

Things to Remember This Week:

Meditation Moments

And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?

What do you consider the most important thing for people to say about you at the end of your life?

Who do you know that will leave (or has left) a meaningful legacy in the world?

What impact do you hope to have on the world, and what is your plan to do it?

What would other people say is the most important to you right now?

The simple lessons in life are... simple. Our challenge is in changing them from lessons to habits. But when we study, reflect on, and memorize scripture, we do begin to change- that's fact! Use this guide as your personal tool. Spend 10 minutes each day doing these things:

Read the day's scripture and consider the related questions.

Read aloud this week's scripture memory verse.

Talk with God using your own words or the suggested prayer below.

Enjoy this time of personal & spiritual growth!

Monday - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

In this passage the Apostle Paul contrasts the "seen" world and the "unseen" world, calling the first "temporary" and the latter "eternal". What does the concept of eternity mean to you? What tugs your attention away from eternal values, and toward temporary things? What helps you to keep focused on the eternal, even when it is unseen?

Tuesday - 1 Timothy 6: 6-8

List all of the goals you are working toward right now. If you attain them, which of them, if any, will go with you beyond this world? Does this week's message compel you to reflect on how important any of those goals are to you, or to add any others to your list?

Wednesday - Matthew 6: 19-21

Where is your treasure- what do you value the most in life? Do your checkbook and your calendar reflect that value, or do they point to other things?

Thursday - Matthew 7: 24-27

What are you counting on to build a solid foundation for your life? Can you identify and "sandy foundations" that have let you down? Have you been waiting for something to happen or for circumstances to change in order to begin building a solid foundation? If so, how does this week's sermon study impact you?

Friday - Matthew 16: 24-27 The words in this passage are Jesus'. What do you think he means when he says we are to 'lose' our lives? Have you experienced or observed a situation where you or someone else gained a great deal, but did so at the cost of losing themselves? What choices are you making to avoid such a conclusion to your life?

Saturday: Matthew 25: 14-30 This is a challenging parable Jesus tells to get our attention by using a startling statement. What got your attention in this parable? If the Master returned today, what would God say about how you've used what has been given to you? How have you developed and shared what God has blessed you with? What kind of responsibility do you feel toward God regarding your talents? When have you observed that the more you used a talent, the more talents God gave you? What will you do this week with the talents God has given you?

Prayer:

Oh God, help me to take a good long look at my life, and see it as you do. Help me to see what's eternally important, and what's really not important at all. Please, Lord, show me the ways I can be part of your plan for this world. Fill me with your deep peace, joy and hope. Amen

THEME: Seven Simple Truths About Life
“Game Over – When it All Goes Back in the Box”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

September 27-28, 2014 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Scripture Reading – Ecclesiastes 2: 9-11; Matthew 16: 24-27; Matthew 5:3

9 So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. 10 Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors.

11 But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds.

3 “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

VIDEO Seven Simple Truths Week 6 Sermon Starter

SLIDE “Game Over – When It All Goes Back in the Box”

I want to invite you to pull out of your bulletin your Game card which you have each week. These are meant to be our Meditation Moments and Message Notes for this series of sermons. At the top you find a Scripture memory verse we want to encourage you to memorize. Each day of the week, you will find some questions for discussion and then some encouragement for you. There are then Scripture passages listed for each day of the week along with a few questions and we encourage you to spend some time each day reflecting on those. Finally, at the bottom of each week's game card you will find a prayer for the week that we hope you will use each day as you grow deeper in the simple truth that we talked about during that week. On the backside you will find a place for you to take notes. I believe that each week the Holy Spirit has a word for each one of us and I encourage you to write down anything you feel nudged about so you can take it with you into the week ahead.

SLIDE Life game with cars (Graphic from last week)

We are nearing the end of our series of sermons on the simple truths that help us through life. These simple truths are things that we learned as children growing up. They are the kind of things which are taught universally around the world and yet they are rooted and grounded in Scripture. Even if we have never opened the Bible, we intuitively know that these things are true. These are seven essential truths that we know already yet we often fail to live by them. If we live by these rules then life goes better and if we fail to live these out we will find that life is much harder. Life is more difficult and we end up with less joy and more pain when we miss these lessons because they are so important. In some ways, these are like the game rules in the game of Life. If you know the purpose of the game and you remember the rules, then the game is fun to play. But if you don't understand the objective of the game and you can't remember the rules, or maybe you've never learned them, the game is not much fun. You will probably lose every time and want to quit because you're frustrated. That's how it is with these simple truths we are looking at in this series of sermons. These truths are all rooted and grounded in Scripture and the teachings of Jesus. They are all lessons that we kind of already know, but we somehow tend to forget and we find them difficult to live out even though we know them.

Today we're going to focus on what constitutes winning or losing in the game of life. There are several components to this particular truth today and the first one we're going to look at is one that all of us learned his children. Let's see how well you remember it.

SLIDE It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game.

It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game. You might be saying, "Well, that's not the Bible." Actually, it is all over in the Bible and it is one of the major themes of the entire Scriptures even though it might not be captured in quite the same words. While we know this is true we often times have a hard time practicing this truth, like our friend Frank in this video clip.

VIDEO Frank playing the game

For Frank, he just didn't get it. We sometimes get so intent on winning the game that we forget the point of the game. When it comes to playing the Milton Bradley version of the game of life, the point is not simply to end up with a bunch of paper money at the end of the game, but it's to enjoy playing the game with your friends and family. The point is not to drive them away so they never invite you back, but we often find in life, that this is exactly what we do. We get so focused on what we think winning might be about that we forget the point of the game altogether.

One person who figured out this truth is an author that we know of as "the teacher." The teacher is the author of the book of Ecclesiastes which is in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, right after the book of Psalms in the Proverbs. It's a part of the wisdom literature of the Bible and it's a book that most of us are not familiar with, with the exception of a few phrases. If you've never opened the Bible, you probably know at least a few of the verses from Ecclesiastes because the Birds made them famous in a song in the 1960s, "To everything there is a season, turn, turn, turn."

That phrase is in the beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes and just gets more depressing from there on out. One of the primary themes of the book of Ecclesiastes can be captured in this one phrase from within the text, "Everything is meaningless." The author of Ecclesiastes is a "son of David," which some take to mean King Solomon and others see as a descendent somewhere down the road. He is looking over his life and he realizes that everything he has pursued has been

a, “Chasing after the wind.” As an elderly man he is asking a question: What is life really all about? All the things he had been pursuing throughout his entire life now seems meaningless or nothing. He missed out on life and it was all in vain.

As a young man, he had grown up in the lap of luxury and decided that life was really all about wealth. He pursued his own wealth and not just that of his father. He had all the money he could ever want or spend, but that didn’t satisfy him.

Then he thought that life was about pleasure and experience, so he made a bucket list and he went about experiencing all that the world had to offer. But after he had crossed off everything on his bucket list, he still felt unsatisfied. He had that experience the Rolling Stones sang about, “I can’t get no satisfaction.”

He then turned to wisdom, and he was sort of on the right track at this point. He got degree after degree from agent and wise sages, but when he was finished learning everything there was to learn he still felt unsatisfied. Listen to how he described this experience of seeking after these things in Ecclesiastes 2:9–11.

SLIDE ***9 So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. 10 Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. 11 But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.***

Ecclesiastes might seem to be a very depressing book of the Bible but it is meant to act as a corrective to how the rest of the world, and even we who are God’s people, can begin to think about winning and losing. We get so focused on all of the things that the world says are important and we go after them, but none of them seem to fully satisfy us. This book reminds us that we were made for something else and that winning and losing in life is not about how much you end up with, whether it’s wisdom or pleasure or power or money or fame at the end of your life.

In glimpses throughout the book, the author of Ecclesiastes begins to lay out what he has learned in life and about its meaning and where we find satisfaction. In Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 he says these words.

SLIDE ***24 So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?***

The author is reminding us that instead of pursuing that next big thing, whether it's a big vacation or a big promotion or a big car or a house of your dreams or a certain kind of retirement, we recognize that every day is a gift from God. Every day is a moment where we have an opportunity to experience life to the fullest, knowing that each moment comes from the hand of God. We recognize that each moment is meant to be a gift in which we live out our faith and that everything we come to enjoy is simply a gift from God.

I appreciate this wisdom because I struggle with it. I seem to always have my head in the future. I'm thinking about the next project at the church and what we are going to do in Grandview. I'm thinking about the number of young people we want to invest in and see go into ministry. I get excited about something we have planned in the future for my family. I think about a trip to a special place where I get to play on really wonderful golf course that I've never played before. Several months ago I was looking at a new vehicle because I had my previous vehicle for 12 years and I got all worked up about what vehicle I would get. The writer of Ecclesiastes and the word of God that he speaks to me says this, "Can you just enjoy this day? Instead of always thinking about what is next or what is going to happen in the future, can you accept the gift of the now that God is giving you?"

I find this a challenge for myself. Especially in moments of change where we can begin to recognize how we have missed out on the present because we are so focused on the future. This last week there were several of my friends who are pastors in town for an ethical workshop training that all Methodist pastors are required to take every few years. After the training a few of us were sitting around talking about how it just seemed like yesterday our kids were little and now they are teenagers or older. Some of them have seen their children leave home and some are even becoming grandparents. We all recognized that time

has gone quickly and there were probably too many nights we were at church meetings and we missed part of their lives because of really important things we thought were happening in our churches. Some of those things were really important and it wasn't the church's fault, but we also recognized that we didn't need to be at all of them. They seemed like such important visions of the kingdom and things we were supposed to do as God's servants, but did we really need to do all of them?

Part of what we recognized is that part of the Kingdom of God that has been entrusted to us is our family and the people who live in our homes. We can't ever get that back once it's gone. The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us of this important and simple truth in Ecclesiastes 4:7 and following.

SLIDE *7 I observed yet another example of something meaningless under the sun. 8 This is the case of a man who is all alone, without a child or a brother, yet who works hard to gain as much wealth as he can. But then he asks himself, "Who am I working for? Why am I giving up so much pleasure now?" It is all so meaningless and depressing. 9 Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. 10 If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. 11 Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? 12 A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

Are we focused so much on our career or our future or our dreams that we fail to spend time in the now, cultivating relationships with people? Are we taking time with people to see the blessings in those relationships?

The first simple rule than for today is summed up in that childhood phrase that we learned: it's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game. The second simple rule for today which goes with is this.

SLIDE **People come before possessions or positions.**

People should come before our possessions and the positions we think are important, otherwise you might find yourself moving towards the end of the game and realizing you have no one left with which to share it.

As we look at this truth, we move from the teacher we find in Ecclesiastes to the Master that we find in the New Testament book of Matthew. We find our memory verse for the week here in Matthew 16. Jesus is preparing his disciples for the fact that he will not always be with them. The disciples weren't really prepared for that and they didn't have this in mind when they signed up to follow Jesus. They left their fishing business and their tax collecting business and other lucrative careers to follow Jesus because they believed he was the King, the Messiah. This was a great career path because when Jesus entered into his kingdom and fully became the Messiah they would be in, on the right and left of Jesus when he claimed authority as the Messiah in Jerusalem. This was a good deal for them, kind of like getting their own City Market card or becoming a member of Sam's Club.

But now Jesus turned to them and says, "We are heading into Jerusalem and there the Son of Man will suffer. He will be despised and rejected and then put to death."

The disciples responded with, "No way. That is not how it works Jesus. That is not what we signed up for!"

Peter even said, "May it never be so!" Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter after Peter uttered these words? Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan, because this is the path that I am traveling."

Jesus is reminding us that when we pursue a life which is real, sometimes it is hard and the road is difficult. There are two paths in life. One of them is broad and wide and it leads to destruction while the other is narrow and difficult but it leads to life. Most people take the broad and wide path because we want the easy way. Jesus tells his disciples that following after him is not always easy and it sometimes very hard. Then he gives them this passage of scripture that we have before us today in Matthew 16.

SLIDE ***24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"***

SLIDE **“soul” = *psyche***

That word “soul” is the Greek word “psyche.” It is sometimes considered the heart or the mind but this particular word and phrasing is meant to encompass the essence of life. Jesus is saying that if we gain the whole world it won’t matter if we lose life and what life is really about. This series of sermons is about the simple truths of life and Jesus is saying that you can gain the whole world but lose your life, your soul.

You know how this works because it happens for each of us as we get focused on the wrong things and we end up losing our life because of it. The writer of Ecclesiastes was saying the very same thing. You can be focused on attaining all of these things and all of the big dreams you have in life and then one day you wake up and find out there is nothing left inside. We have become a hollow shell of what we could be and there is an emptiness.

Several years ago a woman came to me to talk about her husband. This woman described this experience with her husband as she talked about how the more success he had the more he seemed to disappear. The more success he had the less she liked him. He used to be nice and funny and he would make his wife laugh but now he doesn’t smile anymore. What happened to him?

He was very successful and as she described what happened to him she pointed to a truth that success can sometimes wound our soul. Success becomes addictive. We get the taste of victory and it doesn’t satisfy for very long so we have to have more and we go after something else to get that high again. We keep reaching for that next big thing and we find out we are never really satisfied. The present victory doesn’t satisfy us for very long and so we go after the next big thing and pretty soon we are addicted to success. All of a sudden, nothing else seems to matter and we do things that seemed stupid before we got addicted. We take risks with our family and our friendships because we have to have the victory and the success that comes next. We can gain the whole world and all kinds of success, but lose our soul in the process.

Sometimes, when we’re in the process of getting the whole world, we become so busy there is no time left for anything else. This is what I find my own life if I’m not careful. I get so busy there is no time to read the Bible anymore. I don’t have five minutes even to pray or read the Bible because I’m busy doing God’s work. I can’t really make it to a small group anymore because I’m too busy.

Pretty soon, the only time you have left to achieve your goals in life is Sunday morning or Saturday night. Church becomes lost and pretty soon God is a distant reality. No longer is God restoring your soul when it becomes wounded in the process of living life. No longer do we allow the shepherd to lead us beside still waters and bring us new life. Before long, we have lost our soul in the process of getting the world.

That's part of why this memory verse is so important this week. I would like to invite you to say these words together out loud as we reflect on these questions that Jesus asks us. They are good to always remember.

SLIDE ***26 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?***

So how do we not lose our soul? Jesus asks us these great questions and they can haunt us, so how do we not lose our soul? Jesus gives us the answer in this passage of Scripture. He says, "***You must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.***"

Jesus tells us of the way we don't lose our soul is to recognize that our life is not about getting everything that we want, just the way that we want it. My life is not to be focused on bringing as much pleasure into my life as possible. I'm not going to focus on me, but I'm going to deny myself and focus first on God's will and then on living that out towards other people. I'm going to be more interested in how I can bless others rather than always insisting on what you can do for me. I'm going to be more interested in how I can serve rather than being served all the time.

Jesus repeats this truth over and over again. He says that the one who would be greatest must be a servant. He says that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. In this case he says that the one who wants to gain their life should be willing to lose it. The one who loses their life for the sake of the kingdom of God will save it. It's in the process of giving life away that we find life.

We know this already about life. We know that the more we focus on ourselves the less satisfied we become. The more we give towards other people and live for other people, the more reward you find. It's something we can't buy

at the mall or on Amazon.com. Our life is filled with joy and meaning when we learn to give.

Even the people who made the Milton Bradley game of Life understood this. There are places on the game where you land and it's called a, "life space." The rest of the spaces you are either paying money out or taking money in for things like taxes or lawsuits or hospital bills. Here are a few of those spaces that you can land on in the game of life.

SLIDE LIFE Square (Graphic)
Volunteer at Charity Sport Event
Volunteer with the Homeless
Learn CPR
Donate to African Orphans

I find it fascinating that in this game which is all about gaining property and money that even the makers of this game recognize that where life is really found is not just in taking but rather in giving back. Jesus reminds us of this truth where he tells us that we find our life in taking up our cross which is about giving for others and being willing to sacrifice.

Jesus ends his words by talking about following him and how we find life in that. Knowing Jesus and following him as Lord and Savior is what leads to life. Seeking to live your life for Christ and being the presence of Christ in the world changes you and brings life. This is why I teach you almost every week that we should wake up every day and ask God to send us on a mission. Here in this church we talk about being the presence of Christ and how that happens in multiple ways, but there are four of them I want to remind you of today.

SLIDE Connect

We become more like Christ and follow him more closely as we connect through worship and being in a small group. We need each other to find this life and we need time with God.

SLIDE Grow

We open up the Scriptures and learn new things about God as we grow and this is part of following Jesus. We try to live the path that he lived and we grow into his likeness as we do that and as we study the Scriptures.

SLIDE Serve

We serve others and in doing so find our soul.

SLIDE Share

We share the good news that we've learned and that brings us hope because we want to bring hope to others. We want to be a river in life and not a reservoir which turns into a stinky pond over time.

Our soul, our psyche and our life is restored when we seek to be the presence of Christ in the world and follow him by connecting to God and growing in our faith and serving others and sharing hope. This is where we find life.

John Ortberg wrote a book a number of years ago which is where I got the title of this sermon from, When the game is over it all goes back in the box. It's a great little book and John tells the story which really gives us a great picture of this idea of what it means to win at the game of life.

Armand Hammer, not the baking soda, but the multi-billionaire who was the president and CEO of Occidental Petroleum for many years. USA Today called him a "giant of capitalism" and "confidant of world leaders." He was a towering figure on the world scene when it came to economics and politics. After his death at the age of 92 we began to see a different story which told the true story of his life. He got his start laundering money for the Soviets. After he had made some money he paid writers to write fictitious autobiographies of his life to impress other people. When he was a young man, almost ready to graduate from medical school, he performed an abortion on young woman and the young woman died during the medical procedure. His father took the blame for this and spent two years in prison while his son never spoke up to say that it was really him who had done this thing.

He neglected his only son and he never claimed responsibility for a young woman he conceived out of wedlock. He never claimed her as his daughter even though she was. He had no friends at his company where he freely fired the executive on a whim. When his brother died, he sued his brother's estate for

\$677,000 of the \$700,000 estate, keeping that money from his brother's wife who was in the nursing home or his brother's children. When he died, his own son did not attend his funeral and the only people who would carry his casket were the folks who were paid to take care of him and then do this task at the end of his life. Hammer was a multibillionaire tycoon, world-renowned leader in economics. Did he win or lose at the game of life?

Sarah Tucholsky was playing in the Division II softball championship. She played for Western Oregon and they were playing Central Washington. She stepped to the plate for her turn at bat and she hit her first ever home run in college softball. She takes off running to first base and as she approaches the bag she heard a pop in her knee and fell to the ground, unable to even walk. The medical team began to come out onto the field and the umpire gently stopped them and told them with pain in his voice, "Officially, this run won't count unless she physically touches the bases."

Her teammates came out to carry her around the bases, but the umpire had to stop them and once again painfully explained, "It doesn't work that way. The rules say that if any of your teammates help you the run does not count and you would have to forfeit the game."

Spontaneously, the young woman from the opposing team run over to her and pick her up and begin to carry their opponent around the bases. I think we have a picture of that on the video screen.

SLIDE Sarah Tucholsky carried around bases (Graphic)

They carried her around the bases until she scored her first home run in college softball. The girls who are carrying Sarah around the bases lost in the game, but who do you think really won at the game of life? Who do you think people will remember 10 years from now? For those people who were at the game, what do you think they will remember about that game? Will they remember who won the game or the site of opponents carrying an opposing teammate around the bases even though they lost?

Let me ask you this question.

SLIDE Are you winning or losing at the game of life?

As we wrap this up I want to remind you of a simple and profound truth that we find in the title of John Ortberg's book. When the game of life is over, it all goes back in the box.

Your box may be a pine box. Your box might be made of crushed aluminum, or if you have the money, hand rubbed cherry. If you choose, it could be a small box that is 7" x 3" x 12" deep. But for all of us, it is all going to go back in the box. Then there is a question that becomes very pertinent.

SLIDE What did it all mean?

To help sort that out, we pastors show up at the home of your family members and we sit down together in the living room with the closest family and friends. I say, "Tell me about your loved one. Where were they born? What were their growing up years like? Did they have a career? If you could use a single word to describe them, which word would it be? What were they really like?"

I listen as people begin to tell stories. I'm not doing that just to write their eulogy but I'm listening for their eulogy. I'm listening for their life message and what I love to do is find a Scripture passage which sums that up. **All of us have a life message that we are preaching, whether you realize it or not. Your eulogy is being written right now and how you live your life.** I just try to summarize what I hear, but I'm not the one who makes it up when it comes time to preach the message as part of the funeral.

SLIDE Do like the message that you are preaching now?

How is the sermon going for you in your life? If I sat down with your family and closest friends in your living room, what would they say about you? You can spend too much time asking that question and it becomes really narcissistic, but every once in a while it's good for us to pause and say, "Do I really like this sermon I am preaching with my life right now?"

I preach each sermon for the first time usually on Saturday night at our Saturday night service. There are a few people in that service I asked to give me feedback at the end of the service so I can refine anything I need to before Sunday morning. They look for what points connect and what points don't and where the sermon got too long and when people look like they were going to fall asleep. Sometimes Saturday night goes really well and sometimes I don't feel like I shared what God asked me to share. I'll spend another hour or two Saturday

night redoing part of the sermon so I can get it right so I hopefully can communicate what is I feel like God is asking me to communicate.

This may be your Saturday night. It may be an opportunity for you to ask, "Is this sermon really going the way I wanted to go or is it time to make a change?" You are writing your own eulogy right now with your life. What will they say about you?

In my last church a man named Howard joined the church when he was 83 years old. He had been to church as a young child but had not been to church in almost 80 years when he showed up. He said he felt like something was missing and not only did he join but he became a part of our mission team and he went to Nicaragua on one of our mission trips. He joined in when we worked with Habitat for Humanity building homes near the church for those in need and he helped out almost every day in our pumpkin patch in October out in front of the church which raised money for youth mission trips. Two years after joining the church John had congestive heart failure. On one of our last visits together he talked about how the last two years had been the best two years of his life. In his first 80 years he had lived almost exclusively for himself but in his last few years he gave his life to Jesus Christ and it changed everything. It changed his relationship with his kids and his grandkids and even his ex-wife.

Most of all, it changed his soul. Howard had lost his soul over the course of 80 years and the amazing thing about Jesus is that he can give it back to you in an instant. Jesus is an expert at second chances and at renewing souls. I found John's story inspiring as it shows us that even the last years can be the best of all.

Why do you think John's last years were his best? It's because his last years were spent denying himself, taking up his cross, and following Jesus. One my favorite experiences was watching Howard in the pumpkin patch talking to our youth, many of whom were convinced that winning at life is getting the next gadget or gizmo or seen the latest movie. Howard would sit and listen then he would share his story about how he finally discovered life after doing all those things that he thought would lead to life. It was fascinating to watch the light bulbs go on in their eyes as they realized the living truth sitting in front of them. Howard couldn't physically go with our youth on the summer mission trips, but it was clear that he had made his presence known and we did his funeral the first few rows were filled with young people who were part of Howard's eulogy.

Are you winning or losing at the game of life?

Do you remember that people are more important and possessions or positions?

Let me remind you of one final truth about the game of life. This game of life is just the qualifying round, for the great game which goes on forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. *The Chronicles of Narnia* are seven books written by CS Lewis, several of which have been made into movies. You get to the last book and you've heard the stories of children who have gone back and forth to Narnia. At the end of the last book they die in a tragic train accident.

And then the children wake up in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the epilogue for *The Chronicles of Narnia* as CS Lewis writes these words.

The things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last they were beginning chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever and which every chapter is better than the one before.

Ecclesiastes ends with these words in chapter 12.

SLIDE ***13 That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty.***

It's not whether you win or lose, at least not measured by the world of money or pleasure or power, but it's how you play the game. I invite you to follow the one who is the way the truth and the life.

Would you bow your head and pray with me?

SLIDE **Prayer**

With your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I would like to invite you to simply say something like this...

God, there are times in life where I have really blown it...

I've been too focused on the future and not lived in the present...

I've cared more about success or wealth or pleasure than people...

Too many times I have lived for myself...

Forgive me Lord...

Help me to honor you and live for you...

Help me to deny myself...

To take up my cross...and to follow you...

May my life message be one that's pleasing to you...

In your holy name I pray, amen.