

- ***READ Ephesians 5:15,16*** Paul's instructions to those who make up the body of Christ in these two verses are very simple: Be sure that you live wisely by making the most of the time that has been given to you. The last phrase might seem strange as he speaks of the days being evil, but I believe this is Paul referring to the fleeting nature of our days. They seem to go by so quickly at times, and we must therefore be sure to take one day at a time making the most of each one that is given to us.
- I would say that most of us accept this as being necessary in our lives. Especially those of us who are in the busiest times of our lives. We understand the need to not waste days blessed to us by God. We probably look towards the future for days when life will slow down and we won't have as much to do, but until then...we definitely need to make the most of the days we are in now. We need to make sure that these days count. But what about those of us who are past those busy years? What about those who are in the latter stages of life where our busiest days are behind us? Are we now free from the instruction of the Apostle Paul? Are we no longer required to make our days count since we are probably counting the days and years that we have left on this earth?
- Recently, a few of us were able to attend a local high school athletics department event where legendary University of Tennessee football coach Philip Fulmer was the keynote speaker. He shared a story that took place just after he was let go from his duties as head football coach at Tennessee in 2008. He was contemplating his next move. He had opportunities to go serve as a position coach in the NFL or he could seek another head coaching job on the college level. He was even considering giving coaching up all together and simply letting himself out to pasture in retirement.
- He was spending some time with a good friend named RC Slocum who had served as the head coach at Texas AM before being asked to resign in 2002. He shared with RC his feelings about his next step and how he was even contemplating retirement. After listening for a little while, RC took out a dollar bill, and asked the waitress at the restaurant they were sitting in to exchange it for 100 pennies. The waitress looked a little puzzled, but did as she was asked. After taking the pennies, RC asked Philip how old he was. Philip responded by stating that he was 58. RC counted out 58 pennies and took them off the table. He then took another 15 off the table because he said that 85 was a good guess as to how long Philip might live. This left only 27 pennies remaining on the table. RC looked at Philip and told him that he had two different ways to approach these pennies which represented possible years left in his life. He could either sit back and count the pennies or he could take those pennies and actually make them count for something. Philip Fulmer said that was all he needed to hear to be able to make up his mind that he was not yet through in the football world.
- Friends, especially those who are either nearing or are already in the latter stages of life, we have those exact same choices before us. We can either sit back and simply count the years we might have left in this life or we can get up and get busy making sure that those years count for something. In doing the latter, we will be fulfilling the instructions of the Apostle Paul in making sure that we are making the most of the time that we have. This is true for all of us, but this morning I would like to focus on our senior saints and encouraging you to make sure that you are excelling in the latter years of your life. This year, our focus is on giving every effort to be excellent in all that we do and that is true even for those of us who have already put in a lot of work to be excellent in our lives. These latter stages of your life aren't the times to stop giving such effort to be excellent. Instead, we ought to all strive to be excellent no matter the stage. Therefore, we are going to take a few minutes this morning to look at five ways in which we can make the latter years of our lives count for something as disciples.
- Now, before we get into these points, I want to make clear that I fully realize that aging affects all of us in different ways. Some people might age, but their abilities continue to thrive. For others, their aging bodies break down much quicker. Therefore, as we go through these points, I would like for us to

recognize that each of these ways in which we can make the latter years of our lives count will be different from person to person depending on how much our bodies and minds will allow. Someone might be able to do at 75 what another simply isn't able to do even at 65. That's completely ok! The main emphasis needs to not be on comparing ourselves with others but on making the most of the days that we have with the abilities we have. With that in mind, let's look at these five things we can do in order to make the most of our latter years in Christ.

5 Ways To Make Our Latter Years Count

I. Don't enter into "Christian Retirement."

- A. There can be a natural temptation to treat our spiritual life much like our work life. Just as we begin our work life with the end of retirement in mind, so might we look at the beginning of our faith in Christ with the end in mind. There isn't much wrong with that so long as we recognize when the end actually comes. Some people might think that there will come a point in our faiths and lives when we can take the gas off of the pedal and slide into what we might see as "Christian Retirement."
- B. This is the point in our lives where we think that our consistent efforts towards spirituality are no longer necessary. Just as we worked for so long in our jobs that we were able to save to the point of coasting in retirement financially, so we might think that we have stored up enough spiritual treasures in order to coast to the day of our deaths. We might think that we have become so mature that we no longer need to put effort into growing or maintaining our faiths like we used to, or we might think that we have accomplished enough to punch our ticket into heaven. While we might not actually verbalize these thoughts, it is very possible that our lack of attention towards spiritual things in the latter years in our lives betrays our true feelings.
- C. I don't know about you, but I can't help but think that Paul would scoff at the possession of such a mindset and attitude. The Apostle himself, who is believed to have died somewhere between the age of 60-65 (which in those days was a ripe old age), clearly verbalized that he was fully aware that his efforts, even in old age, were not yet finished.

"My goal is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead. Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way..."

(Philippians 3:10-15)

- D. It was not until he knew that the end of his life was eminent that he spoke of confidence in having run his race well and in such a way that he anticipated receiving the just reward of a crown of righteousness from His Lord.

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing." (II Timothy 4:6,7)

Paul was going to continue to strive for excellence in what he did for his Lord as long as he had breath. He knew that this life is a blessing from God in which we ought to be working to serve Him and His people as best we can with the ability that we possess. If he didn't see a time to retire in his faith in this life, then we must not either. We must continue to work up until our own departures, and in doing so we will most certainly have made the most of our days.

II. Grow in dependance & trust in the Lord.

- A. Again, there can be a temptation to grow more independent as we grow older and wiser, but the reality is that we need Jesus just as much in our latter years as we did in our former years. In fact, we will more than likely find ourselves learning to lean more and more upon the Lord in the latter years because we begin to understand more and more the brevity and fragility of our bodies and minds in this life. We will begin to see our weaknesses more and more and learn to lean upon the strength of the Lord as we need more and more to get by.
- B. While we often look at **Ecclesiastes 12** in the context of encouragement to make sure that we learn to trust and follow God in our youth, I'll suggest that the picture painted for us by the words of the Teacher is a picture that reminds us of our weak existence and the need to not just seek the Lord in our youth, but to continue to seek Him as our lives become more difficult in the latter stages of our time here on this earth. When everything in our lives seems to be failing and growing weaker, we can rest assured that our mighty God is as strong as ever, and He is there for us to lean upon when those days of adversity come and we say that we have no delight in them.
- C. We might not have delight in the difficult days, but we can always have delight in the Lord and the blessings He continues to shower down upon us. If we will trust in Him when we are faced with enemies and adversities, then we can overcome them even if they come in the form of the difficult days of our latter years. (**Psalm 37:1-6**)

III. Be thankful for the blessing of growing old.

- A. At the age of 29, I have no true grasp on what it feels like to be old. I joke with others that I'm getting old because I'm almost 30, but I'm sure that those who are well beyond me only what to throw something at me when they hear such a thing. That being said, I have had a few moments where I recognize that I'm not quite as young as I used to be. I know that those moments will only continue to compound as I get older and older, and I realize that those moments present moments for me to bemoan the reality of my getting older.
- B. However, I hope that I will remember the words that I am about to say in those moments when I am tempted to complain because there are many blessings that come with growing old. Yes, I realize that we just alluded to many of the difficulties that come with growing old in these bodies in this life from **Ecclesiastes 12**, but there are also some great blessings that come with growing older. Firstly, with greater age comes greater opportunities to grow in wisdom. Notice that I said opportunities to grow in wisdom. Wisdom is not a guarantee with age if we do not take the opportunities presented to actually learn and grow. But if we do it the right way, then it can be said of us as it is written in **Job 12:12**, *"Wisdom is found with the elderly, and understanding comes with long life."* If we have listened to advice and accepted instruction in our youth, then we have set ourselves up to be wise in our latter days. This is the truth set forth in **Proverbs 19:20**.
- C. Secondly, the longer we remain in this life, the more opportunities we will have with others to serve the kingdom on this side of eternity. Paul had this internal struggle going on inside of him that we can read about in **Philippians 1:21-26**. He obviously would have loved to have been able to go on from this life so that he might be with Jesus, but he knew that the longer he stayed on this earth, the more opportunities he would have to do good work for others. If this was Paul's mindset that he embraced in his latter years, then we would do well to embrace it, as well. We should see our latter years as blessings from God that can continue to be used to His glory and the benefit of others.

IV. Be willing to share wisdom with others.

- A. One such benefit would be the ability to share the wisdom, that we have hopefully gained over the years, with those who might be coming up behind us. This was the mindset of the Psalmist in **Psalm 71:18**, where it is written, *"Even while I am old and gray, God, do not abandon me, while I proclaim your power to another generation, your strength to all who are to come."*

- B. This was also the practice of many Biblical characters. Jethro was willing to use his wisdom to advise his son-in-law Moses in such a way that helped him to be more efficient and successful in serving and leading the people of Israel as they were out in the wilderness. (**Exodus 18**) Paul certainly displayed his willingness to share his wisdom with men such as Timothy and Titus by writing letters to them that helped them in their ministries for the Lord. He even included teachings in both of those letters to help those in their latter years to know how they could serve the younger generations through pastoral instructions in **I Timothy 3** and general instructions for those who were older in **Titus 2**.
- C. Again, all of this simply goes to show that there is much that can be done by those who are in their latter years that can help to serve and strengthen the Lord's kingdom and His people. All of this simply goes to show the truth behind the words of **Psalms 92:12-15**, *"The righteous thrive like a palm tree and grow like a cedar tree in Lebanon. Planted in the house of the Lord, they thrive in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, healthy and green, to declare: 'The Lord is just; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.'"* Doing such things would certainly qualify as making your latter years count!

V. Be excited for fulfilled hope instead of fearful over the unknowns of death.

- A. Finally, we can make sure we are making our latter years count by keeping the proper perspective on what is coming next in our lives. As we see the inescapable end of life drawing ever closer, it can be easy for us to begin to grow fearful. We might fear the unknowns of death. We might fear what will happen to those who we love that will be left behind without us. There are many different things that we might fear, but I am convinced that such fears will only cause us to waste the years that have been blessed to us by God.
- B. Instead, we need to be people who are adopting the mindset that is found in **Psalms 71**. In this text, the inspired writer is speaking directly to God as his Refuge. No matter what was going on around him, he felt as if he was safe from the dangers. His hope and confidence were fully in the Lord. But then he gets very specific in **v.9** when he asks that he not be discarded by God simply because of his old age. Instead of abandoning him when his strength fails so that his enemies might come in to overtake him, the Psalmist asks God that He not be far from him so that He might help him to overcome. In overcoming, the praise of God would continually be on his lips, and *"I still proclaim your wondrous works."* (**v.17**) It might be difficult to have such confidence in our old age because of the unknowns that are before us, but I am convinced that this Psalm and the words of Paul in **II Timothy 2** ought to fill us with such joy and confidence as we stare down life's end.
- C. Paul is well aware that his life is about to end. He has been playing this back and forth game with the governing authorities, and he is confident that his end is near. And yet, we don't see him scared about death! Instead, he gladly looks forward to this inevitable occurrence because he realizes that in experiencing such a thing...he would be taken into the next phase of his existence which would be eternal bliss. He was confident that he was about to experience the reward for which he had worked so hard for. Can we approach the end of our lives with the same confidence? If not, then we need to take time to reexamine Paul's life and efforts because I am fully convinced that Paul's attitude and mindset can be ours, as well, and possessing such will certainly be an incredible way of living our last few years on this earth.

As I sat writing this lesson, I couldn't help but think about Joe Lewis. He recently passed away, and as I stood in the funeral home listening to the words that were said about the way that he lived his life...I couldn't help but think about how he truly made his latter years count by living the excellent life that he did in doing much of what we have discussed this morning. I hope to live in such a way that others, and certainly most importantly God, will see me as someone who made (Lord willing) my latter years count, and I believe we can all do that very thing by leaning upon the strength that He provides.