

**Sermon Notes of  
Assistant Pastor Ed Stonick's Sermon on June 27, 2021:**

**"Some Keys to Finishing Well  
(2 Corinthians 4:16-17)"**

**[In today's sermon, Assistant Pastor Ed Stonick on Zoom shows us that as we get much older in life, God will show us how to finish our life with gratitude and generosity.]**

Introduction:

- This sermon was prepared to encourage himself and hopefully all of you.
- Here's one thing we probably don't need to be reminded about.
- We are getting older. I am getting older. We all are getting older.
- And, eventually, we all have to face the fact that one day we will be gone – our life on this earth will come to an end.
  
- Now, you've heard the quotes: "No one is getting out of here alive."
- "The only two certainties in life are death and taxes."
- "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself."
- "My mind says I'm in my twenties. But, my body says, 'Yeah, you wish!'"
- "I remember being able to get up without making sound effects."
- "Bob Hope once said, "I don't feel old. I don't feel anything until noon. Then it's time for my nap."
  
- We're getting older, our congregations are older; there are lots of older Christians.
- Older people do tend to have more faith in God and go to church more often than younger folks.
- According to recent statistics (Pew Research Center), about 50% of evangelical Christians are 50 and older. Twenty percent are over 65. Only 17 percent are under 30.
  
- About 70% of adults aged 50-64 and 70% of adults over 65 believe in God with absolute certainty.
- Sixty-five percent of adults over 65 say that religion is very important in their lives.
- Almost 75 percent attend religious services regularly.
- And 65 percent say they pray daily and the same number say that they have a feeling of spiritual peace and well-being at least once a week.
  
- Now, getting older can be tough.
- It's often fraught with challenges and difficulties, but it's not something that should be overly worry us.
- It's not something we should unnecessarily dwell on.
- It's something we can manage, something we can cope with, and something God will help us through.
- We need to be reminded that God does us offer so much help.

- Of course, many people in our society don't look forward to getting older.
- Many people in our culture view aging as the enemy. Many encourage us to defend ourselves from aging.
- "Aging is inevitable," they admit, "but we needn't welcome it, nor try to understand it, or endure it; instead, we should postpone, deny, and control it."
- One woman said,
  - "I turned 50 this year. Fifty! And I hate it.
  - I hate what's happening to my body, my hair, my face.
  - I hate how I have no control over what happens as I get older.
  - I hate that people half my age have achieved more than I ever did or will do.
  - I don't understand how old people can be happy despite all the losses they've had to deal with, along with the aches and pains, the diseases.
  - I don't feel cut out for any of that, I'm barely able to cope with life each day."
- Another wrote,
  - "I know there's some popular posts about how getting older is great and your body's always changing and stuff. Well, I disagree.
  - This idea that I keep looking better as I age is just plain wrong.
  - I feel sort of... mildly irritated all the time. My job's way more stressful now and it keeps me up at night.
  - All in all, I hate it. I feel like it's too soon.
  - I never became the person I was supposed to be or did the things I was supposed to do.
  - And now I'm 34 and I have wrinkles all around my eyes when I smile.
  - So yep, I. don't get it when others say they like getting older or they look better or feel better or whatever."
- In all this, it's easy to sometimes forget the value of age.
- Things such as wisdom, the priceless value of experience, and the beauty of maturity all accompany the aging process.
- Now, for us as Christians, we have amazing and continual encouragement and reassurances from our God to help us finish well, to help us age gracefully and in the best way possible.
- God loves older folks. Ed was so convinced of this, he was inspired to write some verse:

*God Loves Older Folks!*

*There's no doubt God loves older folks  
Despite the kidding, sayings, and jokes  
God gives honor to the hoary head  
Especially those who have faithfully led*

*Despite gray hair and wrinkled face  
God holds us in a special place  
For those who have lived longer and longer  
He holds us up in special honor*

*We may easily tire and lack much strength  
But God's with us for our whole life's length  
As we go on, decade after decade  
His power in our lives will never fade*

*We've got to keep on keeping on  
As on His strength we draw upon  
Our prayers are needed more than ever!  
For every need and every endeavor*

*God helps us live a life worthwhile  
He'll help us end it in good style  
It's true – we all must face the reaper  
But we do it in the hands of our most capable Keeper!*

*So take heart, God has given His Son  
His loving grace extends to everyone!  
Be confident and finish the race  
And you'll see your Savior face-to-face!*

God finishes what he starts, and we can do the same:

**Philippians 1:6, For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Not only finish the work started in us, but perfect it."**

**Isaiah 40:31 but those who keep waiting for the LORD will renew their strength. Then they'll soar on wings like eagles; they'll run and not grow weary; they'll walk and not grow tired."**

- In every situation, God gives us exactly what we need and plenty of it through His power and love.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-17 That is why we are not discouraged. Though outwardly we are wearing out, inwardly we are renewed day by day. Our suffering is light and temporary and is producing for us an eternal glory that is greater than anything we can imagine.**

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10, But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Some keys to finishing well:

- We're all in this together. We are all simultaneously running with endurance the race that is set before us.
- And we would like to be able to reach the same conclusion that the apostle Paul did towards the end of his life.

- As he said, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7**
- We can finish well! God wants us to, and He offers much help.
- Here are some important things to keep in mind as finish our race.
- First of all – maintain a flourishing intimacy with Jesus Christ.
- Our highest calling is to grow in our knowledge of Christ and to make Him known to others.
- Does our desire to know Christ exceed all other aspirations?
- If not, whatever is taking His place in the center of our affections must yield to Him if we are to know the joy of bearing spiritual fruit.
- A key secret of those who finish well is to focus more on loving Jesus than on avoiding sin.
- The more we love Jesus, the more we will learn to put our confidence in Him alone.

**James 4:8, Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

**Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”**

**Isaiah 65:24, “Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.”**

Keep practicing the spiritual disciplines:

- They are so special and so necessary to our lives.
- Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fellowship, study, worship, and submission are not ends in themselves, but means to the end of intimacy with Christ and spiritual formation.
- Any of these disciplines can begin to decline and decay. Sometimes we need to make a greater effort and be more intentional.
- Prayer is a good example. We need to be reminded that prayer is spiritual nutrition.
- Just as the body needs physical food, so the soul needs spiritual food. Prayer changes us.
- But it goes much further than this. God’s Word clearly shows us that prayer has the power not just to change our own lives but also circumstances, events, and the lives of others.
- It can even change the course of history!
- We are reminded in **Proverbs 15:29** that **“The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.”**
- And in **Romans 3:22**, **“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus to all who believe.”**
- So, Therefore, God hears our prayers.
- Christian prayer is powerful because we pray not in our own name, but in the name of Jesus.

- Recently, we've gone over the entire book of Acts together. The early church was so powerful!
- What made it so? Surely, part of the answer is the prayer lives of those first believers.
- They prayed regularly, they prayed in Jesus' name, and they prayed in all circumstances.
- They prayed, as encouraged in **1 Thessalonians 5:16**, "**Rejoice always, 17) pray continually (without ceasing), 18) give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**"
- This doesn't mean nonstop, but it does mean constantly recurring but frequent, repeated, continual, fervent, and heartfelt.
- There is no end for things to pray for.
- One of the consequences of our getting older is our increasing health problems some of us had to experience.
- Now, when we look at society, which is so filled with hate in so many respects.
- Many families have been broken up because of their political differences and the way things are done to resolve issues.
- And Christianity now has a less and less effect on societal issues.
- Now, we can even complain to God! God wants us to cry out to him, and He wants us to be honest.
- Many times in the Psalms, the writers bring their doubts, difficulties, and distress before God and question him.
- God will help us with our conflicts and disputes.

Keep a Biblical perspective on the circumstances of life:

- Part of the purpose of our suffering and trials is to drive us to our dependence on God alone.
- When we view our circumstances in light of God's character, we come to see that God is never indifferent to us, and that He uses suffering for our good so we will be more fully united to Christ.
- Sometimes we do have to face some harsh realities.
- For example, Elizabeth Roberts wrote an article entitled, "Declining with Grace".

In it, she described two men she had served while working as a hospice social work – George and Steve. Shortly before Elizabeth met George, he had moved to Arizona, to an active retirement community where he expected to live a vigorous life with his new friends.

He had left his daughter and her family in Illinois and was trying to get some emotional distance from his failed marriage; now he was ready to settle into some real living. When a brain tumor sneaked into his life, landing him back in Illinois and reducing his world to a nursing home, George had no resilience. He had fully expected to be in control of his life, and the idea of being disabled had never even flashed across his radar screen. He felt ambushed. All he could do was mutter, "How could this happen to me?"

Steve was shocked by his diagnosis of stomach cancer, but it did not leave him entirely without resources. In the weeks following the diagnosis he and his wife lived with the hope of good days, even of many good days to come. But they were also aware that they couldn't count on that, and they rearranged their priorities.

They spent time with their children and grandchildren. They worked on legal and financial affairs together. On days of needed rest, they enjoyed watching the birds in their back yard. During one of Elizabeth's visits, they showed her their travel pictures of Europe on the big-screen TV in their living room. You had the sense that in the face of disability and death, life was going on and was still basically good.

- Now, human lives have two aspects—dependence and independence – and the task of living well and maturely is to integrate and balance them.
- When we are born, we are in a state of such dependency that we would die immediately if we weren't in intensive care by round-the-clock caregivers.
- But then we grow to be relatively independent, active rather than passive, strong, and able to care for ourselves and for others when they are helpless.
- But sooner or later, if we live long enough, we go into physical and mental decline, and may revert to a weakness very much like the infancy from which we emerged.
- In her work with older people, Elizabeth has observed that people facing the loss of function and seeing death on the near horizon “handle” the change from competency to dependency in vastly different ways, some with serenity and composure, others with bitterness and disorientation.
- And she has noticed that two virtues, which especially take dependency and weakness into account, seem to make for better adjustment in such difficult times.
- People whose earlier lives have been characterized by these traits do best in situations of loss.
- These virtues are gratitude and generosity, which go together quite well.

### Gratitude:

- Gratitude is an eye for the good in life.
- The intensely grateful person is just a little bit blind to the downside of life – doesn't tend to dwell on it, doesn't notice it quite as much as the rest of us do.
- But gratitude is more than “looking on the bright side” of events.
- It is a personal, or rather, interpersonal attitude.
- To be grateful is to be related to a giver; it is to be grateful to somebody.
- The Christian is in an ideal position to become genuinely grateful, based on our belief that we are created by God and redeemed by Christ.
- These beliefs set the stage for a life of gratitude, because now every good we have, both material and spiritual, is from the hand of a personal God who has given us these things without our deserving them.
- Elizabeth Roberts wrote about a co-worker:

There is a woman on our Board of Directors who is such a thankful child of God. She has no financial pull with foundations or influence with corporations. She has lived in poverty most of her life. As a grandmother, taking care of four others, she lives in a housing project in Waco.

She is living with cancer and goes three times a week for grueling kidney dialysis. She has plenty of reasons to hold her fist up to God and say, "Why me, God?" But she doesn't. She just thanks him each day for another day of life to bless others until he calls her home.

- God can give every one of us that kind of peace, that kind of power!

### Generosity:

- Those individuals who function well in loss and adversity, as opposed to those who function poorly despite wealth and successes – also tend to be generous.
- They see their lives as a life of giving to others, rather than a life of acquiring and trying to get happiness for themselves.
- Generosity is the other side of gratitude.
- If gratitude is a disposition to receive graciously, generosity is a disposition to give graciously.
- Both of these virtues are interpersonal and involve the acknowledgment of dependence.
- Just as the grateful person receives without a sense of entitlement, the generous person gives freely from the heart, without a sense of the pressure of obligation.
- Just as the grateful person has a loving attitude to his benefactor, so the generous person has a loving attitude toward his beneficiary.
- Just as gratitude can be a whole way of life, pervading a person's consciousness of all that he has and is, so generosity can be a fundamental way of thinking and feeling about what one has and is, in relation to others.
- The grateful Christian will be generous.
- It is hard to imagine a deeply generous person who is not grateful, or a deeply grateful person who is not generous.
- The reason is that these two virtues take the same philosophy of life to heart.
- This philosophy says that everything ultimately belongs to God, who showers us with his grace.
- If we are to be like him, we must become little showers in our own right.
- John Wesley probably said it best... "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."
- Seeing regularly beyond oneself to the needs and interests of others is a kind of practicing-up for the inevitable losses that await us.
- This practice of detachment from ourselves prepares us to move on, freely and gladly, to whatever God has in store for us.

- Elizabeth Roberts has noticed that older persons, who have ingrained in themselves, by long practice, the patterns of gratitude and generosity, handle disability better than the resentful and the grasping.
- They have better relationships with their caregiving children and other caregivers.

### Continuing to Serve:

- Having now been retired for three years, Ed can say it has many advantages.
- He doesn't miss going to work but enjoys waking up with no particular place to go or thing to do on certain days.
- The typical retirement activities – golf, playing cards, gardening, hobbies, travel, and the like – have a legitimate place as occasional recreation.
- Most of us have worked hard, and we look forward to more opportunities for recreation and travel when we retire.
- The danger is in making these a steady diet.
- We need to be careful not to focus too much attention on ourselves, and we need to leave room for service to others.
- One important key to a satisfactory life and a part of our responsibility as Christians is to be careful about the ways we choose to fill their later years.
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- Most of us have worked hard, and we look forward to more opportunities for recreation and travel.
- The danger is in making these a steady diet. We need to be careful not to focus too much attention on ourselves, and we need to leave room for service to others.
- Spirit-filled living requires us to continue to discover and develop the spiritual gifts we have received and exercise them through the Spirit's power for the edification of others.
- Believers who finish well are marked by ongoing outreach and sacrificial ministry for the good of other people.
- Often older people assume that they have pretty much fulfilled their responsibilities and can mark time before claiming the place reserved for them at the Messianic banquet.
- The attitude sometimes is, "Well, I did that for forty years; I've put in my time already.
- Get one of these younger people to do it – they're the ones who'll benefit."
- But there is no age limit on God's expectations that persons contribute to the coming of the Kingdom.
- We are not individual Christians, we are a community founded on love – indeed, for Christians a community functioning as the earthly body of its risen Lord.
- Whatever one's age, God will work in all His children to conform them into the image of Christ until the end.

### Seeing Christ in Others:

- We need to look for Christ in others.

- You'll recall our former pastor, Glen Weber, had to spend some time in the hospital with some rather serious health issues.
- While he had a rough time, including surgery, complications, and time in the critical care unit and cardiac unit, he experienced God's goodness through others.
- Here's what he said in a recent GCI testimonial:

From the moment I entered the hospital, I noticed the "spirit" and attitude of the people serving me – doctors, nurses, even custodians. They were all so caring and concerned – encouraging me, explaining how they were going to help me and even apologizing when they were going to hurt me (which was more often than I would have liked!). I saw Jesus! Ephesians 4:8 became very real to me, as I realized Jesus told the disciples he must ascend (partially because he could only be one place at a time), so that he could send the Holy Spirit and gifts (and therefore be everywhere humans lived).

We all would like to see Jesus snap his fingers and miraculously heal us instantly, but he rarely (although occasionally) does. I believe that instead he put his healing spirit in millions of human beings. People who choose the medical profession because they want to help people get better are living out the healing spirit of Jesus.

In my fourteen-day stay, I had over seventy medical professionals come into my room. There were only two who I felt were "only doing their job" (and they may have just been having a bad day!), while all the others seemed like Jesus walking into my room.

This may be surprising to read, but I only prayed for myself once or twice during that time because I truly felt Jesus was in my room multiple times a day! When I walked out of that hospital, I truly felt like I had never been closer to Jesus Christ.

#### Concluding comments:

- Finally, let's be reminded of some central promises of God:

**John 3:16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.**

**John 5:25, I tell you the truth. A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.**

**John 11:25-26, Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."**

**1 Cor. 15:42-45, So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in honor; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.**

**Rev. 21:4, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**

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 Despite the kidding, sayings, and jokes  
 God gives honor to the hoary head  
 Especially those who have faithfully led

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 God holds us in a special place  
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So take heart, God has given His Son  
 His loving grace extends to everyone!  
 Be confident and finish the race  
 And you'll see your Savior face-to-face!

- So, take heart ladies and gentlemen – God's got this!

Closing prayer: