintentional and inconsistent. That doesn't lead to good things. But the good leaders are the exact opposite. They are intentional and consistent. We could apply this to anything, right? If I want to learn how to play the guitar, I could learn to do that if I am intentional about it and I'm consistent with it. Maybe many of you made New Year's resolutions. Pretty easy to think if I'm just intentional about that New Year's resolution and I'm consistent about it, probably gains will happen. We must be intentional and consistent about putting together a gameplan for our marriages, and to enjoy it with our spouse.

I think Ted has taught us and has done a great job of talking about a way and a gameplan to do that with our spouses. And that is through the Daily Delay, the Weekly Withdrawal, and the Annual Abandon. This is a game plan that he has taught my wife and me. The Daily delay, every day, are we connecting, are we sitting down, are we downloading, are we talking through our day, are we hearing how it went. Are we prioritizing where we're pushing everything aside to sit down and do that.

Are we doing the same thing on a Weekly Withdrawal. We're going to grab a babysitter. We're going to make sure the kids know that Mom and Dad are going away. We're going to go grab dinner, go do something fun. And Annual Abandon – we are going to take a big trip, just my wife and me. Get away, retreat, abandon, get out. This is a gameplan. These gameplans help being intentional and consistent.

I remember my dad producing these calendars when I was a kid. He'd put a calendar up on the fridge. It would have Daddy day with me, and I looked forward to my special time with dad. I knew there were dates with Mom and Dad on the calendar. I recognized that as a kid. I saw my dad make that intentional gameplan. So, thank you, Dad, for doing that. May we do that for our own children that they would see us prioritizing marriage. We must have a gameplan and be intentional and consistent with that.

4. Teammates enjoy one another when they are unselfish. I've been a part of some teams where there is a player that it is all about themselves. They are taking every shot, everything is about them, and it makes it unenjoyable, doesn't it? Get me off this team. We are not a cohesive unit. We are not going towards the same goal. This is not about you. You know that when you've been a part of a sports team or a team at work. When everybody is on the same page, going the same direction, it is enjoyable, is it not? The same thing is true in our marriages. When we are unselfish, when it becomes how might I serve my wife, how could I help, support, encourage, when it is less about me and walking into the house or going on the date and going how can I love you here in this moment in time? Great teams are built when individuals are unselfish.

As much as we've talked about marriage in this time, as much as we've talked that, I know there are singles in here, those who are widows. I know that. What I want to make sure you hear is that as much as we've talked about marriage, what Solomon is imploring and encouraging us to do is something I want to come back to as we finish. Treat every day like a special occasion. We've decided to talk about marriage. Valentines Day is coming up. It's a big message here at Woodland Hills. But that doesn't mean that there aren't great gifts in which God has given you to enjoy.

Yes, all of us will end in the same fate; we all die. Our time here on this earth is not very long. Solomon's encouragement is teaching us to be thankful for the generous gifts that God has given us. Maybe on your drive home, maybe in your moment of delay with your spouse tonight... Maybe it's a conversation starter. "Which four of these could we grow in, could we be more intentional, could we be more consistent to enjoy the great gift of marriage that God has given us?" What an interesting conversation starter for you all today. We're going to die. Our time under the sun is short. God loves us, cares about us, and has given us great gifts and one of those is marriage. May we honor that gift and cherish that gift as we intentionally look to be great teammates with one another.

Father, we thank you for today. Thank you for the great gifts you've given us. Life is tough. Trials are hard. May we walk through those trials in joy, and with thankful and generous hearts, may we pursue enjoyment in the great gifts you've given us, one of those which is marriage and our spouse.

We love you, we thank you, we praise you, and it's in your name we pray. Amen.