

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Not having full voice, I am asking you to listen more intently for I will be speaking softer.

The sermon will be shorter than normal, at least from my perspective.

1. Life comes from God. Where does life come from? The answer is life comes from God. The Bible tells us about Jesus, "In Him was life." Life on this planet is not due to an accident or a collision of atoms. The origin of life is directly from God. Your life is from God. So why am I making this point? God has given you the breath of life and that is why you exist. Your life is not an accident of the universe. You have more worth than any other part of creation because only human beings are made in the image of God. In God's eyes you are the most valuable part of creation. You have incredible worth for you are made in God's image.

I've been fighting a cold that has affected my voice. On Monday I walked up to Josiah's open door and said, "Would you like to me to breathe on you the breath of death. He politely smiled and said "no." God has given to you the breath of life. Every baby in the womb, every person in the nursing home is as valuable to God as a healthy 30-year-old. Our value is not based on what we do. Our value is based on God creating us in His image; God does not make junk.

God has given to you the gift of life and our primary purpose is to live our lives to bring glory to God. There is nothing that really matters more than the glory of God. I sincerely hope that when I know my days may be few that I live every day to experience God goodness, kindness, grace, mercy and more. I hope I live every day to bring glory to God and not whine about still being alive. Our lives are in God's hands and we live to the glory of God until God takes us home. We don't give up before the race is over. We endure patiently crossing the finish line that God has chosen, and that choice is never ours to make. Living for the glory of God till the last day means we go out winners and not whiners.

My brother still has a fantastic ministry at the nursing home 9 years after our mother died. I did a visit for him over Christmas vacation. No matter what condition a person is in in the nursing home, they have the gift of life and are made in God's image. My grandfather told me before he died, "Terry, never grow old." Well we will all be old someday and some of us are already there. Every day on this earth is a gift from God whether you are healthy or not. Every day is a new day to experience God's faithfulness, even if you have arthritis. Yes, we can get down and feel sorry for ourselves but that is not God's fault. If we learn early in life to rejoice in our suffering as the Bible tells us to, we can make the end of our lives the times to experience God's glory the most. The more we lose control of our lives here the greater we can experience God's control over our lives even when we are in pain. I say in Christ your best days are ahead of you always and I mean in this life. Every day is a new day to experience the grace of God. Be in the Bible now so when your days are numbered you will be able to hear the voice of God louder than ever, God giving his word to you that strengthens your faith for God's faithfulness is new every morning.

To our young people, you go to school every day to give glory to God. Being created in God's image means you represent God at school. Your very purpose is to be in a close relationship with Jesus that brings glory to God. You go to school to enjoy God as His very Presence resides within you. You don't go to be an old poop. You go displaying the work that God is doing in your life.

We have some people in this church who have not grown much in the Lord these last years. Friend, God has given to you the gift of life. Your life comes from God. For whatever reason you have chosen to stay at the same place spiritually or taken a few steps backward. You would not be caught dead in a Bible study or prayer group or men's group or women's group. I challenge you today to take positive steps so your life can bring greater glory to God and you can fulfill the purposes for which you were born. To put it bluntly, please get off your

spiritual duff for God has so much of His life, goodness, kindness, beauty and more for you to experience. But if all you do is sit on it you will miss out why God put you here on this earth.

For the last five years of my mother's life she did not know us at all. From a human point of view her life was rather useless, worthless, producing nothing of value. From a Christian, spiritual point of view, her life was as valuable to God as any of ours. Life is a precious gift from God and God has purpose for us as long as we have breath. I saw the Lord use my mother's illness to bring great glory to God. Her Christian witness was by far brighter than Christians in good health. Her smile was radiant. Her enjoyment of food was contagious. Her illness gave us opportunity to serve Christ by serving her. It gave us a chance to bring glory to God by taking care of her as best we could with her illness. There was such a sense of God's Presence within her. When she breathed her last, she was in the fullness of God's Presence and all according to God's perfect timetable. God determines the number of our days and we are not to mess with that. Sometimes we may want to go home sooner than God's choice. This is God's decision and not ours. Your life has incredible worth from God which leads me to my next point.

God wants to use you for His glory. I remember Eleanor wanting so badly to go home and be with the Lord Jesus. There is a healthy holy longing that every Christian experiences to be with the Lord and out of this world into a much better place. We can tire of all the junk happening around us and long to be with Jesus. There is an inner ache to be with God. The good news is God is with us here. The Holy Spirit resides within every Christian. The Holy Spirit continually renews us on the inside. We may look old on the outside but be completely renewed on the inside. This is why it is so important for us to be growing strong in the Christian faith when we are young, viable, full of energy, vim, and vigor. We put our energy into knowing God on deeper levels year in and year out now and then when get old, we have years of experiencing God to draw from.

One of my favorite shut-ins when we lived in Mt. Olive was in a wheelchair for the last 20 years of her life. Before her stroke in her 50s, she was a ballroom dancer and loved to laugh and dance with her husband. One stroke took all that away from her and her husband became her primary caregiver for the last 20 years. Yes, they had home health nurses too. She could not speak words those last 20 years, but could she ever laugh. She could make hand gestures and that is how she communicated. I brought communion on a regular basis to them for over 8 years. Their relationship as husband and wife was one of the finest that I witnessed. They loved each other so much. Omer and Merle had an unconditional love for each other that never quit. If anything, her illness brought them closer to God and each other. It was a privilege for me to serve as their pastor and laugh with them at every visit. God used her illness for His glory.

Omer called me and asked me to visit Merle in the hospital. I drove up there rather quickly. Arriving at her room Omer asked me to stay with her until he got back because he wanted to speak to the doctor. Now what I am about to tell you really happened. I was writing in my journal, waiting for Omer to return. Merle was sound asleep. An inner prompting told me to look up. Above Merle's head I saw something in my spirit. There was this absolutely beautiful glow above her head, not for the eye to see, but in my spirit I saw it clearly. I was immediately flooded with a sense of joy, overwhelming joy, and it hit me. Jesus is in this room and is taking her home right now. There was a beauty in the room that was breathtaking, a kindness that was overwhelming, a joy unspeakable, and all in an atmosphere of God's holy love. God was very present in the room and was there to usher her home. I could not move. I sat in amazement writing all this in my journal. It was as close to heaven as I have ever experienced up until that time. God is never kinder than in death. I know that as a fact. There is a peace that passes all human understanding. I know that. There is joy unspeakable, I know

that. I also know she left this world according to God's timetable. Even in the wheelchair, her desire to live never waned.

She had learned the secret earlier in life that no matter what happens to you it comes from that hand of God and God wants us to glorify Him in it no matter what.

If you have life, if you are still breathing, God has purpose for you. So, live today for God's purposes. Put to use the spiritual gifts that God has given to you to build up the church, to build up God's people. Please don't just sit on those gifts or complain that the church is not doing enough. Get to work and help in those areas that you see as deficient. God has gifted you for such a time as this. We are here to serve and not be served. There is no such thing as a spiritual gift of criticism. Where you see the church could be doing more please do it and do not expect others to do it. It is up to you to involve yourself. It is easy to be a spectator in the arena and comment on those in the field doing the work. It is time for all of us to get down on the field putting to use our God given gifts to the glory of God.

Your life comes from God. We live to bring glory to God and enjoy God's Presence forever. All human beings are created in God's image. We are the apex of creation which means every human being has incredible worth given by God and to God. The unborn to those who are next to death all have the same worth in God's eyes as the healthiest person alive. As long as we have breath God has purpose for us and nothing matters more than living for the glory of God. Amen and Amen.