

The Discipline of Declining Days - 6

by Jack Hibbs

As we age, it's essential to stay focused on Christ, prioritize spiritual growth, and live for Him, even in declining days.

Duration: 1:01:54

Scripture: Psalm 37:25, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Romans 8:28

Topics: "Discipline"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker encourages the audience to watch a movie called 'Does anyone remember?' as it teaches valuable lessons and has a handsome actor. The speaker then references 1 Samuel 12:20, where Samuel tells the people not to fear and to serve the Lord with all their hearts. The speaker emphasizes the importance of passing on wisdom and deeper spiritual truths to younger generations. They also mention a movie called 'The Gift' that explores the crisis and evaluation of one's life, which can lead to a positive change and a closer relationship with Christ. The sermon concludes with the message to continue walking in faith and not to give up, using the example of an old man who has fought the good fight and finished the race.

Transcript

this evening to two places. Number one, Matthew chapter 28. You know that that's our theme verse for this series on the Disciplines of Life series, Matthew 28.

And as soon as you get there, then jump way, way back to the Old Testament, to 1st Samuel chapter 8. So, Matthew chapter 28 and 1st Samuel 8. And I can tell by the rustling of the pages when you'll get there, because it'll calm down. It sounds awesome from right here, by the way, to hear those pages turning. Matthew chapter 28, verse 18, Jesus said, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I've commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Number one, Jesus makes this statement about discipleship just before he leaves them and ascends back to heaven.

But then he turns right around and says, I'm going to be with you even unto the end of the world, which is a radical statement. Because that statement means that Jesus Christ is in the earth, moving today, and has been for the last 2,000 years. But how does he do that? Ever since the day of Pentecost, the birth of

the church, the Holy Spirit has been that amazing, appropriated power of God working in the life of the believer.

It's the Holy Spirit's job to disciple people. And Jesus said, I'm going to be with you. And what he meant by that was, in fact, he said it in John chapter 14.

He says, I'm not going to leave you orphaned when I leave and go back to heaven. I will come to you. He said, I will send the Holy Spirit to you.

And that's how Jesus Christ dwells in your heart today. And that's the work of Christ in your heart today is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, 1 Samuel chapter 8, verse 1. 1 Samuel 8, verse 1. We're going to read part of the verse and use this as we look at tonight, our title.

1 Samuel chapter 8, verse 1. It says, Now, it came to pass when Samuel was old that he and we leave it there. Why? Because he's going to not only say something to his sons, he's going to accomplish a tremendous work. We're talking about what we'll name this evening the disciplines of decline or the disciplines of declining days.

Each week we're going through and tonight is our sixth week in 31 week series of the disciplines of life. And when we talk about the disciplines of decline, what are we talking about? The first temptation tonight, listen, is for the young people tonight. Remember earlier, I asked you to raise your hands if you're 18 years of age or over.

Well, if you're 18 years of age or younger, if you're alive tonight, you need to hear this because this is stuff that you may not think applies to you. And that's part of the trick. It's amazing.

We're going to be talking about our lives as they decline in this world. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't sound very uplifting, but if you listen all the way through to the end of the message, it should be very encouraging. But you and I are living in a time and in an age that no matter how prosperous or how threatening it may be, we live in the time of declining days.

You say, what do you mean by that? Well, listen, aren't you a year older right now than you were last year? Well, so, well, so that's a big deal. We're going to talk about that tonight. It's a very important thing.

Quite frankly, as we consider this series on discipleship, it's something that is rarely talked about. And that is what happens as you grow older as a Christian. What's to be expected of you? And what are you to be doing? And what are you to expect in life? For the Christian, we're not often thinking like that.

We're in this mindset. And I have to tell you, I am all the time and I have to discipline myself to think beyond. But I so believe that Jesus Christ is coming back in my lifetime that even on my deathbed, I'm still going to be expecting him to come back any moment.

Look, that's the way I was brought up spiritually. It's biblically accurate. It's what's called expectation.

And in Bible prophecy, it's the eminency of Christ. That is, he could appear at any moment for the church. I live like that.

And I want you, if you don't, I want you to live like that, too, because all those who have this hope, says the Bible, purify themselves even as he is pure, meaning I'm going to see him soon. So let's get ready. You say, well, what if I live to be an old man? Then you have lived to be an old man living the right way.

Man, I'm only 16. Why should I care? You should care the most. Us old people, we're close to the end.

It's you youngins that have got to put up with this world. Man, I got to tell you, hey, anybody who's bold enough to say so, listen, if you're older, would you ever be coming back to this world again younger? Would you want to be younger again in this world? No, man, as a Christian, I want out of here. It's amazing.

We have a huge hope. Listen, my future retirement program is awesome. It's around the throne of grace.

Jesus is on the throne. There's angels flying around. It's going to be incredible.

And the older you get, the more excited you get about it. But the truth of the matter is, how are we going to manage those declining days, those declining years of our lives? In Matthew chapter 25, verse 21, this is what you and I are living for. Jesus said that in the end, he'll say unto his faithful servants, well done.

Don't you want to hear that? Every Christian that I've ever met, that's what they want to hear. That's what we're living for, is to hear from Jesus, well done, thou good and faithful servant. That's what I want to hear.

Listen, as people criticize you or encourage you, when they pat you on the back or kick you in the rump, listen, understand this. You're living for just one opinion, and that's his opinion. When he says, well done, it's like, yes.

Can you imagine? Oh man, we are gonna see Jesus someday face to face. You're gonna see his face. You say, well, I don't believe in him.

You're still gonna see his face. He may not be smiling at you when you see his face, but you can change that tonight, by the way, but that's what we're living for. Until that time comes, you and I are dealing with the time issue.

All of us, to some degree or another, will eventually begin to take stock of our lives. It's the way the human nature works. Everybody does it.

Some men do it, and they fall into what's called a midlife crisis. They, at least psychologists, tell us that a man begins to look at his life and figures out, hey, I should have more money than this. I should have a faster car than this.

So he trashes his Yugo, and he gets a red Honda, and he begins to unbutton his shirt and wear gold chains down around his navel, and think all of a sudden that it's time for him to cash in his wife of 20 years and get a 20 year old instead, and he begins to go insane. People begin to evaluate their lives. Others begin to evaluate their lives, and they begin to conclude that I've lived for nothing in life.

People have a crisis. They have a panic. Listen, not all of those crises are bad.

When someone wakes up to the fact that, man, I've lived for myself. I've got nothing in life that matters. That's a good crisis.

That can lead you to Christ. But when we talk about the declining days and years of our lives as believers, as we continue on, and that's what I want to stress tonight, we are to continue on in our walk with faith. Don't give up.

Don't quit. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't cave in.

But time is like a thief. Do you guys remember, some of you, there's people in here young enough to be able to agree with what I'm saying, what I'm remembering, and then there's some of us that just flat-out understand it because we've lived it, and that is this, for example. Remember when you were young? Summer.

Now, look, when I was young, we actually had like three months off for summer, and it was during the summer. We had a real summer break, summer vacation, and summer seemed to have lasted a few days. We were having so much fun, riding to the beach.

We were goofing off, all that stuff that you did, and summer seemed to have just lasted a moment, and I remember my mom getting us in the car and saying, come on, we've got to go school shopping. Oh, I got sick to my stomach when I heard that. I'd get sick to my stomach, and then I got to tell you something.

This is my pathology. Every year, we bought our clothes at JCPenney, and even now, when I walk in, I don't know what it is about JCPenney, but it immediately makes me think of school's coming. And then school begins, and the school year, which is about nine months, feels like 24 years, right? And then you get into higher grades.

You get going along, and all of a sudden, your junior high year seems to be going kind of quick, and then now you're a sophomore in high school. Now you're a senior, and all of a sudden, you start thinking those thoughts like your parents are thinking, and that is, where's the time going? And then you get to college, and it's like, oh my gosh, I can't keep up with the calendar, and now you get to where I'm at or where you're at, and I'm still in February of 2010. Do you know where I'm at? Are you right? Are you with me? Time is moving so fast, and then you get sick, and it seems like the sickness has got a grip on you forever, and then you're having a great day, and it seems like that day lasted a minute.

Why? Because time is like a thief, and those strange things that we just laughed at a moment ago can very directly apply to our spiritual person of who we are. How are we investing our spiritual life right here, right now in this world? Are we busy for Christ, or are we goofing off? Time will rip us off. I want to give you... Remember Mick Jagger sang a song, time is on my side.

Yes, it is. Look at this picture of Mick Jagger. Is time... Time.

He said time is on his side. I don't think so. No! Uh-uh, Nick.

No, no, no. Time is not on our side. Even as believers, we need to be applying our lives to the cause of Christ.

We need to be living for Him. Time, life, opportunity, age, the responsibilities that you and I have, all of these things will someday be brought to a conclusion and will answer to God in the end. And the disciplines of those, even in our childhood... Think about this.

The disciplines of decline actually begin in our early days, if you think about it. From the very beginning... I know this sounds silly, but it's true. Listen.

A parent needs to get their child to eat those vegetables. You've got to learn how to eat vegetables. I hate them.

Well, our little kid wouldn't say it like that. The little kid moves his face around, he pushes, he cries. Why? He doesn't like vegetables.

But he's got to have them. For his kidneys to develop right, for his brain, for his skin, for his tissue, he's got to have fruit. He's got to have vegetables.

She has got to have her... Are you with me? Vitally important. The Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes 12... Now, I'm going to ask you to look at the screen. Watch this and think about it spiritually.

And while you look at that, I'll read this verse. Ecclesiastes 12, 1 says, Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come and as the years draw to an end, you have no pleasure in them. Watch this little baby age before you.

Imagine your spiritual life. When the scripture says to us, Remember the days of your youth and in your youth, your Creator, your God, because the older days will come. The days when it's not so easy to get out of bed or get into bed will come.

You'll lay awake all night tired and be up all day. When nothing is pleasurable, the Bible says. Somebody's life there in 60 seconds.

And spiritually, you and I are doing the same thing. We're born into this world and the time clock begins and you are to be living your life for the glory of God. You're to be living your life for Christ.

The Bible tells us again in Ecclesiastes 3, verse 1, To everything there is a season. There's a time and a purpose under heaven. Listen to this.

Solomon wrote this. Wisest man that ever lived. Listen to him.

A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to break down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to gain and a time to lose.

A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to sew. A time to keep silent and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate. A time of war and a time of peace. That's life.

Number one, church, jot it down tonight. What can we learn in this brief time together in the disciplines of life and the disciplines of decline? Number one, for each and every one of us, no matter how young we might be or how old we might be tonight in this sanctuary, it's the days of declining strength. Write that down.

The days of declining strength. And obviously I'm speaking about physical strength, yes. But listen, you and I can be so caught up with the days of declining strength.

This morning early, Lisa said, come on and do some stretching with me. I don't do stretching. And she had me do her little thing.

And I'm telling you right now, I'm sore. I can bench press more than my wife, but I can't stretch. I can't do that.

I can't. And she says, oh, do this and do that. And I'm like, hey, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, slow down.

I'm two years older than you are. There's a time when physical strength begins to wane. And listen, you young people, enjoy yourself now.

But there's going to come a time with what you eat and how you invest your physical energies. It's going to matter. It will catch up to you.

Look at Mick Jagger. It caught up to him. And you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible says Paul told the church at Corinth that the Holy Spirit dwells within you as a believer. And you need to present your bodies as a living sacrifice unto God, he told the church at Rome. And then he again tells the church at Corinth, don't you know that the spirit of God dwells in you and you've been bought at a price? Therefore, glorify God with your body.

Your body. This physical thing is to be used for the honor of God. And yes, you and I live in days of declining strength with every year that passes, but those days are to be met.

Right. Write this down. Jot it down.

You're going to need it. It's going to fight off depression. In the days of declining strength, those days are to be met by you and I with the eyes of greater vision.

Are you getting older? Stay tuned. Pull out a piece of paper and a pencil, begin to pray and watch God give you vision. Corporate, creative, spiritual vision should never die of old age.

The more seasoned a leader becomes or a Christian becomes, the greater the vision is available to share. Think about that. Declining strength doesn't mean it's the end.

Are you in a sense tonight saying, well, you know, Jack, I've been around ministry a long time, been a Christian a long time. And what what are you doing? You're hanging up your Bible. Are you retiring? What? No, more than ever.

If you find yourself tonight, as we'll read in a moment, having gray hair, that doesn't mean you're supposed to retire from ministry. It may be that you retire from DuPont or Ford Motor Company, but it doesn't mean that you retire from ministry as a Christian. There's a lot of awesome stuff the Bible talks about regarding the Lord using old guys.

It's encouraging. It really is. I just marked down a few of them.

Noah. Abraham. Joseph.

Man, when Pharaoh saw Joseph, he said first time, first he saw Joseph and he said, how old are you? Moses. God didn't even start using Moses for realsies until he's about 80. It's amazing.

And then what about Daniel? Daniel's pretty cool because God starts using Daniel from the earliest ages all the way through to the end of his old, old life. Daniel, what an amazing man of God. Daniel got old throughout the Bible.

Following God, Acts chapter two, verse 17 says, and it shall come to pass in the last day, says the Lord, that I will pour out my Holy Spirit on all flesh. And he goes on to say, and your young men shall see visions. Listen, and your old men.

And I'm sure that applies to ladies, too, shall dream. And the word in Greek means divinely inspired dreams. Isn't that a great word? Divinely inspired dreams.

Old men shall dream divinely inspired dreams. Why? For what reason? For ministry, my friend. Listen, I challenge you tonight.

Are you 50 and above? Maybe God's just getting ready to use you. Oh, I can hardly move. You can pray.

Samuel prayed in his old age. In fact, it's argued that Samuel got more done in his old age in, quote, retirement than he did in his ministry years. But there's a stillness that comes with years.

There's a sweetness to it. And I want you to join with me in praying this prayer. I pray it every day.

Lord, please keep me usable. That's a prayer. That's the most profound prayer that I've ever prayed.

In my opinion, that wraps it all up. Lord, keep me usable. That means he's going to keep me pure.

That means he's going to keep me in prayer. That means he's going to keep me in the word. That means he's going to keep me in fellowship with you.

Lord, keep me usable. Think about what that means. Keep me usable.

Keep me discerning. Keep me on track. Keep me, Lord.

It's comforting. In Luke chapter 2, verse 25, the Bible tells us there. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon.

Remember him in the Christmas story? And this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. That means waiting for the Messiah. And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

For it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And so he came by the Spirit into the temple. I love that.

This old man is being led by God and he goes into the temple and he's waiting. He's got a sense of expectation. He's waiting.

And he sees Jesus being brought to the temple. On the eighth day, he's going to be circumcised. And Joseph and Mary bring him.

And that man goes on to say, Lord, let your servant now depart in peace. Time for me to go. I'm coming home, sweet Jesus.

I just saw the Messiah. What a tremendous thing. God uses old people.

If you're an old person tonight and you're not being used by God, I'm going to ask you, why not? Oh, don't sit around and wait for the young people to do it. They're sitting around waiting for somebody else to do it. Everybody's looking at one another.

We need 200 people to sign up for this thing, to tear down or set up. Come on, be honest. Doesn't everybody in the room think that the person next to them is going to sign up? And nobody signs up.

Because they think the other guy is going to sign up. Hey, man, listen. And I'm very, very vested in this.

As we get older in this church, we need to show the younger people how to do it. We need to lead the way. We need to be more like Caleb.

You ever read about Caleb in the Bible? Caleb's out there, he's got his old gray beard. And can you see, I kind of grew this for tonight. Did you see this? Huh? Can you? No? Nothing? Caleb comes out there and, hey, come on, where are those old Philistines? Give them to me, I'll take them on.

Amazing. We don't have to give up. The disciplines of declining days, yes, our physical strength will wane.

But the Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 4, 16, Therefore, we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. Listen, those of you who are growing older in Jesus, you are absolute gems and we need you. And the younger people need you.

So many of our children are growing up today without parents, without grandparents, and they need grandmas and grandpas in the faith. You want to start a ministry that has a tremendous need? It's getting spiritual grandmas and grandpas to talk to their spiritual granddaughters and grandsons in this church. Too many kids have no parents and no grandparents in their lives.

That's a tremendous loss. I know what I'm talking about. I had no grandparents in my life and I see people who do.

What an amazing thing. You know what's cool about that? Grandma and grandpa, they're like God to that little kid. And it should be that way as long as grandma and grandpa is pointing them to the Lord.

Because grandma and grandpa, they have huge power and influence. Oh, don't listen to your dad. Just come with me.

Let's go get an ice cream cone. Come on, let's go. Right? I mean, that's what happens.

It's cool and all that kind of stuff. Very much so. Number two, listen.

The disciplines of declining days, it's not only physical strength. And we don't need to think that God's given up on us because we are not as physically strong. No, no, no.

Second thing is, it's the days of declining responsibilities. And don't think that that's necessarily a bad thing. Those days are to be met with the hands of increased delegation.

To delegate things out. Listen. This is very, very important.

Wisdom and experience cannot be gotten with a PhD. Only PhDs are fooled by that. I'm not making fun of your education.

Go get smart. Just get wise. And here's what happens.

Wisdom and experience is how you stay alive. And you can have a PhD or a master's or a doctorate or whatever it is. But it doesn't matter until you lived it out.

You've got to live it out. A planned, systematic handing of the baton is what's needed today in the church and in family and in life. And as responsibilities decline in your life as you get older, don't panic.

A lot of people freak. You know this. As people get older, listen, the phone doesn't ring as much.

They're not in demand anymore. They're not getting as many emails. Maybe people are not visiting or coming by anymore.

People without Jesus absolutely have a meltdown over this. They come into the retirement age and they begin to absolutely panic. Because all of a sudden, life seems to be over.

I just saw, maybe you saw it too, a couple of weeks ago. An interview that was done by some channel with former First Lady Laura Bush. And they were talking to her about that.

And they asked her, how is Mr. President handling no longer being President? And she said it was very hard for him. Listen to this. Can you imagine? She said, on one day, he's receiving phone calls from world leaders.

And that's how it was for eight years. Every day, there was a new crisis. There was a new issue.

There was some head of state. There was some king. There was some queen on the phone waiting to talk to the President.

And then she said, one day after the election. She said, our phone didn't ring once. And she went on to say that she's doing fine with it.

But George had to go out and cut some wood and take the dogs on a walk. And he drove around the property in his pickup truck. Trying to cope with it.

Christian, listen. As responsibilities wane, spiritually, it begins to open up in a very powerful way. All it takes is a careful eye to watch and to learn.

If you're in your 40s or your 50s, start now to develop an exit strategy. I mean this. For your life.

For business. If you're in business, then develop now an exit strategy for your life. Whatever that thing may be.

I don't care how difficult financial times are. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about your heart and your head.

Vitally important. For business, ministry, sure. For your family, sons, daughters.

For your husband, for your wife. Develop an exit strategy. What do you mean by that? Begin to live your life in such a way that you're not going to be here forever.

So what you want to leave behind is really going to matter. And I've got news for you. It's not going to be some palace.

Or some gold bullion bricks that you bought from one of these constant commercials. Your kids are going to care less. Your husband and your wife will care less.

It will be the legacy that you leave behind. It's not the stuff. It's the love.

It's the relationship. It's the interaction. That song, Cats in the Cradle, in the Silver Spoon.

And that's about all I know of the song. What a huge depressing song of regret. The man didn't have any time for his son.

Dad's trying to make a living. Dad gets old in the waning years. Declining responsibilities.

And the son now who's developed his own life has no time for his father. It's a horrible cycle, unless it's broken. And Jesus breaks it, by the way.

But listen. The more a man or a woman achieves in this life, the more difficulty they have in letting go. There's a human tendency to hang on to things.

Longer than what the Lord would have us to hold on them to. We need to let things go. We can get lost in what we've accomplished in life.

And here's a dangerous thing. Men are very, very prone to this. It's dangerous.

You begin to see that the things that you've either acquired or achieved becomes your personality and your identity. That's me. That is not you.

Like Nebuchadnezzar. Look at this kingdom I've built. Hey, God gave it to you, man.

I did it myself. You did nothing yourself. God gave you the ability to have a brain and to think and to do what you do.

All glory belongs to him. And remember, mind you, he can take it away in one second. The days when responsibilities begin to decline and maybe we're not so much in demand anymore.

What do we do? We begin to delegate things to people and handing that baton. And it may not be a good feeling to realize that your face is either not on the letterhead or on the desk any longer. Or maybe there's somebody in your family's life that's more prominent than you.

That's normal life. You need to cope with that. You need to deal with that.

But understand this. You have got a lot to give away. You can sit them down.

You can talk to them. And boy, listen. This needs to be said.

I don't see this very often, but once is enough. When you see somebody grow older in their life as a Christian, instead of handling life, their life, biblically, they come to the end of days in their lives and they've been bitter, critical, sarcastic, and rude. And nobody wants to be around them.

And that's a tragedy. Because God has invested so much in your life. And He wants to do so much with you.

But your grandkids don't want anything to do with you. Your kids don't want anything to do with you. It's a sad thing.

That doesn't have to be that way. And if that's you tonight, you change that now while you have time. You change that now.

Because listen. In the years of declining responsibilities, it means that we have time. And we have time now to invest in other people's lives.

That's why, listen, the world is not throwing us a curveball. God is giving us opportunity. I hope I don't embarrass them, but I have them right here in my notes.

On Wednesdays, one of the ushers that served here on Wednesdays, at last count, I think he's 83. World War II veteran, Bob Baker, serves. Always praying.

Always encouraging me. Praise for you. Doesn't even know you by name.

Praise for you. And serves as an usher. 83 years of age or more.

And then I think of a woman who's been with us since this church started. 20 years. Since the home Bible study.

Catherine Hazelrigg. She's in her mid-80s. She serves all over this church.

You can't hold her back. She came to my house recently. With a little note thing to encourage me.

What kind of a price tag do you put on encouragement? You can't buy that. Number three, the disciplines of declining days. Opportunities.

The days of declining opportunities. Yeah, I guess so. Sure.

Looks that way. Seems that way in one chapter of your life. But those days are to be met with the joy of passing on the mantle to other people.

Eventually, as I said, the phone stops ringing. The emails drop off. Fewer visitors stop by the house.

Or what's the danger to that? Temptation of loneliness could set in. My wife, she grew up at Anaheim First Baptist Church. And I remember her telling me that they used to have a bus or van or something.

They used to go around to people's house and pick up what's called the shut-ins. And bring them to church. How cool would that be? Do you know anybody who, listen, is a shut-in? They don't get out.

Hey, what if you target them? I mean that lovingly. And you say, hey, you know what? How you doing? I live a couple doors down. And I don't know.

You may think I'm crazy. But I go to church every Sunday. And then, you know, we go get a bite to eat afterward.

You want to come next week? You could wind up leading a soul to Christ. You could wind up rescuing someone from depression or more. Body ministry is an amazing thing.

When the days of declining opportunities seem to come upon you, you can pass on the mantle to other people. I would like to see all the old guys get together with the young guys. And the old guys can teach the young guys how to pray.

How about the old ladies getting together with the young ladies and teaching them how to be women at home or cooking this or that? Did you know this is a crisis? A lot of young girls today do not know how to cook. You say, what's with you? I hear about it. Can't a man cook? Do you want a man to cook your meal? Lisa gets nervous when I get into the kitchen.

I'm a freak. I put a bunch of eggs in there, and I get every bit of spice I can find. And I don't know, man, I love it.

People are running out of the house. You do not want a man to cook. But think about that.

There's so much that you can hand on by the way of the mantle. Samuel did that. Samuel raised up the school of the prophets that you read about in 1 Kings.

The Bible tells us in 1 Samuel, listen to this, a life dedicated to God. You know, God called Samuel from his youth, and he used his mama. Remember Hannah? Great story, awesome thing.

Just from a little guy, God begins to speak to him. All of his life, all of his life, God was using him in chapters of his life throughout his age. In 1 Samuel 3.19, it says, So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and let none of his words fall to the ground.

Wow. And all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, those of you who just got back with us from Israel, Dan is way up by the Golan Heights, way up there, right where the Temple of Pan is at, in the headwaters of the Jordan River, all the way down to Beersheba, which is way heading down toward Egypt way. Everybody came from all of that region to experience Samuel's wisdom and leadership as a prophet, says the Bible.

Then 1 Samuel 7.15 says, And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life, and he went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. Tremendous, tremendous. I mean, this guy was the most famous man other than the king in all of Israel, and yet his days were declining.

He was getting older, but he never gave up. A discipline of life is to never give up. Yeah, it hurts sometimes to get out of bed, or yes, you didn't have sleep, or your body's not working all that good.

Just know this. Those are growing pains. Those are growing pains.

The inward man who is designed after Jesus Christ that's being renewed day by day, the inward man is coming out. This old carcass, this old body's got to give up someday. It's not made for heaven.

It can't go there. Not until the resurrection comes. The Bible says flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Did you know that? Oh, I thought I was going to take my body with me. Yeah, you're young now. That's great.

You keep that attitude going there. We're all for you. Just know this.

There's big hope. Because when your leg falls off because you pivoted on the basketball court or something, you're, well, what is going on? Just know. Your body's just getting ready for heaven.

Number four, the days of declining resources. How do we meet those days? We're to meet them with the spirit of deeper things. An age and a time of life when you're not pulling down the money that you once did.

You don't have the income or you don't have this or you don't have that. And not only monetarily, but you just don't have the wherewithal to get from point A to point B for whatever reasons. Maybe it's vision.

Maybe your eyes are fading. Or maybe you're just not so confident driving any longer. Move to Italy, we just found out.

If you're losing your eyesight, go get your driver's license in Italy because nobody seems to care. The driver of the bus told us. I said, man, that guy almost killed us.

And he said, in Italy. I can't do accents, so pretend with me. He said, in Italy, the lines on the street are artwork.

Nothing to be obeyed. Everything is art, even the lines on the street. So everyone, they don't care.

Maybe you're driving and you're losing confidence and you feel, hey, listen. Don't think for a moment God is done with you. Meet that with the spirit of deeper things.

Man, this culture knows more than ever. I wrote it down. Money is evaporating.

Houses are going away. Power is being lost. All these must give way to reality.

And the reality is that very simple things are the things that last. The value of relationships is what matters in the latter days. And ultimately, your relationship with Jesus.

In the end, the old ways, the ancient ways, they prevail. God's ways. This is one of the hardest things to teach or pass on in life as our days decline.

Listen to this. I don't mean this to be an insult. By no means.

Please receive this as instruction. But there's something about being young that's very dangerous. I'll tell you a little secret.

You send the young guys to war. You never see a general running into battle unless he's George Washington. Why? Because the generals are usually older guys, really smart, and they've realized how valuable life is.

And so they're back in the control center. You send the young guy out on the front line. Why? Because he doesn't think he's going to die.

Young guys think they're invincible. That's why you send them to war first. You put all the young guys up front.

You go, go, go. All the old guys in the back saying, pray, pray, pray. There is a sense of the human heart and spirit with a young man or a young woman.

Here's the tough part. It's hard to teach them anything because when you're young, you think you know everything. No doubt it's part of the fall of man.

You try to tell somebody, are you done? And then they go do that thing and they fall off the cliff and they're down at the bottom crying and you say to them, I told you. It's a hard thing. Inexperience, immaturity, it's hard to teach young people and yet it's the very thing that needs to happen.

As resources decline, we need to pass on the spirit of deeper things. The things that will last, the stuff of God and our reason for instructing them in their youth and in their vitality is to have them be spared from all the brutality that we went through. Wouldn't it be amazing if young people really trusted some old guy or old gal who said, now listen to me.

You do this and you try this and you watch this and you come back next week and you tell me how it turns out. There's a movie that never got off the ground. It's a tragedy.

I don't even think, you may be able to rent it. Help me out here if you did see it. I think it's called The Gift Maybe.

It's with James Garner, I think. Does anyone remember? You guys, nobody knows about it. I don't think anybody went and saw it but Lisa and I and a couple of people right here.

You guys, you need to go rent it. Why? Because the values it teaches, it's awesome. And girls, go rent it because the guy in there, I was told, is really cute and handsome.

So go rent it. Watch what happens when the young guy decides to trust the old guy. It's awesome.

It's very cool. I could have played it tonight. Just thought about it.

It was just amazing. Go do it. 1 Samuel 12 20 says, Then Samuel said to the people, Do not fear.

Now he's an old man. Don't fear. You have done all this wickedness, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all of your heart.

What a grandpa. And do not turn aside, for then you will go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they're nothing. For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake, because He has pleased the Lord to make you His people.

Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, but I will teach you the good and the right way. That's an old man now. In latter years.

Listen to what Samuel's saying. Is that not beautiful? This was spoken during his retirement. And then number five, the days of declining activity are to be met with days better spent.

Well, you know, I don't get out much anymore. Don't do much. Well, listen, your days are to be spent in a better way then.

Samuel just said a moment ago, Be it far for me to sin against God and not pray for you. Isn't that a great attitude? Grandma, will you pray for me? How great for a grandma or a grandpa to say, I've never stopped

praying for you. I would never sin against God, sweetheart, and stop praying for you.

You know what that will do to a kid? That will galvanize them in life. That will strengthen them. Have you ever gone to one of those places? Usually it's like a novelty type shops or places.

We were in Solvayne when we did it. You know, you do the little research. What do you call it? Genealogy search.

And we did a genealogy search and I did one of mine. Apparently, I come from a long line of idiots or something. But up in about 1840, there was a blip on the screen of hope where my grandmother, who I only met once in life for just a couple of days, her dad was a pastor in Europe, in Germany.

And then I find out that my grandmother, who I'm referring to on my dad's side, that I'd only met for a few days, that the whole family couldn't stand her. They didn't like her because she was a Christian. Hey.

Starting to feel my roots. And I wonder, I'm only wondering, was she a praying woman? Did she pray for the salvation of her family? Well, hmm, let me think. I got saved.

I only met her a few days in my entire life when I was real little. I mean, I was like nine. But you know what? I got saved.

And then my brother gave his heart to the Lord. My sister got saved. My mom got saved.

And then my dad got saved, who that would have been his mom. Could she have been praying? Could she maybe have thought, I'm not going to sin and stop praying for... Is somebody praying in your life? Are you praying for someone in your life for them? Activity. Samuel now is out of the limelight of ministry.

He's got no entourage anymore, no more black donkeys pulling up and carrying him off in an entourage. He's retired. And what does he do? He starts a ministry of prophets.

He trains young men how to follow God. I'm going to give you this quote. I think it's pretty cool.

It's been said that the spirited twenties press toward the tireless thirties, and the roaring forties and fifties make way for the sensible sixties, while the slacking seventies prepare to yield to the quiet eighties until the day comes. Wow. No, not for the believer.

Listen to this. As we get older, we can pray giant prayers, even though we might shrivel in size. I'm going to give you a prayer of a man who you don't see often in this way.

He's old now. He's very crippled from mistreatment. He's not very attractive, according to church history.

He's a very little man in stature. His eyes are extremely close together. He's got a very, very bald forehead.

And he's old now. He's got a big hooked nose and extremely bowlegged with severe scars. He kind of looks like, I guess, a scary guy.

His name is Paul, the apostle, the battle-hardened apostle of Christ. Excuse me. And he's writing from a cold, damp Roman prison.

And he writes, For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named. You think that matters to an old man who's alone now in prison? Family. He's talking family.

That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man. Why? Because his outer man was almost dead. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

That you being rooted and grounded in love. He wrote another prayer from a Roman prison. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy.

Excuse me, sir. You're old, decrepit, and in jail. With all joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now being confident of this very thing that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

That's Paul. That's getting old. And number six, we'll end with this.

We're out of time. Number six, the disciplines of decline is the days of declining numbers are to be met with words that bring new life. Jacob spoke blessings in his old age.

In Genesis 49, verse 22, he speaks, Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall. Translated, Joseph, your life is going to be blessed.

Everything you touch is going to turn to prosperity and you're going to be so overabundant that people will be able even to take the benefits from your life as they pass by. Your life will be like a big tree that overflows. Jacob spoke that into a life.

We rarely think of gray-haired apostles speaking into our lives. That gray-haired man, Paul, also said in 2 Timothy 4, 7, he says, I fought the good fight. Wouldn't that have been beautiful? Just think right now.

I think if we had that on the screens, if we had an old man who was kind of dressed up like how we think Paul might have looked and he would be speaking to us kind of shaking with his well-earned wrinkles in his gray hair. I fought the good fight. I have finished the race.

I've kept the faith. Finally, you hear that word finally? Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day and not to me only, but also to all who have, note this, market Bible students, who have loved his appearing. First and last time Paul ever mentions the imminent return of Christ in the sense that he was going to go meet Jesus.

After all, Jesus was not going to pick him up. That's the first time Paul ever admitted, I'm going to go see him. By the way, right after he wrote that, they cut his head off, which is amazing to me.

What the Lord has laid up for me, a crown of righteousness. I'm wondering, I don't know, but I kind of know how the Bible works. I could almost hear a Roman executioner sharpening the blade.

And Paul just writes down, oh, I got to write this down. There's a crown laid up for my head. Hey, stupid, your head's going to get cut off.

Oh, no, no, no. You may cut it off, but it's going to be right on my shoulders when I blink my next blink. I don't plan on being around here long, buddy.

What an awesome man. When I say the decline of numbers, I mean when we don't have many days left. I don't mean few people.

This old guy wrote to the church at Rome. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purposes. What an attitude from an old guy.

God's patriarchs are no longer distracted now in later years with the burdens of day-to-day problems of a business or of a ministry or of stuff. They're free from all that now. And many of you are free from all this stuff now.

You come to church because you thought you came to church to kill time. Listen, you're needed. Last verse, Psalm 37, 25.

David said, I've been young and now I'm old. I've never seen the righteous forsaken. What an awesome statement.

Wow. We have to end. I'm out of time.

No, I can't go on. I mean, I appreciate that. But you guys, listen, I hope tonight that if you're thinking, you know, gosh, pastor, I'm getting on in years.

And when I start taking inventory, you know, you start going through your drawers and you collect nickels and pennies that have been in your sock drawer for a hundred years. Gathering some stuff, you know, and here's a cuff link from Grandpa Barney and you know, whatever. Stop for a second and realize that spiritually we're supposed to do that.

We're supposed to open the drawers that were of our lives and look around and say, no, wait a minute. You know how valuable this is? If this is not going on in your life, listen, gray hair, wrinkles, no hair. Listen, your days could just be starting now.

Well, you know, Pastor Jack, I was thinking about this and I noticed we don't do it at the church and I'm wondering if that's how he gets things going. You guys don't want to be around here if I live to be old because I will have handed this thing off. I've already written it out.

I've written it out. It's in writing. The board of this church at a certain time has instructed to replace me.

I had that done. I'm not going to hang on to this thing. I'm going to start some old timer ministry and drive you nuts around here.

Come on. Let's go bungee jumping. Bungees for Jesus.

Right? I mean, think about it. I don't want to be standing here when I'm old. I want to go do something.

The responsibility is, oh, let some young guy worry about all that stuff. No, come on, man. You know what? We are going to get out of here and we're going to take our gray hair or no hair and we're going to go to Denny's at four o'clock.

And then from there, we're going to go go-karting or do something crazy. Go-karting for Jesus. But listen, seriously, go for it.

Father, we come to you tonight and we thank you that the body of Christ is incredibly diverse. And I thank you, Lord, that you're not like any of the gods of Hollywood where you only accept the offerings from about 18 to 25. And then everybody from 25 on is pumping up this and injecting this and implanting that to try to appease their gods.

And thank you, you're not like that. We think of the gods of Wall Street. Massive, giant, brazen, bull altar where people spend their lives and have their life spent.

And you're not like that. Tonight, Christians, eyes closed, heads bowed. Christians, be praying right now.

And if you're old, be praying hard. That someone tonight, maybe someone tonight, it's clicked with them, that their life has been lived and it's not good. That right here, right now, you would hear this, that Jesus Christ, the Bible declares him to be God in human flesh, died on the cross, rose again from the dead for our sins, for the sins of the entire world.

So, he was the sacrifice that we might go free. There's nothing fair about it. Nothing fair at all.

The innocent was tortured for the guilty. And the Bible says that God the Father accepted his sacrifice on your behalf. Only if, for you personally, you accept that offer.

Oh, he died on the cross. He rose again from the dead. And most of us in this room benefit from that.

But what about you? Well, heads are bowed and eyes are closed. No spectacle tonight. No embarrassment.

But as I look across this sanctuary, tonight, would you say yes to Jesus Christ? Would you say tonight, Pastor Jack, I want my sins forgiven. I want Christ to take control of my life. And don't think tonight that if you're an old person, that somehow, either A, he doesn't want you, or B, you're almost as old as God, so maybe he needs you.

No, that's not true either. You need your sins forgiven. And Jesus called those that he called publicly.

No one's looking around but me. Will you acknowledge Jesus Christ tonight as your brand new tonight Lord and Savior by just raising your hand? Don't be shy and don't be bashful. God bless you.

To my left, you can put your hands down. God bless your hand right there to my left. In the very back, God bless you.

Hands down, anyone else? God bless you to my right. Listen, if you're too old to raise your hands, you tell them. You tell them, Lord Jesus, forgive me.

Those of you who raised your hands, listen, pray this prayer. Dear Lord, forgive me of my sins. I ask you now to write my name in your book of life.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Change my life. Make me new.

If you prayed that prayer tonight, at the end of this song, we have Bibles up here that we want you to take. We want you to read them. But you've made the greatest decision of your life.

Church, let's stand together as we close in a song of worship to him and praise him now. Worship him while we have the moment. Bless his holy name.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/21/SID21860.mp3>
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