



Living with the End in Mind
12 – Making the Most of Your Age
Pastor Ted Cunningham

You know you're getting old when your favorite kind of plans are canceled plans. Can I get an amen on that one? I'm buying my wife a shirt that says, "I don't want to go big; I just want to go home." Can I get an amen on that one. You know you're getting old when happy hour is a nap. That's one of my favorites. You know you're getting old when you spend twice as long to look half as good. You know you're getting old when your memory is shorter but your complaining lasts longer.

I honored a senior adult in this community that's been a mentor to me over the years. I honored him this week by just saying, "You're one of the wisest guys I know." Proverbs is very clear. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps his mouth shut. This guy sits in a room and says nothing. He's like a sage. We hang on every few words that he shares. And I was honoring him for that. I go, "Have you always been that way? What makes you so wise at this age that you don't say a whole lot?" And he responded with, "I just don't really care anymore; that's really what it is. But I appreciate you honoring me, Ted."

I thought that was good because you know you're getting old when you think you have more patience but actually, you just don't care anymore. You know you're getting old when everything hurts and what doesn't hurt doesn't work.

I shared this at 10:00 and 11:45 two weeks ago and I'm going to share it today at just the 8:15 because it was Gary Smalley's favorite "you know your getting old" joke. This old guy is out on the dance floor just tearing it up. He runs into his cardiologist. The cardiologist comes over and goes, "What are you doing?" The guy said, "I'm doing exactly what you told me to do – find a hot momma and be cheerful." The cardiologist said, "I told you you have a heart murmur and be careful." That we say in honor of our departed friend, Dr. Gary Smalley.

What have we summed up in the whole Book of Ecclesiastes? Life without God is meaningless. If you don't understand this premise through the whole book, you might read meaningless, meaningless, meaningless all throughout this book and start to think to yourself that nothing matters. You could really walk away from this book, if you don't have a relationship with Jesus and you don't walk with the Lord, thinking nothing matters. But when you understand this book, in your relationship with Christ, you see everything matters when it's in a right relationship with God.

Today, we are going to jump into Ecclesiastes 12. We will be able to cover every verse in this chapter today as we close because it is a shorter chapter. We really want to spend some time with this word *remember*. It's not just remember your keys or remember that important date.

The word *remember* here in the text is a very weighty word. It means to be consumed in your thoughts, your words, and your actions with your Creator. It's interesting that we use the word *Creator* because we want to understand that we have a purpose. In this book, living with the end in mind thought that we've been going through, we should be living with the purpose that God has created you for. I should be living with the purpose God has created me for. In the days of your youth... We want to talk about that today. I'm so encouraged what God is doing through the youth of our nation and even what God is doing right here at Woodland Hills Family Church through our students and our young adults. We want to spend a little time with this because the days of trouble are coming upon you fast. That's what I love about that video in Baby Dedication. We say it around here often. The days go slow, but the years go fast.

But when you are young, you don't think about this. When you are young, you don't think about your death. When you are young... And we are going to see today, you can even forget about your creator. Because you might fall into this thinking – I've got plenty of time. But the days go slow, and the years go fast. The days of trouble are coming. What are the days of trouble? They are the years that approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them." Today, we are going to get the allegory of a house in this text, and we are going to see the aging process in very graphic detail. We're going to see in graphic detail this allegory of a house and how the body finds it's way into the grind and as you get old, things start breaking down. So, be encouraged. You will be so validated, and your nap will feel so good today after this text.

But when we are young, we tend to be consumed in thought, words, and actions with our looks. Remind us all that looks are fading. With our careers. We tend to throw a lot into what am I going to do to make a living? And into our relationships. When we read today, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," we want to talk about being consumed in our thoughts, words, and actions, with what the Creator has designed us to do in life, but more importantly, to be consumed with our Creator. That he would drive our thoughts, our words, and our actions. When you are young, you are in your prime. You have great opportunities to pursue God's purpose for your life. Yes, career is important, relationships are important. There is absolutely nothing wrong with standing in front of the mirror, putting on nice clothes, getting yourself ready to leave in the morning. There is nothing wrong with that at all, but don't be consumed with that alone. Take this time. Use your energy. You have energy when you're young. Use it to make the most of the opportunities that God gives you to know him, walk with him, serve him. Be consumed in your thoughts, words, and actions with what he's called you to do.

Let's jump into this great text. We're going to start in Verse 2, and now we get into the allegory.

2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 when the keepers of the house tremble... Speaking there of the arms and the hands. The body begins to break down. **...and the strong men stoop...** This now speaks of the legs and the joints. Many of you have new ones, but this starts to happen as we get old. **...when the grinders cease because they are few...** Now we start to lose our teeth. You know you're getting old when you and your teeth no longer sleep together. This is part of aging. **...and those looking through the windows grow dim...** how many of you did not have glasses when you were young, but you have them now? We begin losing our eyesight. It gets bad. My eye doctor told me at 40, "Your eyes just plummet." I asked "Forever?"

And he goes, "No, until 55." He told me this when I was in my late 30s. My prescription didn't change in my 20s and 30s. I'm like, this is just the Pearl Vision way of getting a little more cash out of us. He was dead on. Like on my birthday, I couldn't see. I was 40 years old. And then my son goes back and gets his eye exam every year and there's no change. I go back and... the doctor's back is usually to you as he's asking you to read the chart and he's like "wow." It's been a year and it's going down. I'm past a year right now. I can see to about the 10th row. **4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades...** Many believe this is speaking of the face sinking in. **...when people rise up at the sound of birds...**

You've heard the story. I've shared it here before, but I love it and it's in this context. The couple that got up one morning and they are fixing breakfast. He's sitting at the table and she's at the stove. He ponders for just a moment and realizes the sun is coming in on the wrong side of the kitchen. They had gone to bed so early that they awoke before the sun set. They were making breakfast at sunset. That's when you know you're getting old. You nap all day, you're watching the news, you go to bed early. But look – the sound of birds, but then he adds... We've had teeth, we've had arms, we've had legs, **...but all their songs grow faint...** You can't hear them. You're losing your hearing. For some of you, this is the one part of aging you've enjoyed. I want to tell all the husbands in here that there is a difference between hearing and listening.

5 when people are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets... This is a part of aging when every day, ordinary activities become threatening. They are scary. You know you're getting old when you step off the curb or your step off the stair and you pause to look down to make sure that stair is still there, that street is still there. I have bifocals now and they're these new, trendy ones where you can't see that line. I think that's what is really throwing me. If you ever see me out in public and see me moving my head up and down, I'm not agreeing to anything. I'm trying to walk. Amy and I were just at the convention center, and we walked down those big stairs at the Branson Hilton. She's almost down to the door and I'm halfway down the stairs. I find myself double checking. I've walked down stairs my whole life.

I think you know a good application for us here. I'll really pound on the 10:00 and the 11:45 for you. This reminds us to be patient with our senior adult friends. It should remind us to be a little more patient when we're driving. Because you get behind that slow driver... That's someone who used to be able to hit the pedal, but now they are a little more timid. We have a dear friend in this church who surrendered her keys to her family because her foot was no longer strong enough to hit the brake and she knew for herself that she was going to hit somebody. That's a tough thing.

I read it this week and I was just like, *Oh, man, March is almost here. The season is picking back up in Branson, let us all be patient.* I was no sooner studying this and I'm at Sunfest. At Sunfest... when I'm behind somebody writing a check at the checkout, practicing their penmanship, it crawls all over me. I'm like man I've got somewhere to be, and they are just slowly writing their check. Do you have any idea how many times I'm like, "I'll pay for all of this! Just don't write a check. This is my benevolence for the day."

...when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags itself along and desire no longer is stirred. I'm going to leave it at that. You all are pretty good Bible interpreters. I'm really proud of you. I think my favorite part of this text my whole life has been the grasshopper drags itself along and desire is no longer stirred and then you die. **Then people go to their eternal home...** The body breaks down, desire is gone **...and mourners go about the streets.** And now Verse 6 speaks to finality of life.

6 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... Some would say this is still talking about body parts and maybe the arteries and the systems and how the ancients would have seen it. But almost all agree it's just speaking of the end is now here and death is upon you. **7 and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.** And then we read in this book, at the end of the chapter, at the end of our lessons, **8 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!"** Everything is meaningless without God.

We just had fun with this, and we were able to laugh at this. There are some who are saying, "Yeah, I'm there." Why are we, as followers of Jesus, able to speak about it in this manner. Why are we able to speak about it? I'll tell you why as we talk about death. Because of Jesus we do not fear death. This is not anything that we fear in life. Jesus said it this way, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die." Rest in that today. that is the gospel. We believe Jesus died and rose again. We believe that for those who have placed faith alone in Christ alone, death is not the end. It's why we can speak of it in this way.

You know I love the song by Kenny Chesney, *Don't blink*. It's probably one of my favorite country music songs. I want it as part of my service.

Don't blink. Just like that you're six years old and you take a nap and you wake up and you're twenty-five and your high school sweetheart becomes your wife.

Don't blink. You just might miss your babies growing like mine did, turning into moms and dads. Next thing you know your "better half" of fifty years is there in bed And you're praying God takes you instead Trust me friend a hundred years goes faster than you think.

And, Jerry, today your church family mourns with you. We love you. Jerry sat at the bedside of Cathy this week, his wife of 53 years. He held her hand as she took her last breath. Jerry can mourn today, not as the world mourns, but mourns as the one who has hope. And to watch Jerry just sit back in that chair after Cathy went to be with the Lord... It's a numbing feeling that sets over us when we mourn, but the hope we have in Christ and the joy that we have in it. He is the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in him will live even though they die.

What do we do with this text? I want us to ponder something. Think about the time that you have left. Whatever your age is, you have to make the most of it. Sometimes, the older we get, and we think about our marriages or we think about our parenting, we can live with a lot of regret of things that we've done, things that we've said, and mistakes that we've made. Things our children have told us we've said, or children told us we've done, but at this church, because of Jesus, we do not feed our regrets, we ask Jesus to redeem our remaining days.

Psalm 39: 4-5 - **4 “Show me, Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. 5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.** This is a theme all throughout scripture and it’s why we give these marbles to our parents. We want them to know your time is limited. I still remember when I handed Corynn her last marble on her 18th birthday at a dinner. Amy pulled it out of her purse and handed it to me. I had all sorts of words planned. I had it in my hand and Corynn grabbed it, handed it back to Amy, and said, “Put it in your purse. We’re not doing this right now.”

On June 2 this year, I get to grab my son’s last marble. He’s not nearly as emotional as my daughter. He has learned to control his emotions, as he would say. He’ll let me share the words. But we’re in this season of thinking through our days. You need to think through your days. I would encourage you today when you get home or maybe even right now, take your phone out, type in your age, subtract it from 80, multiply it times 365, and you know you can average the year, how many days you have left in the year before your next birthday, but just to see how many days you have left. Just ponder it for a bit. Just look at it. Make the most of it. If I know time is short and it’s a breath, a vapor, a mist, what do we do? Proclaim the good news of Jesus to the next generation. You’re not done. You’re not done until your dead. You’re not done until you draw your last breath.

Psalm 71: 18 says, **Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God...** I’ve been at the bedside of many, I’ve been sitting next to many, and I’ve sat next to those in their 90s who have asked the question, “Has God forgotten me?” I’ve heard that come out of their mouth. **...till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.** You still have work to do.

This week... I know we can’t all come on campus on Wednesday so I’m not encouraging you to do that. But get on the Woodland Hills young adult feed. Get on the student feed. And be encouraged by what’s happening in our student ministry and our young adult ministry.

When I walk in there... You know I’ve had this illustration since the beginning of this series. There are two ways you can go out. You can go out like spoiled milk or with a sheet cake. I want the sheet cake. And as I sat around that room with young adults this week, and I looked around at all these 20 somethings, I’m going, “Lord, I know my replacement is in here somewhere. I pray my replacement is in here. I have to remind you. Your replacement is in there too. The elders of this church, the leaders of this church, the greeters of this church, we all have our season and then we step aside and there is a new generation, not the next generation, it is this generation. I looked around and I was praying. “Lord, let the 20 somethings in here that have been called to preach and teach rise up. Let them start teaching this group.

I saw it last Sunday at Faith Assembly in Orlando. Pastor Carl has pastored that church for 42 years. He turned it over to his successor last year. In every service, he sat on the second row, cheering on everything that was happening. That was probably my greatest takeaway from the mourning. That every single person in this service would become a cheerleader for the next generation. Would become a cheerleader for this generation. When they step up here... The first time we have a 20 something

preaching on the teaching team, that your first response would be, “Thank you, God for what you are doing.” And I, for one, am not going to be a whiner or a complainer at this church. I am going to be the one who proclaims your power to the next generation, to the new generation, and I’m going to be one that says, “Go for it. You got this. And we stand with you on it.” Let’s all be those people. As our hearing goes, as our eyes go, they’ve got energy. I want to remind all the young people in here. We’re ready. I am ready for you to go, “Ted, why are you so quiet in these meetings?” “I don’t care anymore. I’m tired.” May you take the baton and run. We’re ready.

9 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. So, we got that. As we went through this book, we got a lot. If you are new to our church, I encourage you to go back and watch the messages in this series. **10 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...** They put nails in tents and kind of like rack systems in your garage to hang the tools that you need. It’s kind of the same idea here to take these things and hang them where they are handy, and you can recall them and get them and do something with them. —**given by one shepherd.**

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. As we come into midterms for students.

Pastor Alistair Begg says this, and I think this is beautiful. “*Don’t go down these paths...*” this is what he’s saying. This is what every mom and dad say in here to our kids. Don’t go down these paths. “*Let me save you the expense. Let me save you the energy.*” Use your energy to know what your Creator has called you to do.

“*I’ve gone down these various roads...*” And we’ve seen all them in this text. The road of money. The road of accomplishments and pursuits and building great projects. We’ve seen all sorts of pursuits.

“*I’ve gone down these various roads and I have discovered them to be dead ends.*” - Alistair Begg

Don’t go down them. Live a life on purpose for God.

13 Now all has been heard... now let’s sum it all up. ...**here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments...** Love Jesus, yes, but also fear God. Stand in reverence of Almighty God. ...**for this is the duty of all mankind.** Here’s why the text is not saying, this whole book is not saying nothing matters; it’s saying everything matters. Why? Because of Verse 14. **14 For God will bring every deed into judgment...** The way you live your life and the way I live my life. ...**including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.**

Do you know what’s happening today in our culture though and it’s happening in a lot of our churches? I pray it never happens in this church. Rather than fearing God and keep his commandments, our culture wants to reframe God to fit our preferences. Now we’re painting pictures of God that the Bible does not teach. And we say, “This is how I want to live. I’m going to decide how I live and then what I’ll

do is I will create God to accept the way I'm choosing." When the scripture says fear God and his commandments.

I think how we take this and end out our series is simple. Remind yourself regularly, He is God, and I am not. And I will stand in awe of Him, and I will have reverence for Him.

So, for those that read the scripture and it' like, "Yeah, but is that really what it says?" "Yeah, I don't really want to live that way." "Yeah I don't want to do that. I like these parts but I don't like those parts. I hear it all the time. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth... Young people hear me. Yes, love Jesus, but also fear God. Yes, love Jesus, but walk in obedience.

The Asbury Revival that just took place in Kentucky, I love what John Wesley said. I heard a professor from Asbury talk about it this week and I thought it was beautifully said. "God works in two ways – extraordinary moments and ordinary moments.

What's happening at Asbury is an extraordinary moment. But extraordinary moments don't negate ordinary moments, and ordinary moments don't negate extraordinary moments. Ordinary moments are what you and I do each day when we just take faithful steps to follow Jesus. When we continue in trust and obedience. We have a song in the church I grew up in called *Trust and Obey*. I think the church today loves the words *love and trust*. We're not big fans of the word *obey*. Trust and obey. Walk in obedience.

In 2 John 1: 6, we read, ***And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.***

What did Jesus say? ***'Love the Lord you God, love your neighbor as yourself.*** Yes, love and obey, love, trust, walk, fear God and keep his commandments. This is the conclusion of the matter.

We praise God for all he has done through the Book of Ecclesiastes in our lives.

Father, we number our days today and we take seriously what you've called us to. We stand in awe of you. When we worship, we stand in awe of you. When we pray, we stand in reverence of you. When we read your Word, we need to be reminded that you are God, and we are not. So, we worship you. We will never reframe you. May our traditions and our man-made rules never ever step in as the commands of God. That's reframing as well, and we don't want that either.

I pray a blessing on the one who is here today that has walked with you for a long time and when they think about age and they think about the aging process, there have been years, decades of walking with you. May they take that in these days, whatever days they have left and proclaim you to the next generation. May this church always be about preparing the next generation, the generation that's now, stepping them up, helping them succeed as they follow you, their Creator.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day they repent their sins and ask you to be Lord of their life.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.