

Your Days Are Numbered

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[0 : 00] Well, here we are at the start of another year. 2022 is here. 2021 is over. And as we begin this new year, I want to encourage you and share with you a little practical wisdom from God's Word.

So my message this morning is going to draw mainly from various Proverbs in the Bible, and it will be a very practical word. Let me begin by asking you a question. Have you taken some time to reflect on 2021?

Some of you might be thinking, I don't have time to sit down and reflect on last year. And besides, I'm not sure I want to remember a lot of what happened in the past year.

But I want to encourage you this morning, taking time to reflect on the past year is wise. Proverbs 14, verse 8.

The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways. Proverbs 14, verse 15. The prudent give thought to their steps.

[1 : 17] Proverbs 21, verse 29. The upright give thought to their ways. Proverbs 4, verse 26.

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet, and be steadfast in all your ways. At least these four times, God speaks through Solomon to tell us that it is wise, it is prudent, to give thought to our ways.

That is, to take time to think about the paths that we have walked, the decisions that we have made, the things we have done, and where those decisions have brought us.

What has been the result of them? So taking time to reflect on this past year is not just a helpful idea, it's much more. We might even call it a spiritual discipline, a good habit of grace.

But let's think about why for a moment. There are some people who go through life and make the same mistakes over and over and over again.

[2 : 29] They might pause and wonder briefly at times, why doesn't this work for me? It seems to work for other people. There are other people who seem to be successful in this area of life, but why not me?

Oh well. And they just keep on doing what they've always done. Proverbs 26, verse 11. As a dog returns to its vomit, so fools repeat their folly.

Think about that. Have you ever watched a dog do that? Puke up something on the floor and then sniff it and lick it, and then walk away, and only one minute later, come back and sniff it and lick it again.

Dogs do that. It's almost like they're so captivated by the smell of things that any intelligence that they have is just bypassed, and ooh, what's that over there?

It's like they completely forgot that it's there because of them and that it's no good. And, says Solomon, people can be like that too.

[3 : 52] We do foolish and stupid things, and then we do them again, and again, and again. just kind of sniffing our way through life like a dumb dog who learns nothing from his experiences and continues to forget what he's gone through.

So coming back to 2021, there are two things that we can do. One is, to more or less, relive it again, and again, and again.

Make the same mistakes. Do the same dumb things. Give into the same mindless sniffings. Scratch the same recurring itches.

Say yes to the same regular urges. Or, we can stop. We can break the cycle of foolishness by giving careful thought to our ways, to the things that we have done, the decisions that we have made, where those decisions brought us, what has been the result of them, and what can I learn from all that I experienced in 2021?

It's only then that we have the opportunity to change. To grow. To become wise. Prudent. To become successful in that area of life that's been a continual struggle or challenge for us.

[5 : 28] And so if you haven't done it yet, I want to challenge you to take some time, whether a morning, or an afternoon, or an evening, whatever works for you, to just sit down and quietly reflect on this past year.

Having your calendar out can be helpful to jog your memory and trigger memories of what you experienced this past year.

For some of you, a paper and pen might be helpful to keep you focused and lessen distractions. You might try and list out a few of the wins of the year and also a few of the failures.

What are those weaknesses? Those opportunities for growth in your life? What can you do differently this year, 2022, to grow in those areas?

And of course, I would encourage you to pray about all of this as you do it. As I went through that process again this past week, I was reminded of just how good God has been to me and to my family this past year.

[6 : 36] And I was also reminded of how merciful and forgiving and patient God has been to me this past year with all my failures, sins, shortcomings, sins.

So give careful thought to your ways, to your steps. But this doesn't mean just to reflect on the ways and the steps that we've taken in the past.

It also means that we should give careful thought to the ways and steps that we are about to take now and in the days ahead. Inevitably, as you look back on 2021, you'll remember and you'll see things, steps that you've done that you wish you hadn't, things that you said that you wish you didn't, ways you went down that you wish you could go back on.

And for those things, praise God for his grace and for his forgiveness through Jesus, our Lord. But now, this is a new year.

This year will be full of new decisions to make, new opportunities to do things differently and better. You'll have opportunities to get off some of those old, tired, and well-worn paths that have been getting you nowhere and instead to cut some new trails, trails that by God's grace may take you where you really want to go with your life and where he wants you to go with your life.

[8 : 10] But to make those changes, you first need to stop and give careful thought to your ways, to the steps that you will take today and tomorrow and in the weeks and months ahead.

And so, I want to encourage you to set some goals for 2022. There's more than one way that you could do this. You could write down a handful of goals for the whole year on a page or you could sit down and write out a few goals for each month as it begins.

Some of you might be thinking, goals? Who does that? Goals are for CEOs and people who take life too seriously. I don't need goals. And I used to think like that myself.

I'll just kind of do and feel my way through each day as it comes. But that's not really giving careful thought to your ways. That's called flying by the seat of your pants.

And eventually that merry-go-round gets tiresome and you realize that you're getting nowhere with many of the things that are most important in life. One of my favorite quotes that's not from the Bible is, if you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.

[9 : 36] And it's true. Goals lead to habits. Little decisions that we make about how we spend our time every day and every week.

Habits like those lead to progress in whatever we're aiming at. Do you want to make progress in 2022? Do you want to grow in 2022?

Or do you want to fritter away half the year scrolling through news and social media, watching TV, playing games? the wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways.

And so set some goals for this year. And I want to encourage you to set at least one goal that's not a work project, but a character growth kind of goal.

as you look back on 2021, what did your decisions reveal about your character? What character quality would you like to grow most in in this coming year?

[10 : 55] Make that a matter of prayer and focus on it this year. It may lead you to listen a little differently as you read through your Bible again this year.

It may lead you to seek out the wisdom of those who have that quality and maybe even make some much needed changes in your life. As we think about goals, we must also admit that it's possible to have a whole page full of goals and to accomplish every single one of them by the end of the year

and yet have wasted the entire year.

Goals only get you somewhere good if they are worthy goals. Solomon's not just telling us to be intentional here, but to be wise, to give careful thought to our ways and steps so that we take the ways and steps that are good, that are right, that are most beneficial, that are most important in life. And our goals should reflect what's most important in life. Leaving Solomon for a moment and going to Moses, Psalm 90, verse 12, a psalm of Moses in which he prays to the Lord, he prays this, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

wisdom. I love these words. First of all, a heart of wisdom. It's one thing to have a wise mind. It's one thing to know in every situation what you ought to do, what you should do, but it's another thing to have a heart of wisdom, to deep down love to do what is best and desire to do what is good.

[12:50] for most of you, these things I'm sharing with you this morning, I'm sure you've heard these before, you've already got that wisdom in your head, but have you got it in your heart?

Is it in your heart to do these things, to live wisely and productively in this next year, to accomplish much that is good and right for the glory of Jesus this year?

you might wonder, well, how do I get wisdom not just in my head, but in my heart? And God tells us here through Moses' prayer how it can work.

He says, Moses prays, teach us to number our days, that, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. So it is possible to gain a heart of wisdom.

wisdom. How does it work? By learning from the Lord to number our days. It is possible to break the cycle of going back to sniffing and licking at your own vomit, to gain a heart of wisdom, to stop being a fool, to stop doing the same stupid things that we do over and over again.

[14:14] and it comes by learning to number our days. For some people it takes a terminal illness to bring them to the place where they finally realize that every single day is a precious gift from God and that they've wasted many of them.

think about your life. Each new day is part of a limited edition series that will soon come to an end, both for you and for me.

2021 is a good example of this. It's already been spent. It's done. Your 2021, my 2021, is written in the history books of heaven and it cannot be changed.

Teach us to number our days. Already today, there are only 363 days left until 2023.

there are only 29 and a half days left until we start February again. Blink and it'll be spring. Blink again and harvest will be drawing to a close.

[15:34] Before you know it, we'll be back here again saying the same kinds of things about 2023. But here's the kicker. None of us truly knows just how many days we have left.

And we'd be fools to assume that we all will live to the ripe old age of 96. Let's not forget also that health and strength often start going downhill even decades sometimes before we get to 96.

You might think, well, I'll give more of my time and attention to those things that are important later. When I'm a little bit older, when I've got more time for them.

but when you get to older, you might not have the health, the strength, the mind to do those things anymore. Truly, God could take any one of us out of this world any day.

It could happen by a tragic accident or by critical organ failure, you name it. we are fools to presume that God will give us more time down the road to do the most important things in life, the things that he's called us to do today.

[16:56] It's only when we learn to number our days that we realize what is most important in life.

Not how much money is in our bank accounts or how nice to houses or the vehicles, not what level our video game character is, not what the best golf score was or whether we won or lost the sports games that we played.

It's only when we come to see that our days are running out that we realize what is most important in life and it's then that we begin to set worthy goals of what we might do with the days that we have.

goals that lead to habits that take us where we really want to go in life and where the Lord wants us to go in life so that we can look back on 2022 in years time and say thank you Lord for all the worthwhile things that you enabled me to accomplish this past year.

back to Moses for a second. There's something humbling here. It's in the way Moses says it.

[18:15] He doesn't say thank you Lord that you have taught me the lesson of how to number my days and that you have given me a heart of wisdom as if he's already figured this out as if he's

already got a heart of wisdom.

him. No. Moses dare I say is even humbler than we are. He includes himself in the prayer.

Teach us including me says Moses to number my days so that I may gain a heart of wisdom. I don't know when he wrote this or how old he was or what had happened in his life but there came that time when Moses admitted to the Lord that he had need for wisdom in his heart.

That he had need for the Lord to show him what the span of his life really was so that he could live more wisely. Will you make that your prayer this year?

Teach me Lord to number my days so that I may gain a heart of wisdom. I wonder what you're thinking right now as you hear all this.

[19 : 32] Reflect on 2021. Set goals for 2022. Well I know that's right. I know that's good. But Proverbs 22 verse 13 the sluggard says there's a lion outside I'll be killed in the public square.

26 verse 13 a sluggard says there's a lion in the road a fierce lion roaming the streets. Well I would get out and work but I can't.

It's not safe. Excuses. Now this might sound a little strange to us. I mean if there actually was a lion roaming the streets it would be prudent not to go there and put ourselves in danger.

We wouldn't typically call such a person a sluggard or lazy. So is there really a lion out in the streets or is maybe this person more like Chicken Little?

The sky is falling. There's a lion out in the streets. Or maybe like the boy who cried wolf. There's a lion. Look at me.

[21 : 02] Give to me. I can't work. I don't know. Whether there's a lion or not. I don't know. But the point I think Solomon is making is that the lazy person makes excuses.

He doesn't get to work. I would do that. But there's a lion outside. I wonder what some of our excuses might be today.

I would take some time to reflect and to set goals for this coming year. I know that's good. I know that's what I should do. But I haven't got time.

I'm too busy. I would do it. But I've got all these kids to look after. And they need my attention constantly.

I would do it. But with all the cold weather that we've been having and the short days, the lack of sunshine, I just have no energy.

[22 : 02] I won't be able to concentrate. I would do it. But how can I make goals when there's COVID in the streets?

Or when COVID regulations are constantly changing? What if something changes and I'm not even able to make my goal? Maybe I shouldn't set any goals in the first place.

Excuses. Let me be blunt and frank. Let's not deceive ourselves with excuses. Let's not comfort ourselves with excuses in this next year.

If you can't make the time for the things that are most important in life, if you can't make time for the things that are wise in life, then you are a fool.

fool. And you will suffer the fate of fools and you will repeat your folly again and again and again as a dog returns to its vomit.

[23 : 07] You'll be like the lumberjack who says, I can't stop even for a moment to sharpen my axe. I know it's getting duller, but I've just got too many trees to chop.

Or you'll be like the motorist who refuses to pull over and check the map. Got to keep moving. I'll find my way. As long as I'm moving, I'll get there fast.

And yet, what if you're driving in the wrong direction? No, we must not make excuses. We must not put off prayerful reflection and planning.

We must give careful thought to our ways, past ways, present ways, and future ways. We must pray like Moses did and ask the Lord to teach us to number our days and to give us that heart of wisdom. In the great race of life, we might look around and see all the hairs bouncing around here and there at breakneck speed. And we might fear that if we don't just join in with them, we're going to miss out.

[24 : 14] We won't be able to keep up. I won't be able to keep up if I take time to stop and pray or to reflect or to set goals.

I'll be like the turtle in the great race of life. But who wins the race in the end? The hare. Or the tortoise.

James chapter 3, verse 13. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life. By deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

What good will you aim to do with God's help in 2022? What deeds will be done by your hands in this coming year?

Ephesians 2, verse 10. For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

[25 : 25] Let me remind you and encourage you this morning. At the start of the year, God has it in his mind and even in his plan for you to do good work for him this year.

God has it in his life. God has it in his life. God has it in his life. So let's not, as we often say, take it easy. Let's not say, don't work too hard.

Let's not say, there's COVID out there, I can't. Let's not say, let's not let's instead say to one another, brother, sister, your days are numbered.

Look, man, Jesus is coming back soon. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I don't know who said it, but my mind often goes back to this quote.

[26 : 36] Only one life will soon be passed and only what's done for Christ will last. And so may God fill us with his spirit and give us power and grace and wisdom and love for a fruitful and productive year.

year for his glory and for the good of the people all around us. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of life.

Thank you for all the precious moments that we've had over the past year. Sweet moments of relationship. Thank you for even the challenges and the trials that you used in our life to strengthen us, to deepen our faith, to grow us in our character.

Thank you that you love us enough to let us go through hardship at times. Only you know, Lord, what 2022 holds for us as individuals and as a church, but we commit the year to you, Lord. We pray and ask that you would have your hand on us and bless this year for each one of us.

We ask that you would lead us to make good decisions, wise plans, and to succeed in those things that are pleasing to you one day at a time.

[28 : 12] We ask this in Jesus' name and for his honor. Amen.