

I've been watching God at work these last few weeks and it has caused me to contemplate the brevity of life, the direction of this church, and evaluate my actions and ministry. I've always preached that instead of being worried about the end-times, we should be living as if every day is our last.

¹⁰ The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? ¹² So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:10-12 (ESV) We get a heart of wisdom by living daily at the Lord's direction. He is the wise One. That is one reason I preach through the Scriptures, for there we get the full counsel of God, the source of wisdom. So as I numbered my days, and realized that it is like a vapor that appears for a time and then vanishes, I considered what I need to say or reiterate. Let me sum it for you in the message for today. I would usually give a message like this for New Years, but why wait?

The Great Command is first and foremost. It should be our daily heartbeat. So many things vie for first place in our love and attention, but there is nothing that is worthy of our first love but God. He is the One that gave you life and breath and value. He is the One that loves you like no other can even come close. His love is beyond compare. Yes, it is difficult to love what you cannot see, by faith to receive that love in the midst of this fallen world of pain. But He is able to convey the reality of it to your heart if you are willing to receive it.

It was made very clear to me this week that the one thing that hinders our willingness to receive this all-consuming love is the fear of where it will take us. We are just sure that if we abandon ourselves to Him, He will lead us to the cross. Yes, He will! You are right. That is why He tells us to count the cost first. But the cross is made incredibly light as the Lover of our soul comes alongside us and carries it with us. The longings of our soul can only be met by our unreserved surrender to the Bridegroom of our soul. We find that when the surrender is made, instead of the cross we had so much feared, we find a King, the King of Love, who both satisfies our deepest longings, and who finds His own satisfaction in us.³ The cross is still there, but He turns it into a path to glory with sweet communion on the way.

Commented [notes1]: Paraphrase of - Taylor, James Hudson (2009-10-04). Union And Communion or Thoughts on the Song of Solomon (p. 70). Public Domain Books. Kindle Edition.

To lose your self in Christ is the greatest joy you will ever experience. It is the joy of Christ. It is what men of God have called "the exchanged life". You give your life to Jesus and He gives you His life and lives through you. He is life eternal. To find life you must lose your own. If you will cling to this life, you will never fully know the life of Jesus. It is a huge leap of faith, a conscious decision to abandon yourself to Him, and one you make on

moment by moment basis. It costs everything to gain everything. But on the other hand, what else is there to live for? Everything else is chasing after the wind.

The second is inseparable from the first, to love your neighbor as yourself. When you abandon your self to Jesus, His love for the mankind compels you to invest in others, to disciple others. The Great Commission is just another way of stating the second great command. If life is Jesus, and you love others, what will you want to share with them? Life! But you can't give them what you don't have. As you grow in Christ and come to know the intimacy of His love, you'll want to share it with others. You'll find ways to share it with those that come around to inquire what it is that you have. You can't hide that light that begins to shine from that inner communion you have with Jesus.

I've been reading a book I recommend to you all, *50 People Every Christian Should Know*. I've always been impressed with the truth that in the biographies of nearly every great instrument of God, there is mention of them rising at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to spend their best hours at the foot of the throne of their King, hearing what He would speak to their heart, and presenting their petitions to Him. There we bring the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ and those in the world that God has placed on our hearts. That communion causes your face to shine like that of Moses as he came down from the mountain. And those that are drawn, as Moses was to the burning bush, are those you are to disciple. They are drawn to the Lord. Don't mistakenly think they are drawn to you.

One reporter asked D.L. Moody, "I saw one of your disciples in the bar drinking quite heavily." Moody replied, "He must have been my disciple, and surely couldn't have been my Lord's disciple." It's not about you. It's about Jesus. We disciple people by pointing them to Jesus. Who are you discipling? Has no one been drawn to the glow on your face? Perhaps you need to spend more time in the Holy of Holies until the glow lingers. Make disciples of every nation was Jesus' last request. Let's get at it. Start with your children or grandchildren.

When your time is no longer yours to use as you will, and your feet no longer at your service to take you where you would go, and your mind no longer free to think on whatever would pass through it, and your hands no longer yours to do what you will, and your eyes are restricted by His Spirit, and your mouth has watchmen restraining what you would say... THEN you can know true freedom! Real freedom is for our mind to have the mind of Christ, and our heart to desire His pleasure, and our eyes to see Him at work in this world, and our mouth to say what He would speak, and our feet to take us where He would go, and our hands to serve others, and our time available to our Master to use as He sees fit. That is living! That is life! It's a daily adventure. It is joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The chief expression of the life of Christ in us is love. Jesus said it in numerous ways. The only thing new about the command was the addition of "as I have loved you". That means

we need to look at how Jesus demonstrated it. And what do you know, what He demonstrated is exactly what He asks us to do. He made disciples. His love focused on 12 men, and He invested His life into those men. Yes, He taught publicly and preached in the synagogues, but the vast majority of His time was training those 12 to take what He had taught them and teach it to others who could then teach others. Love is better caught than taught. It has to be demonstrated.

"As I have loved you" also was included in His command to take up our cross and follow Him. He was taking up His cross every day, not just the last one. He did only what the Father showed Him. He demonstrated for us how to lose your life so you might find it. He always set aside His will to do the will of the Father, even on that last evening. The cross comes before loving service to others.

And finally, "as I have loved you" included His death. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. We won't die for others at the end of our life if we haven't learned to die daily.

That brings me to the church. When I first came to Wayside, about 10 years ago, I said that if we can become a church that is known for loving one another, we won't be able to seat everyone that wants to be a part of what is happening here. Looking back, I think that was somewhat naïve. Love also corrects and disciplines. Love teaches the truth. Love disciplines. Not everyone wants that. In fact, just as we see people reject the love of Jesus because of the realization of the cost, people will reject the love of the body of Christ because they do not want to have to pay that price of returning that love.

The motivation for loving one another in the body is realizing we are the body of Christ. If you want to show your love for Jesus, show your love to His body. Bless one another with time and attention and care. "In as much as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me", Jesus said. We've read how the Apostle Paul described this as "considering others interests" and "thinking of others more highly than yourself". It is a fellowship that only genuine believers can have. It is a foretaste of heaven. It is participating in New Jerusalem right now.

"But what about the limits and boundaries?" you might ask. First of all, where is that question coming from? If it is coming from past hurts, get over it. Take it to Jesus and let go of it. Of course we are not to enable sin, and of course love is sometimes speaking the truth. But let's face it, to love like Jesus will cost everything. Jesus asks no less. He's worth nothing less.

Last Tuesday I met with the Young Adults, and Luke gave an excellent message from a book called, *In the Likeness of God* by Dr. Paul Brand. Dr. Brand explained how the cells that make up our body all live for one another. We have no pleasure nerve. Pleasure is derived from numerous cells and systems all doing their part in unity and the resultant effect in our mind. Then there are amoeba that just live for themselves, eating what they

can, surviving and multiplying with no real effect on our body. Then there are all other cells that work in unity to make the whole body healthy. Then there are cancer cells that want to consume the body and have no purpose but to destroy.

A white blood cell will hunt down an invading cell and even be destroyed itself to stop the bacteria from doing damage to the body. It lives for nothing but protecting the body and functioning together with it. The church will always have all three kinds of cells, that is until the day when the last trumpet sounds. Discipleship is that training of the new cells that life is not just about surviving, or even pleasing oneself, but about the whole. When the majority are selfless, sacrificing and working in unity, the body is healthy and functioning as an amazing combination of systems and cells. That is when the work of the Lord is accomplished.

In the coming year, we are going to do a read through the Bible campaign. We'll also have one Friday night a month when we get together and discuss what we are learning. I'm going to challenge you to be praying and watching for someone to take under your wing and disciple. That means, of course, that you need to be living what you want to teach. In the body of Christ, it's not how much you know, but Who you know. It's not about knowing all the answers, but living the truth you do know.

The only reason we would not get up and take time with the Lord is that we think something else is more important. We have to be honest with ourselves and realize what our priorities are. If it is pleasing the physical body, then let's admit it and ask God to give us a greater desire to want things that are eternal. If we are an amoeba, realize it and ask God for a vision of how great His love is for us. Let's look into His word and get a vision for all He has planned for us. Those things can't help but move your heart, because they show us His love.

When you wake at 5a.m. and you hear Him call your name, is that cozy bed and a few more minutes of sleep more valuable to you than time with the King of the Universe? Self-discipline is a fruit of the Spirit, but it also comes from a growing love for the One who loves us more than we can comprehend.

Finally, I want to commend to you your elders and those young men and women that the Lord has placed in this congregation to pray for them and encourage them. I'm nominating Ron Vachon-Vierra to the elders this next year. He has already served the church and helped us through numerous difficulties. He loves the Word. He loves His wife. He loves the church. He's proven himself by living as an elder, which is what every elder does before he is nominated.

Our brother and pastor, Ed, will be retiring this year. He has served you well. He'll continue to minister as he is able, but it is time for him to slow down. We owe him a debt of gratitude for faithfully serving his Lord and you. Ryan and Connie will continue. They

both continue to grow in Christ and in service to the body. They are good and faithful brothers.

I want you to pray for our young adults in this coming year. They are our future. Mac and Jory have grown so much from their year on the mission field and as much in the year since they returned. God is preparing them for ministry. Jonathan and Jordan are a real blessing to have in our fellowship. I hope they decide to make Wayside the place they will raise their children. You have an exceptional leader in Jonathan! He is doing an amazing job with Young Life. And Kim is a gem. Some of you don't know about her knowledge of Hebrew. Mac and Kim are both already in ministry by serving at Rainbow Acres. Our brother Luke is growing by leaps and bounds lately! At work they can't figure out what got into him. I know what got into him, Jesus! Of course I can't mention all of you, and don't feel bad if I didn't mention what you are doing. Your reward is in heaven and that's much better than a word of praise here. This church is just beginning to warm up its engines. Its best days are not behind us, they are ahead.

As you get to know Jesus even better, and make Him known even more by discipling that one or two or ten that He leads you to, this is going to be one dynamic place of life, the life of Jesus! Oh, we won't have the programs that so many love to do, and I'm not saying they are bad or any less important, but we are going to major on The Program, making disciples of every nation, starting right here in our Jerusalem, knowing Christ and making Him known.

If you judged Jesus' success by the number He left behind, you might be thinking He wasted those 3 years of ministry. Eleven fearful followers is not much to show for those years, but looking at the result today, we can see God has the right plan. Just obey and watch what He does with it! Let's get on board! Amen?

Let me sum up where we are headed in the coming year. Let's get in the Word, taking time with the Lord each morning to sit at His feet getting to know and love Him more every day. As God brings people into our lives and we build those relationships, let's lead them to a deeper life in Christ by going deeper first.

Pray for and encourage your leaders, especially your up and coming young adults that are our future. Let's all be healthy cells that work for the good of the whole.

Let me close with this message with the words of the Apostle John. "Little children, love one another." When that is done, all is done.

Questions:

- 1 How should we live each day?
- 2 Why do we hesitate to receive God's all-consuming love?
- 3 How can the longing of our soul be met?
- 4 What is the exchanged life?
- 5 How are the Great Command and the Great Commission linked?

- 6 What causes our face to shine?
- 7 What is the chief expression of the life of Christ in us?
- 8 What does "as I have loved you mean"?
- 9 What do healthy cells do?
- 10 What's Wayside's motto?
- 11 Why is Wayside's future bright?
- 12 What's THE PROGRAM?