

DAY 4: A HEART OF WISDOM

Read Psalm 90.

This is a core Psalm for me. It tells you that life is finite and fragile. Life is hard. There are some changes that bring pain and suffering, but life is infinitely precious. Therefore, you need a heart of wisdom to know how to live fully every day. You also need God. You need a personal, saving relationship with God. It is God who will help you in all the changes of life. The Sunday sermon spent some time walking through the best practices of daily living that are described in this passage.

Study and Reflect: I recommend a careful, verse by verse consideration of this Psalm. Jot down all the lessons of life you learn. Then, what are the parts of the prayer (verses 12-17) that illustrate what God must do for us through the changes of life?

Pray It Through: Find ways to pray the prayer of Moses for your own situations and relationships.

DAY 5: GET BUSY LIVING OR GET BUSY DYING

Read Psalm 118 and Lamentations 3:19-26.

This is the day the Lord has made. Will you rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24)? The compassions of the Lord are new every day. Will you receive and enjoy them (Lamentations 3:19-26)? *Every day you are busy living or busy dying.* That is your choice! Those words come from the movie *Shawshank Redemption* (one of my top ten movies ever). We have two short clips from that movie on the web version of the devotional. Be aware that there are a few words of profanity in the clips.

Here are some more great words: “Aging is mandatory, growing is optional.” “Getting older is mandatory, becoming mature is optional.” Life changes. You get older. Relationships move through the seasons of life. One day, we will all die. We will all experience loss. We will all grieve. And yet, in all this messiness of life, there are biblical words of hope and the beauty of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Jesus gives meaning to life. Jesus gives purpose to life. And Jesus gives us hope beyond life. That is why we can get busy living. That is why we can be ready for the next adventure God has for us (see the movie *UP*). That is what today’s texts are all about. Life is hard, but you are called to get busy living for God is great, he is loving, and he is with you.

Dream About It: Are you busy living or busy dying? What is your next adventure? How can you seize the day God has given you? Life is precious. A heart of wisdom will enable you to be fully human and fully alive.



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Week 6 • March 12 • Pastor Brian Rice

LIFE TOGETHER

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A GROWING DEEPER PRACTICE Stuffing yourself and starving yourself—no one would ever suggest this as a healthy way of eating, much less as a way to maintain a healthy level of fitness. Imagine if Sunday afternoon was the one day a week where you prepared and consumed a feast (think Thanksgiving Day amounts of food—the day when we indulge in our national pastime of overeating!) So, you are stuffed with great food. Too stuffed. Uncomfortable. Without going into detail, the amount of food consumed in that space of time is mostly wasted. Your body is not designed to absorb the nutrients and sustenance of that much food, so it is literally waste. Intake and outgo (if you know what I mean).

Now comes part two of your eating strategy: starving yourself all week. Monday through Saturday you hardly consume any food at all. As I said before, no one would ever suggest this as the way to arrive at health and fitness.

So, why do many Christians have that mindset about spiritual eating? They put all the focus on the Sunday Sermon Feast—more ideas, more Bible verses, more explanation, more teaching, more, more, more...! And then, they do minimal devotional work during the week. They put all the burden on the Sunday Sermon Feast and neglect the Daily Devotional Diet that is essential for spiritual health.

The irony of the Sunday Sermon Feast is that study after study reveals that on Monday, typical sermon hearers have forgotten most of what they heard. The Feast has been wasted for them. They heard, but they forgot. They heard, but they didn't put it into practice. They heard, but they didn't get down into the personal wrestling with the Word of God.

As the lead pastor of Living Word, I am totally and thoroughly committed to helping you grow, mature, and become like Christ. Sunday morning starts the “eating” process by giving you enough spiritual food to satisfy your appetite, nourish your soul, and help you have great “eating/feeding” practices all week long. Then we give you more food all week

long with the daily devotional diet of reading, reflecting, studying, praying, and putting into practice the Word of God that was served to you on Sunday.

Like all good habits, it takes time to develop these practices. May this week be a wonderful time of you being led by God's Spirit to develop the devotional habits that will create love, joy, hope, and peace inside you.

DAY 1: EVERYTHING CHANGES

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

The Book of Ecclesiastes (whose author is ultimately unknown, but who might have been Solomon) is one of my favorite Old Testament books. I have studied it many times through my decades as a Christian. It is part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. You will find it right after the Book of Proverbs. It is a book about the BIG questions of life—those tough, thorny, troubling, titanic realities of being alive. Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? What is my purpose? What about suffering? What about pleasure? What should I do with the years I have been given?

Early in the book, there is a poetic paragraph that simply says *Everything Changes*. Life is in flux. Life is on the move. There is an ebb and flow to our lives. Seasons come and go and then do it again. The time is ripe for one thing, and then it is ready for the opposite thing. Everything changes. You change. The people in your life change. That means every relationship will experience change as a fundamental reality.

When change happens in the relationships that matter the most, that change is hard to handle. Yet, we must learn to handle that change. We must be ready for change. We must be proactive about change. We must (in the words of an earlier *Life Together* message) be the change that our relationships need.

Think About It: How about right now? What is the most important change taking place in one of your core relationships? How are you doing with this change?

Pray It Through: Talk to God about this season of change. Ask him for wisdom to discern what is going on and for you to have the ability to be the change that is needed. Ask for grace, trust, faith, hope, and love during this time.

DAY 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and John 17:4; 19:30.

This is a theme I did not talk about on Sunday. It was one of the things I did not have time to cover. This is one of those good reasons to use these daily devotionals—they give you valuable supplemental ideas that advance the Sunday message.

“Begin with the end in mind” is a quote from Stephen Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Basically, it means *know where you want to go*. Have a vision for your life. Have goals that matter and then make daily decisions to move toward those

goals. Change will happen, but you can be proactive about quite a bit of change in your life. You can be highly intentional and wisely strategic about implementing change that will get you where you want to go.

Study the Passage: Jesus had a vision and he had the motivation to pursue that vision. Everything he did, all the changes he experienced, were in the service of moving him closer and closer to his vision. What lessons do you learn from the example of Jesus described in Hebrews 12:1-2 and John 17:4; 19:30?

Think About It: Another favorite author of mine is Dallas Willard. He counsels us to have a vision, not only for the good work we want to do, but also for the kind of people we want to become. Spend time this week thinking and praying about those profoundly motivational visions. What do you most want to do? Who do you most want to become? Then, start to develop your plan to get there. Be the change and make the change you need to reach your vision and accomplish your mission.

Put It Into Practice: Even better, share your vision with family and friends. Tell your small group about your mission. Be accountable. Find friends, partners, and mentors who will help you. Then, as you learn how to do this, find mentees who you can help with their own vision and mission and change processes.

DAY 3: DAILY PURSUIT OF WHAT MATTERS MOST

Read Philippians 3:10-16.

These verses illustrate the passion, determination, and visionary focus that

motivated the Apostle Paul every day of his life. It was in the service of this vision and passion that he made daily decisions that brought about all the change he experienced. This passage shows the inspirational vision and inner will of character that made Paul a proactive change agent—not only for others, but for his own journey.

Think About It: What are the most important lessons and insights of wisdom you see in these verses? As you think about your vision and passion, your desire and determination, what is God saying to you?

Pray Through It: Ask God for the grace to have similar (but uniquely applicable) vision and passion, desire and drive, longing and love, and the will to be the change that will get you to the end that God desires for you. A wonderful way to pray is to use the words of Scripture to shape your prayers. Try that with this passage.

A Final Word on This: You are either an actor or you are acted upon. You are either the change or the changed. You are either proactive or reactive. Christ has given you free will and personal responsibility to be the change that is needed in your life, your relationships, and your future. Yes, you will always be acted upon, be changed by others, and have to react to what happens around you, but be sure to act, be the change, be proactive, and be responsible.