

I. Opening Remarks and Announcements

Today we have Christian out in Las Vegas, and Greg in Saint Louis. Please pray for our jail ministry. Aaron was down there preaching this morning, and our nursing homes this afternoon. Rick Warren, who we know is stationed over in the Middle East, please pray for him. Pray for camp coming up. Now that the kids are back, we are just going to open up the gates and go to work on it. We have so much to get ready, and we are really excited about it. We have a whole family coming in from Utah, bringing their kids, and we have our kids coming from England. It is just a really exciting time.

We want to really keep in our prayers DeJuan and Brittany. They are having some problems with her pregnancy, and they are going to be down in Texas for the next several months. We just really need to pray for them. They are going to be going through a series of operations once the baby is born, so just really hold them up in prayer. He left yesterday, and she flew out this morning. We will keep you updated on that, but we really need to pray for them.

Then pray for the kids coming home, that they will be making their way back today. And then a pastor friend of mine and a friend of Terry's, Doug Ripley, is having some heart surgery coming up this next week. We just need to put him in prayer. If you would do that, I would certainly appreciate it.

II. The Invaluable Study of Paul's Life

If you have your Bibles this morning, I want you to turn to 2 Timothy chapter four. As you know, I have been taking some time before we get into the book of Psalms. We probably will not start Psalms until after camp. When you get into a long series in Bible, I guess you could do it, but I never liked to break stride in a series. However, there are things that come up that you want to preach about, things that you see or God shows you that you just want to put out there. So we have taken some time before we get into Psalms to talk about some things.

The message I want to preach to you today is out of 2 Timothy chapter four. Paul has always been an incredible study for me. I think he is one study that everybody ought to really take and look at every aspect of his life. He is so unique in so many different ways. When you study his life, you find that the older he gets, the more insight he gets. It becomes invaluable to us. You see how he looks at and understands ministry. You see and learn how he understands people. You actually see how he understands life and really what the important things of life are. It becomes invaluable to us.

I noticed how, as he grows older in the ministry, he continues to learn some things. One of the things that you never want to do when you find yourself in the ministry is get to the place where you think you cannot learn anything anymore. There are a lot of guys out there who are basically unteachable. They get a little Bible under their belt, and then they think that they know it all, they have learned it all, and that is just simply not true.

When you look at Paul's life, you find that in the ministry, whether you are pastoring or whether you are just ministering in a church someplace, you find out that God's school is never over. There is never a time when you can say, "I got it all now, and I know what I am doing."

I look over in Philippians chapter four, verse 11, where he talks about the great doctrine of standing and state. Our standing is in Christ Jesus as our sinless perfection because of salvation. But the state we are in is the everyday life that we have to live. The greatest aspect of the Christian life is to understand those two doctrines: the doctrines of standing and state.

He said in Philippians chapter four, verse 11, when he was talking about the state he was in, in his relationship with God, with people, and in the ministry, he simply said:

Philippians 4:11

For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

He never stopped learning. As you grow older in the Lord, it seems like to me anyhow, that the real things that matter really have more meaning to them. Like I said, you feel more of an urgency. I know it is that way for me, and I think it is probably that way for anybody who really understands the concept of what God is doing in their life.

III. The Reality of Life's Seasons

As the older you get, the study of the end times is no longer just about the second coming of Christ and the times leading up to it. The end times now becomes the fact that your time is coming to an end sooner, more sooner than later.

James 4:14 says, "Boy, how true this is."

James 4:14

For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Psalms 39 says that the days of our life were just like a hand's breadth. You know, in the Bible, life on earth is likened to just simply four seasons.

- 1.) You have the springtime of your life. That is when you are a child, probably up to 15, 20, maybe 21.
- 2.) Then you have the summertime of your life. That would probably pick up sometime after 21 and maybe take you all the way up to 40, maybe up beyond that a little bit.
- 3.) Then we enter into the autumn time of our lives, and you know that takes us up into the 50s and into the 60s.
- 4.) And then wintertime comes in our life.

Now, the first three you may be able to fudge on a little bit and add a few years, take a few years here, but this last one is clearly defined for us in Psalms 90 when he says, "Man's life is threescore and ten, 70."

Psalms 90:10

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

It is safe to say that when you hit 70 years old, you are in the wintertime of your life. Most of you here today and all of our kids down at the lake, you are in the springtime and the summertime of your life. There are a few of you here that are in the autumn, and there are some of you that are pushing the winter button. I get that.

But I have learned that the key to life will be at the end of our lives: what is the accumulation of what we have learned with God and what then we did with all that we learned that God gave us. I am not under any illusion in the reality of my own life that I have more years behind me than I have ahead of me.

I was thinking as I put this thing together, I am 73 years old. When we started our church 20-plus years ago, I was in my fifties. If another 20 years rolls around, I will be somewhere around 94, 95. That is pushing it. It is a thing where most guys my age, or maybe a little bit before my age, when they start to feel the reality of life coming down on them in the wintertime of their lives, they get what they call a bucket list. I think they made a movie about that. A bucket list is the things that you put down or you want to do before you kick the bucket.

I know guys that do that, and guys that say, "Hey, you know what, I have the time I have left, I want to do this, I want to do that, I want to go see this, I want to go see that." I do not have a bucket list. In my life today, I have done just about everything a man could hope to do.

Dr. Ruckman wrote a book a number of years ago, and I remember reading it, and it is one that I like to read about every other year. The name, it was not about the Bible, it did not do anything about verses or expository anything. The name of the book was **The Full Cup**. In that book, he talked about all the things that God had done with him. He talked about how here he was, and I think he died when he was 94 or 95. He talked about how in his life at that age—and this guy was still playing goalie on a hockey team when he was 82—he talked about the fact that he had in life a full cup.

I would never in any way, shape, or form ever try to compare myself to anything he was, knew, or did, or anything; that would be ridiculous. But I want to tell you today at 73, my cup is full. I have made plenty of mistakes in life, as we all have, but God was good to me. If you look in God's dictionary of long-suffering, you will find my picture there. But I always try to learn from my mistakes.

I am a nobody. I am no intellectual giant. I have had no formal training other than taking you out at 200 yards. I still use a flip phone. My only claim to fame is I am the fastest one in the slow class. I deserve to burn in hell, screaming my lungs out for all of eternity. But the day God saved

me, it changed my life. It not only changed my life for my eternal soul—and a lot of people, that actually happens, they truly get saved and God changes their life as far as eternity is concerned—but He not only changed my eternal destiny of my soul, He gave me a book that changed everything in my course of life.

For the last 55 years or so of my life, He took a worthless piece of dirt, Genesis 2:7, and through the greatest book the world has ever seen, brother, He gave me a full cup.

I hear a lot of people talking about burnout in Christianity, and I understand that. But I wonder sometimes how much a burnout is just really a flameout. Because you are looking at a guy who, when that book got in my hands and I realized what it was, for the next 50-some years of my life, I burned my life out in that book. There was nothing more important to me, nothing more I cared about, nothing that anything could be or do or anything that could ever come to ever be close to that book.

Through the good times and through the bad times, Dr. Ruckman, if you would have been around him in the last 10, 15 years of his life, you did not see it when he preached, but when he read his Bible, he had to have a big old magnifying glass. I remember him telling me he read through the Bible over 200 times. He read a book a day, every day of his life when he got saved, and he basically told me, he said, "I have burned my eyes out with the Word of God." Now that is the kind of burnout that we should have.

When God gave you a Bible, He just did not give you a book that would change your eternal destiny; He gave you a book that would change the course of everything in your life. Amen. In my life, God said, "Fill up." Boy, He did. As Psalms 23 says:

Psalms 23:5

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Today, me coming down to the wintertime of my life, I have had the greatest life a man could ever hope for. It is all by the grace of God. It is all because of the power of the Word of God. I would have made a mess out of it 100,000 times. I would have screwed it up and messed it up so bad if it was just me doing it. I am telling you, when God gives you that book, that book will change the course of your life, and you will never be the same again.

I have seen guys burn their lives out for sport. Nothing wrong with sports. I have seen guys burn their life out for this or for a corporate position or for a job or this or that. Hey, I understand that is life, but I am telling you as a child of God, burn your life out with that book. You are looking at a man today that is as content as he could be. It has absolutely nothing to do with me, absolutely not one shred of my ability.

I thank God today for my family, all three generations, for ministering with Dad and Grandpa in the Word of God. Hey, I would have made a mess out of it 100,000 times. But I learned something about that book: just as God preserved His Word through men, God will preserve men

through that book. Oh, but for the book that God gave me. Oh, for the grace and the goodness of God.

You know, there will be people who get to heaven, and they will want to thank God for this and thank God for that. They will want to praise Him for saving them and all that stuff, and I get it. That is all good. But when I get there, the first thing I want to ask Him is, "What in the world did You see in me?" When You look down to the men down through history that turned the world upside down, "What in the world did You see with this insignificant speck on the walls of Your eternal universe?" I am nothing.

Yet God allowed me to go into what? Over 20 different countries and give them discipleship, and over 200 churches, and trained pastors around the world two or three times. I have been from Europe to the Philippines. I have been from Central America to Africa, from South America to Australia. Unlike Paul, all the young men and young ladies that God has blessed me with over the years, I learned a long time ago that when God saved me and gave me that book, His calling for me was for one thing: it was for young men and young ladies to give them the book that God gave me. That book that I was privileged by the grace of God to try to give to you.

I cannot tell you how I do not deserve any of it. I cannot emphasize enough my worthlessness, my depravity, my why God would ever want anything to do with me. But over the years, He allowed me to preach over 200 Bible conferences and churches and pastors' conferences, missions conferences. He gave me over 500 young men and young ladies in the ministry out there today. It is hard to find a church in this city that the pastor did not come down through some point of my ministry. All because of a book I was willing to burn my life out with, and I am nobody special. You are smarter than me, you are better than me, you have more intelligence than me, you are quicker than me, and you are a lot younger than me. There is no reason why God will not take you right now.

I was putting this message together Monday morning. My phone rang, and there was a guy from West Virginia who had some Bible questions, and he wanted to thank me and told me that there is a whole group out there that follow our church on the website. I have them in Pennsylvania, I have them in Ohio, I have Massachusetts, Illinois, I mean, Washington State, South Carolina, Utah, Missouri, Indiana. I mean, I do not deserve any of that. What I have to offer them is nothing. It is only because if you are willing to invest everything you have in that book, God will invest everything He has in you.

In 1968, I joined the army, and I wanted to make a career out of the army, but God had other plans. God put me in another army, and for the last 50-some years of my life, we have fought the battles together, and God has always brought the victory, and I do not deserve any of it. Today, I have the greatest church with the greatest people a man could ever have that he could ever ask for. I deserve none of it, but God blesses His Word.

I look at what I have today at 73, God's final gift to me. I am done traveling. I was at the dentist last week getting a tooth cleaning, and you know how doctors and dentists and nurses and people, they always want to make conversation. They are like barbers. When I go to a barber shop—well, I go to Jamie, but there have been times that I could not get to Jamie, and I go to

some guy, and what did you just—he is asking him, "Well, what do you do for a living?" "I got the rest of the day off, are you retired?" "Hey, cut my hair. I do not care to have dialogue with you." I threw one curve one time. I said, "Oh, I am a serial killer, and today is my day off, and I need to get a haircut."

So the dentist lady was cleaning my teeth. She says—and I did not appreciate this—she said, "In your senior year"—you do not look too hot yourself, sweetheart, in fact, your face looked like a road map to Saint Louis. I said, she said, "In your senior years, are you planning on traveling?" I said, "No, ma'am, my traveling days are over. I have nowhere I want to go. I have been there, done that, bought several T-shirts."

My goal right now in the wintertime of my life is to build as many of you as I can in this little place that God has given me here with the greatest people in the world, which I do not deserve, and all that God has given me and showed me and taught me and trained me and put me through, which I do not deserve. This is my last hurrah. I do not care about going to preach places anymore. I am not going around in countries and around the world. I am just, I am done with all of that. All I want to do is take today the young men and the young ladies and the moms and dads and whoever want to get it together that we can stand and burn our lives out for the Lord Jesus Christ till He comes back.

I had Terry Joe preach last week for me. I told you, some of you just laughed at me and said, "Oh, here goes Bob again talking about, hey, Terry did the job." Terry and I go back, what, 50 years, Terry, probably. I told your wife this morning, by the way, that she is the best thing that ever happened to you, just so you know that. She hugged me when I said that, then she slapped me. I cannot figure out what that was all about. We have been through some churches together, have we, buddy? And through some countries together too.

Terry was the kind of guy—he told you the story last week—and he is the kind of guy that I could put him in any church, any place. Well, I had a pastor call me, and we had a bunch of them back in the day. I could just send Terry in, and he would get the job done, boy. Terry went his way and did his church for a while, and I went my way and did my thing for a while, and then here we are. It looks like the final chapter, Terry, we are going to get to be together again. It all comes back full circle, and I am happy about that. We are going to pick up and end where we started. That is the way it should be.

No more traveling, no more trips, no more passports, no more malaria, no more Balut, no more any of those things. You know what Balut is, don't you? Balut is duck eggs that in the Philippines, they take them and they bury them in the hot sand. They leave them there for three or four days, and then they dig them up, and it is a delicacy. Then you suck the juice out and you eat the little bird that is in there. We were in the Philippines one time, and they thought they were going to get this American guy. Little did they know, I have eaten things that make a billy goat puke. I have drank water out of a swamp with dead people in it. So you are not going to bother me with that. So they come up, and then they said, "Hey, would you like to try a Balut?" Everybody else said, "Oh, absolutely." So, you know, pop the little hole in it. It was still warm from the sand because you are right there at the equator. Chug that sucker down. It actually

tasted like chicken noodle soup, really. Cracked it open, ate that, popped out the little embryo in there. And then just for color, took a little fingernail, toenail was still growing there, and tipped my teeth with it and said, "You got any more of those?" Hey, no more. No more. I am done with the Balut. Though that was pretty good.

Now my job is to send you guys out to preach. Now my job is to get you guys ready. We take the last times we have. You know, in the Bible, as in life, one of the things that will really teach you will be to see the last thing a man says about something in his life. Or in some cases, the last thing that God says about the man in the Bible. I found over the years of studying that, you know, we talk about the law of first mention. I thought to myself, "Oh, why would not it be a law of last mention?" And boy, there is. It will always show you his perspective of what he has learned in his lifetime.

In history, I think it was probably up to about 1955 that in every public school, the kids were required to read George Washington's farewell address. The last thing he said. It is one of the most incredible things that you will ever read about what will happen to America when they take God and the Word of God out of this nation.

Douglas MacArthur, the great general in the Pacific in World War II. After a full career in World War II, his last time he spoke was at West Point Academy. He approached those young soldiers that were going to be officers. He closed up by saying this, "Old soldiers never die. They just fade away." That is so true.

I think of Bill Halsey, who was his counterpart in the Pacific, got us through Guadalcanal in '42 when it looked like we were not going to win the war. After the war, you know, he was given a gold watch by all of the men that were with him. On the back of that watch were the last words that he said, "Lest we forget."

I think of General William Booth, who started the Salvation Army. He was old, and he always addressed the whole Salvation Army crew on Christmas Eve. This time he was just near death. He was in a hospital bed, and they brought the microphones in, and all around the country and the world, all of his people gathered to hear what he would say to them. He only had one word; he was weak. He passed away several hours later, but he had one word, and that one word summed up everything in his life. You know what it was? "Others, others."

You know what the last thing Adolf Hitler ever said that ever got recorded? There is a book out there, and everybody had to read this one. It is called *The Bunker*. It records the last 10 days in the bunker when he is down there when the Russians are closing in. Right before he commits suicide, all the staff is coming in and saying their goodbyes and everything. Heinz Linge was his valet, I guess. Everybody is distraught. We know that Adolf Hitler is the last type of the antichrist. His party number was 555. The next one is going to be 666, and then bless God, the next one is going to be 777. Heinz Linge comes up to him, and he is distraught. Everybody thinks the world is coming to an end. He says, "Mein Führer, what shall I do?" The last thing Hitler said to him was this, "Wait for the man to come after me and follow him." Heinz got taken captive by the Russians, spent 10 years in captivity, came back around 1955, and then was interviewed by everybody. To this day, he is dead now, but to his dying day, he did not know

what he meant by that. Hey, I know what he meant by that. I know exactly what he meant by that.

The last things people say. How about Savonarola back there in the 1400s? He preached the Word of God. He was a Roman Catholic monk, and a big Roman Catholic Cardinal came to him and said, "Look, if you shut up and do not preach the gospel anymore, we will give you a hat of red and make you a Cardinal." All the Cardinals wear red hats. You know what he said? The last thing he said, he says, "I will take a hat of blood," and they killed him. The last thing people say, it sums up where they are at. It sums up where they are at.

In Bloody Mary's reign, you had two Bible-believing guys. One was named Ridley, the other's name was Latimer. This is 1555. They are condemned as heretics by Bloody Mary, Roman Catholic. They are being burned at the stake side by side. Ridley was the younger guy. He begins to kind of lose it. Well, who wouldn't? Latimer looks at him, and his last words, he says, "Master Ridley, play the man." It was out of the Bible. He says, "For this day, we shall light such a torch that all England will see the light of God through our lives." Last thing he said, they burned him.

William Tyndale was the forerunner of the Bible you hold in your hands today. He did one of the first English translations. They burned him at the stake in 1536, Catholic Church. The last thing he said, while the flames were consuming his body, he was not screaming, he was not yelling, he was not begging for mercy. He welcomed the fire because the fire meant nothing. You know why? He had already burned his life out. The last words he said, before he went home to glory, it says, "Oh God, open the King of England's eyes." You know what? 70 years later, God answered that prayer, and England brought forth the King James 1611 Authorized Version. The last thing people say, it is incredible. It is incredible.

In the Bible, look at Hebrews chapter 11. 16 people that God talks about, of what He thought of them, never one time mentions one failure in their life. Look at the last book Moses writes to Israel, the book of Deuteronomy. Read Deuteronomy chapter 33 sometimes, see it for yourself. Look at the last thing God said about David in Acts chapter 13 verse 22. Look at the last thing John said in Revelation chapter 22. The last thing he said in 2 Samuel chapter 23 verse 1, it says, "These be the last words of David." You ought to see those last words. Those last words were about the men that fought with him and labored with him that he counted as his mighty men of valor. In that last thing he says, you find the four greatest keys for Christian leadership that you could ever want. You ought to see the last words of Joshua in Joshua chapter 23 and 24. In Matthew chapter 27, you ought to see the last things Jesus says in His life before He dies on a cross. John 19:11, you ever see the last thing Jesus said to Pilate before He goes to the cross?

I am telling you in life, the last thing God will say about you or the last thing that you say is all that really matters. If I have learned anything in my pilgrimage through this thing, I have learned that it is not how you start, my friend, but it is how you finish. Listen, I have done a lot of funerals in my 50-plus years. I noticed that the way it kind of shifts today is the fact that it is all about a celebration of life. But yet the Bible is very clear, like in Psalms 116 verse 15, that:

Psalms 116:15

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Sure, there are lessons that we can learn in a man's life, but I am going to tell you something. Most of the time in sermons and in funerals, we talk about the celebration of life because there is no celebration about them going home to the Lord by the way they went. I used to love to read the Salvation Army's magazines. When they lost people, you know, they went home to be with the Lord, they would have a whole section that listed with their pictures, and it would be under the title "Promoted to Glory." You know why we cannot preach today a celebration of death about somebody being promoted to glory in Christianity? Because we have too many deserters. It is not about how you live, it is about how you die. It is about the last thing people remember about what your life is really about.

Sharon and I remember when John went home to be with the Lord. That was a celebration of a man's death. That man loved the Word of God in every part of his life, and when he went home to be with the Lord, he did so with you reading the Bible to him and him just walking out into eternity. The last thing he said to me, about two days before he went home to be with the Lord, he told me he asked me to take care of Sharon, and he thanked me for all that I gave him out of the book, and he said, "Bob, it is getting me through, and I am ready." You know what that book did for him? Same thing it did for me: gave him a full cup.

IV. Paul's Final Charge: Come Before Winter

Now in 2 Timothy chapter four, we are going to eventually get down to verse 21 here, so just stay with me. I do not know if you know this or not, but in 2 Timothy chapter four, you have the last thing that Paul says before he goes home to glory. The last thing he says will be to the young man in his life that he knows will carry on after he is gone. That is where I am at today. This is where David was at in 2 Samuel 23. He was talking to the guys that had been his fellow soldiers that he has to leave now, but they are going to carry on. Getting out to you all that I have learned before you cannot get it from me anymore.

You hear me talk about guys like Tommy Thomas, Phil Ward, Mel Sabaka. The tragedy of those guys is none of them wrote anything down. None of them are on tape anywhere. When they died, the accumulation of all they knew was lost with them. When I got into the ministry, I made up my mind that that was not going to be happening to me. That is why I created the website, that is why I put everything out there, that is why I try to do what I can do. Because there is going to be a time coming when you walk into that office, and the chair is going to be empty.

Now look at 2 Timothy chapter four. Let us pick it up in verse one and two here for a moment. He says:

2 Timothy 4:1

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

Now he comes down through here, and he starts to say some things. Again, this is the last thing that he says, and he says in verse one, "I charge you," and then he tells him what the charge is. He says in verse two that he is to preach the Word. You preach that book in season and out of season. In verse three, he says there is going to come a time that they will not endure sound doctrine anymore. He says in six, seven, and eight, "My time is at hand, I am ready to be offered," wintertime, "I have fought a good fight." In verse 10 and 20, he talks about the brethren a little bit and then some personal matters, and then Demas has forsaken me, and only Luke is with me. Then in verse 13, he talks about, "Bring me the books and the parchments." Then in verse 21, he makes his final statement. To me, when I saw it many years ago and understood it for me, it just added a change to my perspective, my direction, and my purpose in life. For he says in verse 21, excuse me:

2 Timothy 4:21

Do thy diligence to come before winter.

Let us pray. Father, help us today to learn these great lessons. Help us, Lord, soberly look at our lives and see where we are at. Help us today, Father, to be everything that we need to be. Thank You, Father, for the book. Thank You for taking this worthless, worthless piece of dirt, Father, and seeing fit for whatever reason I will never know of giving me the greatest book the world has ever seen. Thank You for Your investment in me, even though my investment back to You has been totally unworthy. I burned my life out the best I could. For me, it was a burnout, not a flameout. I thank You, Father, for this time today with these good people. I will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

Now I understand the context here: "come before winter." Winter in the Middle East can be very hard and very harsh. They shut down travel many times. The mountain passes that you have to go through, you cannot get through because of the heavy snow. Actually, wintertime, no matter where you are at, is the most bleak, cold, dark time of the year. Everything is dead. There are no leaves, nothing to stop that cold north wind. The grass is all dead and brown. Wintertime, the gray old days of winter, dark now at 4:30, five o'clock, cold, freezing rain down the back of your neck, chilled to the bone.

For me, knowing the four seasons of life and looking at this from a personal application, I realized in my own life, and I say to you today, there are some things that we need to do in life before winter sets in. Because when winter in your life and my life gets here, take it from me, there are some gardens you cannot plant. There are some golf games you cannot play. There are some softball games, volleyball games you cannot do anymore. There are some things that if we do not get done in the springtime of our life or the summertime of our life or at least in the autumn of our lives, they just do not get done.

The greatest problem that God's people have—and this is every one of us—the greatest issue we have is one of procrastination. "Why do today what you can put off till tomorrow?" I want to talk

to you for just a few minutes about some things that you better get done because, take it from me, winter is coming.

V. Things to Do Before Winter Comes

➤ 1.) Form Good Habits

First off, and I am glad you are in here today, I want to talk to you young people for a moment. There are some things you better do before the wintertime comes in your life. I totally get it. The last thing you are thinking about right now is wintertime. Right now it is July. You are going swimming, you have July 4th, you have camp, you are having fun, you have balls, you have vacations. Nobody thinks right now when you are young what it is going to be like next January or February. But there is a wintertime coming in your life. It is coming. It will be here before you know it.

Right now, while you still can, you better form some good habits in life that will pay off when wintertime comes in your life.

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

Hey look, there is a time coming when you hit the wintertime of your life that if you do not form some good concepts, some good ideas, some good habits, because bad habits you form in the spring and the summer of your life will keep you from serving God later on in life. You are going to wake up someday—oh, I have seen it a thousand times—you are going to wake up someday at 30 or 40 and you are going to say, "Well, I am going to serve God today," and your flesh is going to say, "No, you are not."

That Bible says in Ecclesiastes chapter four verse 12:

Ecclesiastes 4:12

And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

You take that little piece of thread that your mama sews your buttons on with, you wrap it around your fingers once or twice, and you can just snap it like that. You take that same piece of thread and wrap it around your finger a hundred times, the bad choices and the bad things, habits you put in your life, you will never break it. You will die before you ever break it. It will take you to an early grave. It will become a stronghold in your life that will kill you. Hey listen, there have been many a young gal or a young guy who dies way before their time. It is all because of the bad habits, the bad friends, the things that even their parents allowed in their life, that when they got older in life, it destroyed them.

➤ 2.) Forgive and Thank People

I will tell you something else. There are some people you better say some things to before you cannot say it anymore. There are some people you better learn to forgive. Hebrews 12:15 talks about that root of bitterness. I have seen people carry some bitterness all through their life, and when they get to the wintertime, they are the most miserable people you have ever saw in your life. No joy, no peace, no ministry, no nothing. As Hebrews 12:15 says, that root of bitterness takes hold in time, and it attaches itself to everything in your life.

Hebrews 12:15

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Now you want to know the fundamental simple little reason for bitterness? It is found in Hebrews 12:15: the failure of the grace of God in our lives. Oh, we want God's grace in our life, but we are not willing, when somebody does something stupid or makes a mistake, we are not willing to give them the same grace that God gives us. Wintertime.

I will tell you something else, there are some people you better thank before you cannot anymore. Kids, you better thank your mom and dad before you cannot thank them anymore for all the things they have done for you, all the sacrifices they have made. I remember my mom and my dad, my dad worked two jobs. My mom worked a full-time job. Just so we kids would have a better life. We were never denied my sister and I anything because of the sacrifice that our parents made.

I am telling you kids right now, especially if you have got a single mom and do not have a dad living in the home or vice versa, the sacrifice that your parents or parent does for you, don't you take it for granted. And don't get to the place in your life that you lose them and you can never thank them for what they have done. My dad died when I was 20. Lung cancer. I think about him and my mom, I lost my mom several years ago, but I think about them every day of my life. There is no November frost day that comes around that I do not come out of the house and feel that frost and see the breath of my breath. I think about Dad taking me out rabbit hunting when I was 15 or 16 years old. There is not a time that I do not think about the fishing trips we used to take.

I thank God every day of my life that he was in that hospital, Altman Hospital, that I got to sit on the edge of his bed. Cancer had eaten him up. He could not talk; it had eaten his throat out. He could not drink, he could not eat. We would have to take little bits of chips of ice and put it on his tongue. I got to tell him that I loved him. And I got to thank him for everything that he did for me. Knowing what I know now, if I would not have taken that chance and done that, I would have been one of the most miserable persons on this planet.

My mom too. The last two or three years, when we would go back to Ohio before she got in the home and she could get out and around, I would pick her up, and we would drive around all the places that Sharon and I used to go to: Lake O'Pines, Belgrades, Myers Lake. I would have her down there and just try to help me tell me everything about when they first moved to Canton, where they lived. I thanked her and told her that I loved her. And then she was gone, wintertime.

Hey, I have seen it, man. I have seen them stand by that casket. I have seen them stand in front of that tombstone. I have seen them at that graveside. And I have seen and heard them say, "Daddy, I love you. Daddy, I love you. I am sorry, Daddy. I love you, Mom. I love you." Wintertime, too late. You better say it and do it while you can, because winter is coming.

I have seen moms and dads with their kids who were in a car wreck or something, and they are in a hospital, and they are not going to make it. Those moms and dads never cared about them spiritually. They were so far out in the world, they could have never got back. I have seen moms and dads literally crawl into bed to try to now tell them about Jesus. Wintertime! Too late.

I will tell you something else. There are some people that you better thank that God put into your life that got you where you are at today. We get a little Bible and think we know it all in gratitude. We get so self-centered and so spiritual, we forget the people that God put in your life when you first got saved. God's people are the most thankless bunch you will ever see. Just ask yourself, here you are, you got a Bible, you know your Bible, you love the Bible, where would you be without God putting that person in your life? Do not get spiritual on me and say, "Well, it was God." Hey, God uses man!

John 1:6

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

One time years and years ago, I was getting ready to do a Bible study, and a lady came up, she was a spiritual, pious gas bag if you ever saw one. She said, "Could I talk to you?" I said, "Well, I am getting ready to do my Bible study." She says, "Oh, well, Brother Bob, it is the Lord's Bible study." You know what I did? I said, "Okay, let Him teach it." And I left. You know what happened? He did not come down and teach it. Sometimes you get so spiritual, you get too spiritual.

A guy says all the time, he says to me, "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord." "Well, praise the Lord, praise the Lord." And I said, "You do not know your Bible very well, do you?" He says, "What do you mean?" I says, "It is not praise the Lord. It is praise the Word." He says, "Well, I never heard that before." That is my point. You must have missed Sunday school that day. It is not praise the Lord. That Bible says that He has magnified His Word above all His name. You missed that day, didn't you? Praise the Lord. No, praise the Word. If you want to be biblical.

God's people, I am telling you. I am telling you, in my life, I will never forget the people God used in my life. I have seen some of you. You want to change your life. You want to grow. You want to do something. You want to, and so I will put somebody with you to help you. And they have a family. They have a job. They have all kinds of responsibility. And you just blow them off. Do not show up for appointments. Do not call them. Do not let them know. And you just, and you know why? Because you do not appreciate what God has given you in that person. That is why.

I never got so spiritual that I forgot that it was a sacrifice of those people that God used in my life to get me through the things that would have shut me down. And I will never forget them. Herb Kuntz is coming up here in a couple of weeks to do part of camp. You are going to listen to a guy

who I will never be able to thank for the time in my young life that he took me hospital visiting. Showed me how to love people.

I think of Chuck Shuster, his wife just passed away here a couple of months ago, was just a young guy in the men's youth department and took me under his wing. Helped me figure things out when I was trying to put it all together. I will never forget old Glen Mays who would take me out on every Tuesday night and show me how to win Jehovah Witnesses to Christ. I will never forget Bill Aiken who was such a strong model of what a Christian man should be. We talked about your church, and you talked about Rufus Holfeldt. Had no idea he was in your church. Rufus was one of Mel's boys back in the day, and he took me out and taught me how to street preach. Old Rufus was a street preacher. I will tell you what, every time I drive down North Canton, Main Street there, there is that Catholic church right on the right. On the other side, old Rufus used to have a square painted, and that is where we would stand, and as they come out of noon mass, we just preached to them. Thank God I was able to say to some of them before they left this planet, "Thank you. Thank you for what you did in my life."

I think of Mel Sabaka and Gene Sabaka. Mel was my father in the Lord. He was the Apostle Paul of my life. That man gave me my Bible. That man showed me what real preaching was. That man showed me what people were. He taught me how to teach and preach the Bible. He gave me my first opportunities to preach, but brother, he held me accountable to it. I have told you the story before, I was preaching, there must have been 500 people, and that was my second time to preach. I was going to town. I remember what I was saying, I do not remember the message, but I remember I made a reference to Genesis where it says, "By the sweat of your face, you should have earned your bread," and I was talking about obviously people that did not work, and I am going to town, man, I am just ripping it off, and I said, "By the sweat of your brow," and right in the middle of my sermon, 500 people, he was sitting right down here in the middle. I heard this booming voice, "Book, chapter, verse." I said, "What?" He said, "Book, chapter, verse." So I went back to Genesis and looked it up, and it said, "sweat of your face," not "sweat of your brow." And I said, "Oh," and he looked up and he says, "Young man, if you are going to preach the Word of God and you are going to quote it, quote it correctly." And he sat down. Now, how do you finish your sermon after that? If I do that to some of you guys, you would be over abundant life so fast you would not know what hit you. You guys are not made with the same stuff that they were made for back then.

For over 50 years, we had the most special, precious father and son relationship like Paul and Timothy must have had. All because God put a man in my life, and I never forgot what he did for me. He was not perfect. I played his gut to the imagination. I learned right then that you quit looking for a perfect pastor or a perfect church. You are better off just to look for a real one. He was not perfect, but he was real. Just as my Bible says in John 1:6:

John 1:6

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

In my life, there was a man sent from God whose name was Mel. God uses men. Over the years, I have learned a lot from other guys. You are stupid if you do not. You learn from everybody you

can, everything you can. You keep what works, throw out what you cannot. But no one could ever take what he did for me out of my life. I never could repay what he invested in me. The only way I know how to do that is to take the same things he invested in me and invest them in you. I never looked for a better deal. I understood that he was the man that God gave me.

Two years before he died, he came to Kansas City. In fact, he preached his last messages here in Kansas City. I met up with him, and I took him over to Apple Center. We had only been in that place now for a couple of years. I showed him around, and it was just him and me. We sat down on those steps, and I said, "Mel, I want to say something to you." I said, "I want to thank you for letting God use you in my life." I said, "I know I have not always done what is right, and I know I have made my share of mistakes, but I want you to know, I would not be where I am and have all of this if it was not for the investment you made in my life. And I just want to tell you, I love you and thank you." Two years later, he is gone. Wintertime.

I am telling you, you better tell some people thank you before you cannot tell them anymore because winter is coming.

➤ 3.) Show Love

I will tell you something else. There are some people that you better tell you love them before you cannot tell them anymore, and you show them that love. You give them things, you find out what they like, what they want, what they love, and you make their life as happy as you can be. Husbands, you better tell your wife you love her. Wives, you better tell your husband you love them. Mom and Dad, you better tell those kids you love them over and over and over. Because when winter comes, hey, I have seen them in car wrecks, I have seen them in overdoses, I have seen them in every state where that kid or gal dies long before. And then all you can give them is flowers on the grave. Talk to a cold old tombstone. Keep the urn of ashes somewhere where you can look and talk to them. Too late. Wintertime.

Years ago, down in South Carolina, there was an old farmer who had farmed all his life. It was him and his wife; they had no kids. He was a hard man that had a hard life. They would try to scratch a living out of the ground and the rocks and try to do everything that they could. They would go to town and sell their eggs and sell their milk and whatever they could grow out of the ground. He worked all of his life, worked hard, had to scrape for everything that they had.

One day him and his wife went into town for supplies. They went into that general store, and he was getting the nails and the wire and the things that he needed. She kind of drifted off over and decided to go to the store, and she kind of drifted off over into the other section there. There on big rolls was rolls of white lace. She thought to herself, "Wow, I could get some of that, and I do not really have a nice dress. I could really make a nice dress out of that beautiful white lace on big rolls." She took some of it over to her husband, and she said, "Do you think that maybe I could get some of this to make a dress?" He said, "Woman, put that back. We do not have money for that. Put that back. We are here for supplies. We do not have time for things like that." She very quietly, submissively went back and put it away. Never said a word.

Two, three months later, she fell sick with fever. A couple of weeks later, she died. For weeks and weeks and weeks, nobody saw the old farmer. They got concerned about him, and one night in the middle of a rainstorm, a bunch of his friends hitched up their buggies and decided to go check on him. As they are driving up that old road going to his farm, the cemetery that his wife was buried was about halfway to his place. As they are driving by, they looked over in this rainstorm and saw a little light. So they got concerned and drove over there. When they pulled up, there was the farmer weeping his heart out in front of that tombstone. All over that tombstone was yards and yards and yards of white lace. Too late! Wintertime.

I am telling you, you better tell some people that you love them before winter gets here. You cannot tell them anymore. I think of Bob Gregg. How years ago somebody gave him my tapes when he was out in California, and God used and worked his way to get him here. You know, we were friends for over 30 years. Two weeks before he died, we had lunch together, and I showed him our church here. We had a great time. He thanked me for all God had done in his life and through our ministry here. And I thanked him. Bob did something for me one time that I could simply never repay him for. We had planned to do the gospel and the stars. I had given him the telescope and was getting ready to go over there, and we had talked about the fact that we were going to do that. You know what? Two weeks later, he was gone. Went home to be with the Lord.

The night before he died, we were chasing deli after volleyball. We sat together, our families, and ate, and I told him, "Hey Bob, next Saturday night, does it look good? We could set up the scope, and I will walk you through it and show you how to put it all together." And he said, "Oh, that would be great, man. Let us do that." Little did I know, the next morning God took him home. The last words I ever said to Bob and he said to me was as we left, "I love you, man. I will see you next week. I will give you a call." And then he was gone. Wintertime set in.

I think that is the reason why, understanding all this, I tell you all the time, when we leave or we meet, that I love you. I am on the phone, hang up, "I love you." You know, I walk around. Jason's Deli was pretty sparse last night because most of our kids were down there. But when it is packed out, you will see me just walking around telling people, "Hey, I am glad you are here. I love you." In fact, I got so caught up in it one time, I walked up to this table, put my arms around him, and said, "Hey guys, I love you. Thanks for being here." They were not even our people. Because I know it might be the last time that I ever get to tell you I love you. And I want the last thing you remember is that I do love you. I love you. Because for me, it is my wintertime.

> 4.) Do Things for God

Finally, there are some things you better do for God before winter gets here. Hey, listen, apple trees do not bear fruit in February. Orange trees do not bear fruit in December. Peach trees do not bear fruit in January. There is a season to our fruit bearing.

Psalms 1:1-3

1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

John 9:4 says that we have to work now because the night comes when no man can work.

John 9:4

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

Listen, my dear friend, I know a lot is going on in life. Do not burn yourself out on the wrong things. You better get it figured out.

Psalms 90:10 says, "Threescore and ten, 70 years of a man's life." Sometimes we get more, sometimes we do not get it. I promise you, you average it all out, it would come out at a perfect 70. You know, I thought about that one time in my own life. You probably could put it into yours pretty close to 70 years. I wasted the first 20 years of my life. Now I only got 50. I read somewhere that in a lifetime you sleep a third of that, and I only got 32. I give everybody five years just to figure it out. Now I am down to 27. Somebody said one time you eat in life five years of your life, now I am down to 22. You count all the vacation, the time out of fellowship. You know what the bottom line is, folks? We probably got maybe 10 years to really give ourselves to Him. And we do not.

Most of God's people come to church, listen to preaching, they go all through their life. It means nothing to them. When the wintertime comes in their life at 70 and 80 and 90, they are as barren as the fig tree in Mark chapter 11. Ministry is the only reason God saved you. Take it from me. Whatever time you have got, burn your life out for Him. Get a good balance in your life like the afterburners. It is either burnout or flameout.

I will tell you something else, some of you, you need to get saved. If you are in your life, you are 40, you are 50, you are 60, you are headed for wintertime, and if you died right now, you do not know where you would spend eternity. That is the scariest thought the older you get. If someday that you are going to step out into eternity and you are going to meet a holy God face to face, and you are going to realize that every day of your life, from the springtime to the summertime to the autumn time, right up to the end of your winter, He was there for you. He wanted to save you. He died on the cross for you. I am telling you, if you are saved today, that book will preserve you and your family. But it depends on what you do with it. It is just that simple.

VI. Conclusion: Finishing Well

In the springtime of your life, form good habits. Build a solid relationship with God. That is what we want to do with your kids at camp. We are going to talk about the theme, "Dare to be a Daniel," but it all comes down to them learning how to form good habits, because that is what got Daniel through. Do not miss out on your kid there.

In the springtime of your life, you form good habits. You build a solid relationship. When you move into the summertime of your life, you take every opportunity God gives you. You form a

good balance, but you never quit. Remember, God is not the author of confusion. If you are confused in your Christian life, it is on you, not God. He is not the author of confusion. We are. Keep your life clean and well-defined. God will put people in your life. Recognize those people when you first get saved. Get with a pastor in a solid New Testament church. Learn all that you can. Be a torch that burns bright in the nighttime of Christianity, like Latimer told Ridley.

In the autumn of your life, pull all you have learned and help the younger ones to learn the Word of God. I thank God every day for the older men in this church, some 15 or 20 of you, the unsung heroes. A guy said to me one time, "Well, how come there are not any older guys in this church teaching people?" I am very obvious by that statement, you have no clue what is going on in this church, because they are everywhere. They are teaching them how to preach. They are helping them through their addictions. They are working with them here and working with them there. We just do not put their pictures up on the billboard like maybe it is like yours. Pull all you have learned and help the younger ones get that book down. Do for others what God has done for you through others. Your family now should be in line with you as a ministry team. Working together as God's heritage, Psalms 127, building the generations to come with your family. Carry on what God started with you all before wintertime gets here.

Then when winter comes, and it will come. Enjoy all God has given you. No greater joy than watching your kids and your grandkids teach the Bible, work with people. You may at 72 or 73 not be able to do what you did at 30. You might not be able to play ball anymore, volleyball anymore. You might not be able to, you know, do all the things that you used to do. All your traveling days are over, but it is just simply enjoying the fruit that God gave you. And those you have invested your life in to do the work.

Proverbs 20:29

The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head.

I always looked at that verse, and I always thought to myself, notice it says the glory of young men is their strength, because young men glory in what they can do. But when it comes to an old man, it does not say glory, it says beauty. You know why? Because if you get to that point in your life, you have learned that it is not your glory that got you there. It is to the glory of God. That is the beauty of wintertime. In time, God's time, we will all go home to be with the Lord, hopefully with a full cup. No regrets, burnout, but never flameout.

Paul said to young Timothy, the last thing he said, the last thing I say to you, "Do thy diligence to come before winter." Years ago, I was preaching up in the Boston area someplace. I do not even remember where it was. I preached for a week. We hit it hard every night. Then on Friday night when I finished up, a lot of people came forward, a lot of people got saved, a lot of people got right with God. After it was all over, a man, I do not know, he might have been in his mid-60s or 70s, he came up to me, and he put his arms around me, and he said, "Brother Bob," he says, "I want to thank you for coming up to New England and preaching in our church." I said, "Well, praise the Lord, brother, it is good. It is good to be here." He said, "You know what?" He says, "This week I heard things that I wished I had heard 40 years ago. And your message tonight," he said, "I just wished I had heard it 40 years ago." I said, "Well, brother, I appreciate that. Thank

you. But let me ask you a question. What are you going to do now that you have heard it?" That is the question. Now that you have heard it, no matter how old you are, you can always redeem the time. Will you? But there are some things that we better do before wintertime comes.