



DON'T BLINK

Pastor Al Detter Selected Sermons

5:30, 9:30 & 11:00am Grace Church Jan. 5-6, 2008

There are 2 groups of people in this room when it comes to birthdays. The 1st group is the non-counters. They look at birthdays as just another birthday. No big deal. Just another year. More fun. More presents. That's the younger group in this room.

The 2nd group is the counters. They don't see just another birthday. They're thinking, "I wonder how many birthdays I have left." At some point, they passed an imaginary line. Before you pass that line, you think that life lasts forever, you'll never get old, death is something way out in the irrelevant distance, and 35 seems old.

Once you pass that line, you realize that life is speeding up. You see some wrinkles around your eyes. You might be saying goodbye to a thick head of hair. Doctors and cops look awfully young. The generation ahead of you is beginning to die. And you have the realization that your life may be more than half over.

That happened for me at age 40. I never really thought too much about birthdays before that point. But at 40, I doubled my age and said to myself, "The life expectancy for men is about 74 years. I might have fewer birthdays ahead of me than I have behind me."

Regardless of what group you're in today, there's a truth in Scripture that we all need to deal with. It's a truth that can transform our lives. It's a truth the 1st group has a hard time grasping and the 2nd group tends to ignore. It's a truth that's good to reinforce as we begin a new year in a world that's speeding rapidly in technology, learning, violence, and sin. Here's the truth—Life is a fast trip. Our days go very quickly. It's as though God knew that we humans wouldn't get this truth so He reminds us that life goes by quickly all the way through the Bible. Let's read together an assortment of those reminders:

**My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6).*

**Childhood and the prime of life are fleeting. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth (Eccl. 11:10; 12:1).*

**Lord, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days. Let me know how transient I am. You have made my days as handbreaths and my lifetime as nothing in Your sight. Surely everyone at his best is a mere breath (Ps. 39:4-5).*

**As for the days of our lives, they contain 70 years or if due to strength, 80 years. For soon it is gone and we fly away (Ps. 90:10).*

**As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourished. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more and its place acknowledges it no longer (Ps. 103:15-16).*

**Man is like a mere breath. His days are like a passing shadow (Ps. 144:4).*

**Surely people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isa. 40:7-8; I Peter 1:24).*

**You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (James 3:14).*

I know what some of you may be thinking: “I need some good news for New Year’s! I wasn’t exactly looking for a sermon about how soon I’m going to die.” Actually, this sermon is going to be good news. I can’t change the truth about how fast our days go. But I can encourage you to make the most of your days. And that’s my goal today. I don’t want you to blink—because life goes by too fast.

For a few minutes, I want to give you some biblical teaching on the days of our lives. There are 3 facts you should live with every day. They can really make a difference in how you live your life.

Fact 1—Regardless of the lifespan, our days go quickly.

That was the message of all the verses we read together. Life at its best is a fast trip. It goes in a hurry. The march of time is relentless.

I had some plans for Vance Brooks. I knew Vance for nearly 30 years. He used to attend Grace. I went to see him on his 99th birthday in 2006. He was an incredible man—always mentally sharp and full of wit even though his body kind of shriveled up and he needed a wheel chair. He talked about his life and one of the things he mentioned was how fast 99 years went.

Then I said to him, “Vance, I’ll be back next year for your birthday. I’ll bring a video crew with me. I want you to tell the church some of the lessons you learned in your fast 100 years.” Two weeks before his 100th birthday, Vance fell and broke his hip. He died following surgery. He got so close but never got to talk to the church last summer. At his funeral, I realized once again how fast 100 years goes by.

Let’s consider 100 years by a few measuring sticks. It seems so long by itself. But compare 100 years with the 20 centuries since the birth of Christ. It would be less than 1 hour out of a 24 hour day. Consider 100 years compared to 4000 years of recorded history. It would be less than a half-hour in a 24-hour period. Consider 100 years since creation. Regardless of how you calculate that amount of time, we’re down to seconds. Now consider 100 years next to eternity. Not even a nanosecond.

I’ve thought about my own life. My grandparents are long gone. The teachers, pop music, TV shows, movie stars, and athletes of the 50’s and 60’s are but memories and reruns. The cars from that era are gone and those that survived are worth a lot of money. If 7:00am were the time of my birth and midnight were the time of my death and I lived the equivalent of 85 years in that time span, it’s already 7:00pm for me.

Billy Graham is 89 years old. Someone asked him what the biggest surprise of his life was. Without hesitation he replied, “Its brevity”. Some people live into their 90’s and beyond. That seems like a long time. But the truth is—the longest life is a quick ride. The myth in our culture is that life is long and we’ll be forever young. But the Bible says our days are swift.

Fact 2—The number of our days are determined by God.

God knows the exact number of our days on earth. He knows the day of our birth and the day of our death. Job 14:5 says, “His days are determined; the number of his months is with You and his limits You have set so he cannot pass.” David said in Psalm 139:16, “In Your book they were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them.”

God knows how long each of us will live. That’s good but it poses somewhat of a theological problem. The Bible tells us that people in general will live into their 70’s and 80’s. Yet babies, children, teens, young adults, and middle-aged adults all over the world too often die of disease, accidents, calamities, murder, and intolerable conditions. Did God determine the number of days in those circumstances? My father was killed in a car crash at age 69. Did God determine that day and how my father would die?

Look at modern science. It has extended our lifespan and it extends lives. Some people are kept alive in comas when they would have died in any other generation. Did God ordain more days today for people who would otherwise have died? These kinds of issues pose many ethical and theological quandaries.

I can't say that I have the answer to these complexities. All I can say is what I know. The Bible says that in some actual sense, God has set the number of days for each of us. Whether it's a matter of His knowing beforehand what would happen to us and therefore He knows the number of our days or that He actually predetermined our days, I don't know. But I'm confident that He knows how many days we'll live and we won't get any more or any less.

I want you to see something about the grace of God. Isn't it good that He keeps the number of our days to Himself? What if God would say to parents when babies are born, "Little Tommy will live 13,645 days." They run home and figure it out. Tommy will die at just over 37 and 1/3 years. So instead of being happy about the birth, they start crying about losing a child at 37. When Tommy's old enough to know, they tell him, "Tommy, you're going to die at age 37." So as Tommy grows older, he lives in fear of the coming day and how he's going to die.

Can you imagine what life would be like if you had to live with the knowledge of the day of your death? Only God knows that day and it's a good thing! We must entrust our days to Him and believe that God knows what He's doing whether our days be many or few.

Fact 3—God's days are vastly different than our days.

It's not unusual to see the number of our days contrasted with God's time in the Bible. Psalm 90:2-3, "From everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust." Psalm 103:15-17, "As for man, his days are like grass but the lovingkindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." And Isaiah 40:7-8, "Surely the people are grass but the word of our God stands forever."

Compared to God's days, our days are but a sigh. Psalm 90:4 says that a thousand years in God's sight is like yesterday when it passes by or as a watch in the night. In II Peter 3:8, the Apostle says, "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." God's time is entirely different than our time. He's eternal. In contrast, we're like fresh grass in the morning that withers towards evening (Ps. 90:5-6).

What's the takeaway in this fact? We'd better dial into God's days if we're going to hang around for eternity. Our days are swiftly gone. But if we've come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way, we have eternal life. When our earthly day is over, the eternal day has just begun! I tell you, if you don't get this right, the moment you die after this one-and-only quick life, you'll realize that you sacrificed eternity for a few foolish days.

Well, those are 3 key facts about the days of our lives.

- *They go fast.
- *God knows the number of them.
- *Our days are nothing compared to eternity.

The lesson from these 3 facts is in my sermon title—don't blink! If life really goes by that fast, we have no time to waste or to invest in things that really won't matter. So here's my advice. I learned it over 35 years ago when I was in seminary—live today as though it were your last but that you had a lifetime of them to live. Psalm 90:12 puts it this way, "Lord, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

So how would you live if it were your last day? Let me give you 7 quick suggestions.

Suggestion 1—Spend some time with God. I'd be saying something like, "God, it looks like I'll be seeing you pretty soon. Just want to tune in a little." The truth is, we're only 1 heartbeat away from seeing God at any moment. And even if you live a lot of years, life is brief. So fellowship with God today. Read the Bible. Think over what you read. Try to apply 1 thing that struck you. Talk to God in prayer. Don't blink or you'll miss out on an incredible relationship with the God of the universe.

If it were your last day: **Suggestion 2—Spend some time with your family and friends.** Mend any fences. Encourage them. Talk about significant things. Life is too short not to fully enjoy your close relationships. Don't blink or you'll miss some of the most important moments in the lives of the people you love.

If it were your last day:

Suggestion 3—Get on the right path if you're not. Sometimes we get off the narrow road that Jesus talks about. We get into things we shouldn't and we hang out with people that have a bad effect on us. Don't blink or you'll waste some of the prime time of your life. Melissa Morgan comes now to tell you how she blinked but then turned things around. Please welcome Melissa!

"During my high school experience I never thought about long term effects of my behaviors and actions. I was out of control and had my head screwed on wrong. I cared more about my self than what truly mattered in life; my faith, my family, and my education. I was involved with the wrong crowd, filled with liars, thieves and drug users. I spent most of my time skipping school to get high and if I wasn't already high I was spending my time trying to find drugs to get high. I was a mess. I was using around 3 times a day--before school, during school, and after school.

"As I let my life spiral deep into the ground due to everyday drug use and the lack of responsibility and care for much of anything, I fought with my teachers, my parents and I fought with God. I was a born again Christian who had lost her focal point. I knew what I was doing was wrong but I didn't care much to change. I was the only person I saw. Being high was more important to me than being truthful. The lies began to show their ugly face and my habits were no longer a secret. Everyone knew what I was doing.

"February 27, 2004 I was admitted to Hamot Medical Center with a heavy drug and alcohol overdose. The drugs and the alcohol had turned their back on me, and they were no longer my support. After a whole night of convulsions and puking followed by dry heaving, scaring my parents half to death and not to mention my little brother who was left at home thinking that his big sister was dying after the anti-narcotics medication and everything else that the nurses and doctors did to try to save my life, I was finally sober. A rare moment in my pitfall life.

"I can truly tell you that it was my most embarrassing moment. I was caught. My life was no longer the secret I once thought it was. My priorities all those years was me, how much could I get, how high could I be, no one else really mattered. The day after, my parents drug me to the viewing of The Passion of the Christ, the movie viewing that the church bought out so that it was all our church family there, still smelling like puke and withdrawing from the drugs I had been taking for years I was embarrassed. For the first time in a long time I was sober. I had finally realized how much I had embarrassed my family and myself. I was so uncomfortable in front of all the people who had done nothing but loved me and prayed for me for years. This was my rock bottom it was finally time to get help.

"I was sent to Salt Lake City, Utah a week after my overdose, I spent 61 tough days in a wilderness program learning how to live in the wild with almost nothing. A make-shift tarp that I would tie to a tree to use as shelter from the snow, making fire with sticks so that I could be warm and cook dinner, and intense therapy daily. This program broke me down. Helped me to learn my strengths and weaknesses and also learn who I really was and who I wanted to become. It helped me learn priorities, they taught me that I won't live forever so I needed to learn and focus on what was really important to me which was my faith, and my family. After successfully completing that difficult voyage in the wilderness, I was not healed – I still needed to learn how to live everyday without drugs.

"I went on to move into a group home in Denver, CO and learned how to fill my time with better choices. I left Denver in December of 2004. What an intense year 2004 was. But looking back I am proud of myself for what I did. I accomplished much. I now have a full grasp on what I want from my life and I am on a clean road to find it. I am proud to say that I have my priorities straight now.

"I've been clean from drugs for 4 years now. I'm a junior in college studying psychology and will go on to attend graduate school to become a drug and alcohol therapist. I have a fabulous relationship with my family, a strong and healthy relationship with Vince a long term boyfriend, I'm the mother of a rescued dog and I have become the president of my sorority. And most importantly I try to honor God in every aspect of my life. I'm not perfect and,

believe me, I make a lot of mistakes, but I know my priorities now and I'm happy with my life. I know that I'm making the most out of my drug free life, and that's all He's asking from me."

If it were your last day:

Suggestion 4—Avoid workaholism. There are some lazy people in the world. But many of the people I know work more hours than they should. God Himself took a rest after 6 days and He told us to take 1 complete day of rest every 7 days. I've seen too many people blink because of excessive work and they've missed out on deep relationships. I've seen many who sold themselves to the company store and then they were dumped. You never made vows to your work like you made to your spouse. Don't marry your job.

If it were your last day:

Suggestion 5—Have some fun. Lighten up. Don't take yourself so seriously. Laugh. Author Nadine Stair wrote a piece called, "If I Had My Life to Live Over". She understood what I'm saying. She writes, "I'd be sillier than I've been this trip. I'd take fewer things seriously. I'd take more chances. I'd climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I'd eat more ice cream and less beans. I'd perhaps have more actual troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones."

"I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, and a parachute. If I had to do it over again, I'd start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I'd ride more merry-go-rounds. I'd pick more daisies." Good advice. Don't blink or you won't be fun to be around.

If it were your last day:

Suggestion 6—Impact eternity. I'm fascinated with the movie, *The Gladiator*. In that movie, Maximus, the lead character says a profound line to his troops, "What you do in life echoes through eternity." That was a very biblical kind of line. The truth is—our days do impact eternity. What we do with our lives can make an eternal difference.

I believe it's God's will for every one of us to live each day in such a way that God is glorified and lives around us are impacted. Mentor somebody. Share your faith in Christ. Do good deeds. Because some day, on the other side, there'll be a group of people to point at you and say, "He was like George Bailey (in the movie, "It's A Wonderful Life"). Because he lived, my life was changed." Don't blink or life will only be about you.

And if it were your last day:

Suggestion 7—Accept Jesus as Savior if you haven't. The most important day of our lives is when we meet Jesus as Savior. That's the day we realize that we've sinned and can't save ourselves. It's the day we call upon the name of Jesus for forgiveness of our sins, pardon from hell, and the gift of everlasting life. When we accept the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ on our behalf, we become a child of God. From that day on, we're in God's forever family.

If there isn't a day when we come to Jesus in that fashion, when we die, we'll be forever separated from God in a place called hell. We must settle the matter in this life, for if we blink here, we're lost for eternity.

If you've never met Christ as your personal Savior, I say with the Apostle Paul, "I beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:20)." Not to do so would be the worst blink of all!

Conclusion

The Bible says that life is short. I mean, really short. There's no time to blink. None of us knows how many days we have left. I strongly recommend the 7 suggestions I brought to you.

As we start the New Year, you may realize that you've been blinking somewhere in your life. Now you know you can't afford to blink. You can't afford to let the years roll by, come to the end of your days, and be sorry that

you've wasted a lot of your life. You know what your blinking is about and so does God. I don't. But I want to offer a challenge to all blinkers who might be here reading this. Stop blinking!

The beginning of the New Year is a great time to make some adjustments. Life is too short to keep blinking. Talk to God right now if the Spirit of God is tugging on your heart. If you minimize your blinks, you'll be able to say with Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4:20, "I won't often consider the years of my life because God keeps me occupied with the gladness of my heart." That's what I want for you!

