

January 8, 2023

It's Later Than it's Ever Been

OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S STUDY

You only get one shot at your ONE and only life. And the clock is ticking. In part, this series has been designed to help you take an honest assessment of how you've been living. Assessments are good. They are a reality check and help us get a clear picture of where we are right now. But assessments are not enough. We also need help in creating a roadmap to our desired destination in life. During these sessions we are going to be examining different components of a rich and meaningful life that is aligned with God's purposes. Your ONE life is a gift from God that He has entrusted to you. It is our hope and prayer that these studies will help you steward well the days you've been given.

GET READY

- In the book *Your ONE Life* read
 - How to get the most out of this book
 - Introduction
- Read Psalm 90
- If you found out you only had 90 days to live, what would you do that you've never done before?
- Figure out how many days you have lived so far and be prepared to share that number with your group.

START HERE

There is an old country western song called "Live Like You Were Dying." It is the story of a man who is told he only has a short time to live. And the song talks about all the things he would do knowing that his time on earth was quickly coming to an end.

You see, the truth is that we are all "terminal." We should all live like we are dying... because we are. Ultimately, the death rate at Oakwood will be 100%. None of us are exempt and none of us will escape. Ecclesiastes 8:8a (NLT) says "*None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death...*"

So, the question is not "if", but "when."

When it comes to the number of your days, there is no negotiating, bartering, or borrowing. There are some things in life you just can't borrow. You can't borrow somebody else's relationship with

Christ, you can't borrow somebody else's talents, you can't borrow somebody else's soul, and you can't borrow someone else's days. Your days have been numbered by God and you will not live one second beyond what God has appointed for you.

Based on the authority of God's word, we know that this life is not all there is. The grave does not mark the end of our existence. The Bible says that your soul is immortal. You are going to live somewhere FOREVER. Let that sink in. Compared to eternity, your life on earth is a blip on the screen of time.

James 4:14 (NIV) says, *"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."*

The Bible also teaches that choices and decisions I make in this life have a defining impact on my future in eternity. Don't miss this. There is an unbreakable link between this life and eternity. What I do in this life ripples in eternity.

Jesus invaded history and by his death on the cross made it possible for us to have life in heaven on the other side of death. WOW. What an incredible gift. Now, here is the icing on the cake. Jesus not only came to give us eternal life in heaven, but he also came to give us abundant life here and now.

In John 10:10 (KJV) Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." The word "abundantly" has in it the idea of "overflowing."

The New Living Translation puts it like this: "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness."

So, consider this question, "What would it look like for you to live abundantly? " To have an "overflowing" life? To live life in all its fullness?

If some of us were honest, we would have to admit that our lives have never been more full, but never less fulfilled. Our lives feel cluttered and confused. We feel overloaded and overwhelmed. We run fast, but we can't outrun the emptiness we feel. We secretly wonder if this is all there is or if this is how life was meant to be lived.

GO DEEPER

So, where do we start? There is a passage of Scripture written by the apostle Paul that I believe is a wonderful launch pad for this series. It is found in Romans 13.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul says, *"Another reason for right living is that you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So don't live in darkness. Get rid of your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes. Clothe yourselves with the armor of right living, as those who live in the light."* Romans 13:11-12 (NLT)

Found in these two verses are 3 challenges for us today.

1. Live with a sense of urgency

Paul says, “another reason for right living is that you know how late it is; TIME IS RUNNING OUT.” Do you hear the urgency in those words? We know that we only have a limited time here, but we can begin to live and act as if we will be here forever. There was an interesting survey done among college students. They were asked this question: “If you could know the exact date of your death, would you want to know?” 87% said “No.” In most of us there is a kind of denial that doesn’t want to face our mortality.

We can be lulled into self-deceit. There would be nothing sadder than getting to the end of life, looking over your shoulder and wondering “what happened?” So many unfulfilled dreams, so many lost opportunities, so much left undone, so many regrets.

Now, let’s take a moment to clarify something. Living with urgency doesn’t mean living faster or busier. Frantic does not equal urgent. To live with a sense of urgency means to live with an awareness that you aren’t promised “someday.” It means being alert to the fact that the clock is ticking. You see, life is fragile, uncertain, and in so many ways, it is out of your control.

No matter how careful you are; no matter how good your car’s safety equipment is; no matter how much you “play it safe”, there is NO guarantee that you will make it to tomorrow.

Not only is the future uncertain, the past is forever gone. We cannot retrieve it or relive it. We all know people who constantly live in the past. They are always looking in the rearview mirror. As Christ followers, we must learn to let God’s amazing grace and mercy cover our past. Let it go.

The past is gone... tomorrow is an unknown. It is not promised or guaranteed.

One day Jesus was talking about people who constantly fret about “tomorrow.”

In Matthew 6:27-30 (NLT) Jesus said, “*Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won’t he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!*”

Just as we must let God’s grace and mercy cover the past, we must let God’s care and providence cover our future. He is a good God. He is a loving father. We may not always understand his ways, but we can trust his heart.

So, if your past is covered by God’s grace and your future is covered by God’s care, then where should we live? We should live in the NOW. We should live in the present, because that is really all we can do anything about.

The Psalmist declares in Psalm 118:24 (NLT), “*This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.*”

LIVE IT OUT

So, the first challenge of this series is to “embrace today.” It is to seize the gift of this day. It is to “live in the moment.” It means not looking past today. It means doing what you can today because tomorrow is not promised.

Let’s make a commitment together. As a group, would you be willing to declare the next 7 days as a “No regret” week? When we gather back here one week from now, let’s look each other in the eye and say “I didn’t live in the past. I didn’t worry about the future. I embraced each day as a gift. I didn’t take life for granted this week. I didn’t take the people in my life for granted this week.” Wouldn’t it be awesome if that was our testimony?

It’s later than it’s ever been. Live with a sense of urgency.

2. Live with a sense of eternity

Let’s go back to Romans 13:11b-12. Paul says, *“Wake up, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here.”*

As much as it is a mistake to take today for granted, it is an even bigger mistake to take eternity for granted. While we need to learn to embrace today, we must never think that “today” is all there is. Even a lot of Christians live like there is nothing beyond the grave. Let’s be honest, most of us are so consumed with pursuing the good life here and now that eternity rarely crosses our mind.

Paul pleads with us to “wake up”, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”

So, what does Paul mean when he says, “the coming of our salvation is nearer now?”

The Bible talks about our salvation in past, present, and future tense. There was a moment in the past when you personally received Christ as your savior. At that moment of conversion, the Bible says you were “born again.” You were saved. But the Bible also says that you are “being” saved which is present tense. Salvation isn’t just an historical event; it is living and dynamic and active in my life today. But the Bible also talks about my salvation in the future. It is the idea that my salvation will one day be complete when I am in the presence of Jesus, no longer struggling with sin and living in my glorified body.

So, Paul is saying that the full and glorious completion of your salvation is closer today than it was yesterday. Implicit in Paul’s words is a warning. You are rushing headlong toward eternity. You are terminal and what a tragedy it would be for you to not be prepared. It is in this life that you make preparation for eternity. There is no second chance after death.

Hebrews 9:27 (NLT) says, *“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.”*

The Bible is absolutely clear that to be prepared for eternity, you must be born again. You must personally receive the gift of salvation made possible by Jesus' death on the cross. If you have never stepped over the line of faith and asked Jesus to be the savior and CEO of your life, you can do that today.

Paul is also reminding us that, while we ought to live with a sense of urgency in this life, this world isn't our home. The Bible says that we are pilgrims, wanderers, and nomads on this planet.

There is an intriguing story from the life of Winston Churchill. As the Prime Minister was making plans for his funeral, he asked to be laid in state in the heart of London at St. Paul's Cathedral. He requested that his casket be placed under the massive dome in the center of the Cathedral. Churchill then requested two trumpeters be stationed on each side of the balcony that circles the dome. It was his wish that at the close of the service the trumpeter on one side would play taps. When he was finished the trumpeter on the other side was to play reveille, the wakeup call. What a beautiful picture of the reality that when we are laid to rest after this life, we awaken to a life in eternity.

We literally will live happily ever after. We are going home. Every morning when you awake, you can tell yourself "I am one day closer to home."

The apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV) "*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*"

LIVE IT OUT

So, what would it look like for you to fix your eyes on the eternal? Are you spending all your time chasing after that which is going to wear out, go out of style, break down, collect dust, and ultimately end up on a garbage heap? Our world makes it hard to focus on eternity. Every commercial or internet ad or the newest model car all fuel my insatiable appetite for "MORE." But it's all just temporal. What would it look like for you to be pre-occupied less with all the temporal stuff of life?

So, Paul challenges us to 1) live with a sense of urgency and embrace today. Live in the moment and see today as a gift from God. And he also challenges us to 2) live with a sense of eternity. Remember that this life is not all there is. I must make preparation in this life for my life in eternity.

There is one final challenge in this passage.

3. Live with a sense of priority

If you really only had 90 days left to live, how would your priorities change? How would you spend your last 2,160 hours on this planet?

The first two challenges really inform this challenge to live with a sense of priority. When we live with a kind of bi-focal vision, one eye on eternity and one eye on the gift of "today", then we can

really begin to prioritize our lives and actions. Now we can know WHAT we should do, WHERE we should spend our time, and HOW we should behave.

Paul challenges us in Romans 13:12 with these practical words, *“So don’t live in darkness. Get rid of your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes. Clothe yourselves with the armor of right living, as those who live in the light.”*

The word picture that Paul uses here is one we can all relate to. It is the image of taking off and putting on clothes. In order to live like you were dying, you will have to “take off” wrong living and you will have to “put on” right living. It requires change. It requires adjustment. It requires a decision. It requires effort. It won’t happen by accident.

For a moment, let’s go back to John 10:10. Earlier, we only looked at the last half of the verse where Jesus declared that he came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly. The first part of that verse says, “the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” We could all look back over our lives and identify things that stole the abundant life from us. Mostly it’s the distractions, the lies, the illusions, the misplaced priorities.

In order for us to live the abundant life Jesus promised, we must have clear priorities and we must identify the things that keep us from living for that which is most important.

Paul doesn’t give us a lot of specifics in this passage. So, let’s look at a couple of specific ideas that will be helpful for those of us living in the 21st century.

Take off your frantic pace of life

Hurry is a devious enemy of the abundant life. In our rush to accomplish and achieve and live life to the fullest, we rob ourselves of some of life’s richest moments. This insatiable need for speed sets us up for a monumental struggle.

We live in an age of continuous activity which consumes all our time and attention, but which cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. The badge of busyness is one that we wear with honor, but in reality, it is a curse to the health of our souls and relationships and priorities.

Busyness is not so much about the length of our to do list or the number of meetings on our calendar. It has morphed into a state of mind and disposition of the soul. We have a hurried spirit.

If we knew we were dying, we wouldn’t speed up, but rather we would slow down. We would “put off” some things that clutter our lives. We would slow down to enjoy, savor, linger, and relish those things that really matter. For example, when someone in our family is hospitalized, we find the ability to push the pause button on everything else.

Psalm 46:10 is an indictment on the frantic pace of our lives. The Psalmist says, “Be STILL and know that I am God.” You cannot follow Jesus at a sprint. And speed is the enemy of intimacy; both intimacy with God and the people we love.

That is why, as part of God's top ten list, he gave us the command to observe a Sabbath. God built us for a rhythm of life that includes a day of rest every 7 days. Sabbath is a time to cease from work and our frantic busyness. In the uncluttered practice of Sabbath there is room to pay attention to the still small voice of God. It was not just something for followers of God in the Old Testament. It is desperately needed for fatigued and frazzled believers today.

LIVE IT OUT

So, how about it? Slow down. Walk slower. Drive slower. Don't constantly look at your smart-phone. Don't fill every minute on your calendar. What could you jettison out of your weekly schedule? What is "robbing" time and life from you? Take a hard look at the pace of your life. In order to steward well your ONE life, you will have to ruthlessly eliminate the unimportant.

Put on more time for relationships

Slowing down allows you to pay attention, especially to relationships. After all, people are eternal and your relationship with God is eternal. So, if you are going to focus on that which outlasts this life, focus on your relationship with God and your relationships with others.

Jesus was such a great example of this. He spent large blocks of time nurturing his relationship with his Heavenly Father and he paid attention to the people in his world.

No one has ever had the kind of personal laser vision that Jesus had. He noticed an inconspicuous tax collector sitting in a Sycamore tree. He saw a blind man sitting by the side of the road. He paid attention when a diseased woman desperate for healing reached out and just touched his robe. He saw and embraced the children that everyone else ignored.

There are all kinds of people just waiting to be noticed, to have someone just pay attention to them. Every day you pass people who smile, shake your hand, and make small talk, but inside they are dying for someone to pay attention to them. Here is the saddest part; some of those people are the people in our family. We walk past them dozens of times a week.

If we knew we were dying, we would certainly make time for some longer and deeper conversations with people we love. There are some things we would want to make sure didn't go unsaid. Some of us have reduced communication in our marriage to managing tasks and schedules. Who will pick up the dry cleaning? What time will we meet for dinner? Who is taking the kids to soccer practice? You don't know how much time you have. Don't miss the chance to sit down with your daughter and let her know how you feel about her. Don't miss the chance to sit down with your aging parents and spend time enjoying them.

LIVE IT OUT

In the spirit of "living with a sense of urgency", take this challenge. **THIS WEEK**, make relationships a greater priority. Who do you need to get with for an unhurried lunch? Don't let your good intentions turn to painful regrets.

You see, getting clear about your priorities is the most liberating way to live. You are free to stop chasing after all the stuff that doesn't matter. You are free to stop living for the approval of others. You are free to not conform. Because you are living with an eternal perspective, and you are clear about God's purposes for your life.

To live the life we long to live, we must make it...
More about today, less about tomorrow.
More about people, less about possessions.
More about God's priorities, less about my preferences.
More about the eternal, less about the temporal.

The clock is ticking. You don't get a second shot at today. It's later than it has ever been. So, let's commit to living a "no regret week."