

Resist The Exist Part 1

The Tragedy of Not Really Living

Romans 12:9-13

Memory Verses: Revelation 3:1

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Everyone loves a rags to riches; zero to hero story. Someone who can overcome a slow and unimpressive start to finish on top is epic and inspiring. But what about the opposite? What about a bright shining star that burns so hot that in the end it burns out? Someone who's movie has a great first and second act but falls apart in the finale? Makes me think of someone like Howard Hughes.

Howard Hughes was a talent larger than life. An inventor in his teenage years. A movie producer and aeronautical engineer in his twenties and thirties. And a billionaire tycoon in his fifties. He produced some of the most famous movies of the twenties and thirties including *Hells Angels* and *Scarface*. He survived 4 plane crashes, created the largest aircraft at the time; the H-4 Hercules (also known as the Spruce Goose), broke the airspeed record, and flew around the world in a record breaking 91 hours. He also dated all of the famous women of his time including Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth, Ginger Rogers, and Katharine Hepburn. Very few American Icons have ever reached the heights of Hughes' cultural influence and fame. To many Hughes is more than an icon, he's a legend.

But, that's not all a good thing. Unfortunately the most notable part of Hughes' legend is the fact that he spent the better part of his last 30 years in seclusion. He would lock himself in his bedroom for months on end watching his old films on repeat and rearranging Kleenex boxes into towers. He wouldn't cut his finger nails, hair or even shower. If you know the stories, he did even weirder stuff than this... all as a recluse, cut off from society, cut off from living. He went from thriving to merely surviving. He is the epitome of a fallen star burnt out on high living.

How would you characterize the last years of Hughes' legend? There's only one word that comes to my mind. Existing. He went from existing to live to living to exist. Though he lived into his 70's he really stopped living in his 40's. So what happened? What changed? There are tons of theories. He had chronic pain from his plane crashes, he had OCD, he had had enough of the limelight. Regardless... a switch got flipped where this larger than life icon decided to stop moving forward and basically give up. In his early life he woke up to make movies, invent radios, and fly around the world. In the end he woke up to watch movies and stack tissue boxes. In the end he simply lived to exist.

It's a sad story. It really is. But if we were not careful Howard's story can become our story. As a church and as individuals.

As a church we've had over four years of strong direction, vision, transformation, and momentum. We've reorganized, rebuilt, and relaunched... and back in March of last year we were flying high with great attendance, 20 new families, and lots of excitement. But then Covid. And things have been different since. Some of it on purpose of course to slow the spread of the disease, but some not so much. There is no denying that the some of this change has produced a mentality shift. Let me ask you a question; in a pandemic, is church essential or is it unnecessary?

To start the new year I really wanted to start with a different series, but in all honesty I thought it might be wasted because lets be honest... we are still in a Covid mentality... and may be for sometime. And so, what I think we need now is to focus on our mental. Do we as a church have a strong mental game or a weak mental game? What do I mean by a strong mental game? Well in sports, you are considered to have a strong mental game if when things go wrong you are able to keep from giving up and falling apart. If the other team comes out and scores two quick touchdowns do you roll over or do you keep fighting to make a comeback? Teams with weak mental will fold like a lawn chair as soon as they make one mistake or things start to go wrong.

And you know where a weak mental game leads? Existing. Simply existing. Running out the clock. Not caring about finishing strong. At first, mediocrity... then apathy... and then fatality. And I've said it since the day I became your pastor... I refuse to do that. We cannot accept mediocrity, we can not allow apathy... or we will die. So many church's keep their doors open til the last person and the last penny are gone... merely existing, simply surviving for decades. I don't think that glorifies God... not in the slightest. We must keep pressing forward... we must resist the exist.

And as individuals... for you personally; the Christian life can get long, hard, monotonous, and unexciting. In fact for many the excitement only lasts for a couple days. When you first come to Christ there is a fire, and sense of elation, but as time wears on and temptations creep in and the frustrations of life stack up that fire starts to flicker and burn less hot. It's not uncommon to see many people come to Christ and then simply run out the clock for the rest of their lives, waiting on that train to heaven with a golden ticket and very little fruit. Let's be honest... most Christians simply exist. I say Resist. Resist the exist with every fiber of your being. You need to resist the urge to give up, to run out the clock, to stop engaging, to stop sharing, to stop serving, to stop reaching. That's not what God has called you to... that's not the legacy Jesus died to pass onto you. You were made to burn hot, go hard, and live fiercely for Christ until your last breathe.

Look with me at our main passage for this series; **Romans 12:9-13**. Here we see 5 exhortations that encourage us to keep moving forward in our

faith. These 5 exhortations make it clear that we cannot settle into a mode of simply existing. They remind us that we must resist the exist. They remind me of my favorite movie quote of all time, from one of my favorite movies of all time; Braveheart, when Mel Gibson's William Wallace tells his friends who want him to simply take it easy and be safe or he will die. He says; "All men die, not all men really live." This morning I want to encourage you that... **The greatest tragedy in this life is not dying... the greatest tragedy is not really living.** This morning I want to briefly go over these five exhortations to resist the exist and then over the next five weeks we will look at them in greater detail.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first exhortation in order to resist the exist is... **Hold Fast To What Is Good (vs9).** When we settle into the mindset of merely existing it becomes much easier to ignore evil. Then before long you notice that you start tolerating evil. And then in the end you may even embrace evil. When we exist we become callous to the sin in our own lives and tend to back-slide. The commands in the Word to remain pure become less important and it becomes much harder to hold fast to what is good.

The state of existing is a state of apathy, of not caring. And one of the first things you stop caring about is the fight. The Christian life is not easy. Resisting temptation is not easy. For those who are existing... why fight, why try to remain pure, why refrain from giving into temptation any longer... what's the point. When our defenses go down.. the enemy will attack... and prevail. Notice verse 9 says that we are to have a genuine love. A genuine love for Christ will not stop fighting against sin because it recognizes that the love of Christ never stopped fighting for us.

If you look at your life and recognize that you have stopped caring about the sin in your own life and in the lives of your friends... you have settled into a mentality of simply existing... you've stopped really living

The second exhortation is... **Outdo One Another In Love (vs10).** There's a big difference between loving people whenever it's convenient for you and loving people above and beyond what's normal. The Bible says outdo one another in loving one another. We aren't to simply love... we are to outdo one another in love. It's interesting language that we don't see anywhere else in the bible; Paul is saying that we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ relentlessly. We never stop trying to love them more than they love us.

Of course this stands in stark contrast to someone who has given up. There's relentless on one end of the spectrum... their's retired on the other end. One says... i'll never stop trying to show you love and serve you... the other says.. I've done my part.. now it's time to take it easy. It's obvious, if one is simply existing... they've stopped trying to outdo one

another in love. They've stopped serving their friends, they've stopped encouraging their church. In fact the opposite is more likely; they're probably waiting on someone to come and love them, serve them. They feel they've spent enough time loving others... now it's time for someone to love them... otherwise they don't care. But it's clear... when you aren't relentlessly pursuing loving others... you aren't really living.

The third exhortation... **Remain Passionate For The Lord (vs11).** Unfortunately a passion for the Lord seems to be the first thing to go in one who has settled into a mentality of existing. Bible reading becomes sparse, prayer becomes a last resort, and worship becomes non-existent. Paul calls it slothful – lazy. Is there anything more unattractive than a lazy faith. Someone who claims to love Jesus but has no evidence to support that claim. And unfortunately it seems to be the modus operandi for most American church goers today. They are apathetic in their faith. They are what old school baptists may have called; the frozen chosen. It's hard to tell the difference between their worship services and their funeral services. That's why someone who really loves Jesus stands out. **A zeal for God is apparent within a culture of passionless worshippers.** When you are lazy in your desire for God and the spiritual disciplines, which show your love for him... you aren't really living.

Fourthly... we are encouraged to **Persevere In Prayer (vs12).** It's simple, throughout the Bible, God constantly calls us to not give up when things get hard. It's kind of like our signature move as believers. We love others genuinely and we have a hope that perseveres through hardship. But of course it's easier said than done. When things get hard... our first response is to shelter up and try to exist. We say.. okay... im out. But God says, remain patient, wait on the Lord and he will come through. We are to rejoice in the hope of God's help; God's salvation even though it hasn't come just yet.

How can we do this? We must remain in a state of prayer. We must show our dependence on our God's power and ability to come through by staying in contact with him in prayer. The more we pray the more we show we depend on God to deliver us. There's an old cliché, perhaps the oldest, it says; when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Well, when Christians remain hopeful in prayer through hard times God is glorified. When we give up, the world sees our God as weak. We must resist the urge to give up... we must resist the exist... cause when the world causes you to give up... you are no longer really living.

Lastly... we are exhorted to **Serve Others Sacrificially (vs13).** When we stop caring about the needy, and the less fortunate it is a clear indicator that we've settled into a mindset of existing. Existing means... we

care about ourselves and our own livelihood... but not so much the livelihoods of others – its a selfish mentality. When the saints stop giving, when a church becomes inward focused with their funds it is a sure sign of simply existing. If you aren't worried about the livelihood of those around you then you aren't really living.

Application

The point is clear this morning. It is easy to fall into the mentality of simply existing. Perhaps you've lost momentum in you walk with Christ. Perhaps you've lost some of your fire. If you lean into these 5 exhortations you can rebuild a strong mental, you can reclaim some of that fire... and you can find a reason to start living again.

Revelation chapter 3 speaks of the church at Sardis. Look with me at **Rev 3:1**. The church at Sardis had a reputation of being alive but were in fact dead. That's my biggest fear for Stone Creek. I'd hate for us to keep going.. keep existing as a church... but we aren't really alive. Iwe cannot simply maintain, we can't simply survive... we must thrive; we must be alive. And so, not matter what is going on, Covid, sickness, hardships... we must resist the exist. **The greatest tragedy in this life is not dying... the greatest tragedy is not really living.** It's time for you as an individual to reclaim a mentality of really living for Christ, and it's time for Stone Creek Church to really come alive – it's time to resist the exist.

Conclusion

Let me leave you with this... a story that made a huge impact on me as a college freshman. John Piper tells a story of an old Reader's Digest article where a couple works hard for 50 years and accumulates enough wealth to retire on the beach where they spend the rest of their lives collecting sea shells. Then he tells another story of two women who also retire, but instead of buying a beach house and living out the rest of their lives taking it easy and running out the clock... they spent their last years as missionaries in Cameroon serving the needy and sharing the Gospel. At 80 years old both women were traveling to a village to do ministry work when their bus went off a cliff. They both died instantly. And then John Piper asks the same question that I want to ask you this morning; which one is a tragedy. That two women in their 80's died serving Christ or that two people in their 50's decided to spend the rest of their lives collecting sea shells? It's pretty clear to me... it should be pretty clear to you. When we choose to stop living for Christ... we've chosen to merely exist... and that is a tragedy. **The greatest tragedy in this life is not dying... the greatest tragedy is not really living**