

“Fear God, Know God, Seek God”

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Good morning! I'm excited about sharing God's Word and a little bit of testimony with you this morning. I didn't memorize it this time though, so I won't be doing a dramatic recitation for you this morning. I've been studying the gospel of Luke chapter 12: how it relates to my life and how it's changing me, so I'm going to focus on some passages from Luke chapter 12 today. And I'm going to jump right in.

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At the end of chapter 11 Jesus had just finished reprimanding the religious leaders in Judea for neglecting justice and for neglecting the love of God. He tells them that they have removed the key to knowledge from the people. In verse 52 he says, *“You don't enter the Kingdom yourselves, and you prevent others from entering.”* Chapter 11 ends with the religious leaders trying to trap Jesus in His own words so that they could then use His own words against Him.

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In Chapter 12 there are 3 passages that are making a huge impact in my life. There are 3 ideas that Jesus teaches the many thousands of people that had gathered in Judea to hear Him that I've been pondering. First, He warns the people about the Pharisees' hypocrisy and He urges them to fear God. Then Jesus encourages the people to have a rich relationship with God - to know God. And later, Jesus encourages the crowds to seek the Kingdom of God. **Fear God, know God, seek God.** Some of this information was the key to knowledge that the religious leaders in Judea were keeping from the people. I

hope to encourage you today to listen to what God is telling us through His word and ultimately to obey what He says.

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Number one: Fear God.

Luke 12:1-3 says, *“Meanwhile, the crowds grew until thousands were milling about and stepping on each other. Jesus turned first to his disciples and warned them, “Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees - their hypocrisy. The time is coming when everything that is covered up will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. So, Jesus tells us to watch out for the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. He’s warning us not to be like them - not to be hypocritical, because there will be no secrets kept from God.*

Everything that is said in secret will be revealed in the light. All of your deepest, darkest, most intimate secrets that no one else knows about are made transparent before God. He knows everything about you including your thoughts so there’s no use trying to hide things from Him. God is omniscient - He’s all-knowing.

Now, I really wanted to zero in on verses 4 and 5. Listen to this: Jesus says, *“Dear friends, don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. But I’ll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into Hell. Yes, he’s the one to fear.”* Fear God - it sounds kind of scary doesn’t it? What does it mean to fear God? I don’t think it means to be afraid of God. I think fearing and being afraid are different. Fearing God is acknowledging His attributes, His holiness, and to be reverent and contrite before Him. I believe part of fearing is worshipping - giving Him all glory and honor and praise for who He is - to be in awe of who He is. You wouldn’t accept something that you’re afraid of. If you were afraid of God it would be very difficult to have a rich relationship with Him.

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So why should we fear God? God is infinite and we are finite - that's one good reason. He's the Great I Am, the Beginning and the End; the Alpha and the Omega. He's forever; we are not. Our time here on earth is running out. We are like the blink of an eye. Our physical lives are going by very quickly. Our time is ending. This is a good reason to fear God.

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My wife Tammie and I moved to Campbell River with our 2 month old daughter 20 years and 3 months ago. That's so hard to believe for us because time has gone by so fast. In that time we've seen a lot of changes in Campbell River. 20 years ago the mill and the mine were the biggest employers, Dogwood Street ended at Hilchey Road and where we live now used to be a beautiful forest - just 20 years ago. K-Mart still existed in the mall.

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There was no Timmies, no Starbucks, no Superstore, no Discovery Shopping Centre, no Canadian Tire, no Walmart, no London Drugs, and no Home Depot. Some of you probably can't even imagine that. We've also seen a lot of change in our church. During our first year in Campbell River the Baptist Church was on McLean Street where the Salvation Army Church is now located. When I first started volunteering in the music ministry, leading with the guitar was discouraged and a drum set was not even allowed on the stage. Back then the piano was chosen as the only lead instrument. So times have changed very quickly. Not too long ago I served as the music director here for 3 years. My first year was with Pastor Randy, my second year was with Pastor Robin, and my third year was during Pastor Jeff's first year, so I witnessed a lot of change in a very short amount of time for this church. And things have continued to change since then.

There are lots of new ministry opportunities and new families and new people. These are all good changes.

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I really like the countdown clock we have now that they project on the screens before the service - that's new. I think it's such a great idea to let people know how much time is left before the service starts. I guess if you've always been late you would not know that it exists, but it's there. When that clock hits zero, I like to be in my seat. I'm a very time sensitive person. They put a 5 minute countdown on for our coffee break time too, in case you didn't know. So while the clock is running and I'm visiting in the foyer, I'm thinking about how I need to get back before the time runs out. And I really don't like to be late, so in order for me to feel like I'm on time I really need to be about 10 minutes early - I'm one of those people. This has caused some problems from time to time throughout my marriage, as you can imagine. However, no matter what type of person you are, time never stops. As humans we are constantly running out of time.

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The average life expectancy in Canada right now is 82 years. The moment you are born the countdown clock for your life on earth starts to count down from approximately 82 years. Your days here on earth are very limited. We are all going to die physically. Your countdown clock is going to reach zero. Your days are numbered like the hairs on your head.

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In Luke 12, verse 7, Jesus says, "*the very hairs on your head are all numbered, so don't be afraid.*" If God knows the number of hairs we have on our head, He must know the exact number of days that we are alive on earth. I'll bet He knows the exact number of minutes and seconds we all have until our final breath. Then, when we die, we are

suddenly in His presence. This is another good reason to fear God - not to be afraid, but to fear Him.

Now, when we die and enter the spiritual realm we will be face to face with Jesus and we will finally understand everything perfectly and completely.

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Listen, 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, "**Now** we see things imperfectly ('now' - meaning our life on earth) *like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but **then** we will see everything with perfect clarity* ('then' - meaning our life after death, our spiritual life).

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*All that I know **now** is partial and incomplete, but **then** I will know everything completely, just as God **now** knows me completely.*" The NIV says, "*For **now** we see only a reflection as in a mirror; **then** we shall see face to face.*" Face to face with the living God, Almighty God. Think about that.

You see, we don't know **now** as much as we think we know. This is another good reason to fear God. And, despite the fact that we are made in God's image, the minds of men and women are weak and easily corrupted. We hardly know anything about spiritual things because we are stuck here in the "not yet." Don't be a fool thinking that you've got it all figured out now. You can spend your whole life studying and acquiring knowledge and degrees esteemed by men, but if you don't fear God, it means nothing.

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Psalm 111:10 says '*Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom.*' Luke 12:5 says, "*But I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he's the one to fear.*" In other words, humans can only kill flesh and blood. No human has or ever will have the power to do anything to you after you die. After you die only God can decide the fate of your soul, so we need to fear Him. These

verses are a warning for all of us. The clock is ticking. Your days are numbered and, if you fear Him, that's good news - it should bring you peace.

Number one: Fear God.

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Number two: Know God.

Know God. What does it mean to know Him? Jesus tells this short story about a rich man in Luke chapter 12 verses 16-21. He says, *“A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’ But God said to him,*

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*‘You fool! You will die **this very night**. Then who will get everything you worked for?’ “Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”* Jesus tells us that if we spend all our time and efforts improving our life on earth instead of having a rich relationship with God, we're fools. A person is a fool to become rich on earth and not know God.

While you are on earth you can spend all your days acquiring things - money, power, and wisdom, but if you don't believe and confess that you believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son sent to earth to save you from your own sin, you have nothing.

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Because you are taking nothing with you. Everything that you've acquired here, all of the accomplishments you've made, every physical possession you have, all stays here.

In fact, you can be the best at whatever it is you do; the best athlete, doctor, lawyer, government official; you can have private jets, condos and houses all over the world; you can have bodyguards and fashion gurus to dress you and do your hair. None of it matters when you suddenly enter the spiritual realm the same way you entered the physical realm - naked, completely vulnerable, and with nothing. You will take nothing with you on your journey to the spiritual realm **except** what is in your heart. That's all you will carry with you - whatever your heart is filled with. This begs the question, what is in your heart?

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Will you take anger, bitterness, deceit, shame? Or will you carry love, joy, peace, the fruits of God's spirit?

When I was in grade 6, aged 12, my best friend turned to me in Math class and asked me, "Do you think you're going to heaven?" He said it just like that. I told him that I thought I would because I was a pretty good kid and I didn't get in a lot of trouble. He said, "No, if you don't believe in Jesus Christ and tell God you're sorry for all the bad stuff you've done, you're going to go to hell and burn there forever." I can remember him saying that like it was yesterday. I can remember that my response that day was immediate. That day after school I went home and asked God to forgive me for all the bad stuff that I had done and said, and I believed in Jesus Christ. It was so crystal clear in my mind as a kid what I needed to do. I'm pretty sure that the fear of burning in hell forever was the primary motivation to my first step of faith but I wasn't trying to use my human mind to understand all spiritual things. I think that's why God tells us to believe like little children.

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In Matthew 18:3 Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven.”* This was my first step of faith and the beginning of my relationship with God.

So, what are we doing now? Are we investing in the physical realm or are we thinking about the spiritual realm? Are we planning ahead? I believe Scripture is telling us to put more importance on preparing for the eternal life. Or have we forgotten about the eternal? Do we conveniently forget? Are we wasting our limited time? What should we be doing if it's not working hard for the things that we have now and the accomplishments that we make for ourselves and for our families? I forget all the time that my physical life is very brief. Listen to the apostle Paul in this passage from

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1 Corinthians 15:50- He says, *“What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.”*

Many of the things that I want to do or become seem like really great things if I were to live on earth forever. But I'm 47 so I'm past the halfway point statistically. I've only got about 35 years left.

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That's 12,775 days. 306,600 hours. That's only about 204,400 hours that I'm awake. But I'm trying not to be worried, because I do confess that Jesus Christ is the Savior of my life, and I believe that he died and came back to life to save everyone who believes and asks forgiveness for their sins. He wants to forgive us all despite the fact that

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we've all betrayed Him - not just Judas. It's so important to take that step of faith - to repent and follow Jesus. This is what it says in

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Luke 12 verses 8-10 “ *I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God's angels.*”

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But anyone who denies me here on earth will be denied before God's angels.”

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And in John 6:47 Jesus says, “*I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life.*” We need to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ! The heavenly realms do exist! Colossians 1:15-16 - “*Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.*”

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He made the things we can see and the things we can't see...” We need to spend more of our time on earth developing a rich relationship with God instead of enriching our earthly lives with finite things.

If you don't know Jesus Christ this morning I urge you to repent and believe in Him, and if you do know Him I want to encourage you to develop your relationship with Him through prayer and studying and obeying his word. Prayer is the best way to remind yourself that God is with you and that He is totally accessible even though He is Almighty. He is there for you and He is listening. He does answer prayer - I can testify to that. I've leaned on Him and asked Him to help me through very difficult times in my

life, and he's answered my prayers by giving me peace and joy in my heart that I had never known was possible. He's not a silent partner and we shouldn't be either. He wants to give us all of His good gifts. He wants to give us the Kingdom - that makes Him happy. We need to fear Him but we also need to talk to Him and develop our relationship with Him. It's hard to remember, but it's so incredibly important to take the time to be with God and to talk to God. He's waiting for you. He's calling you. Don't fool yourself into thinking that you're too busy. Get to know Him.

Number one: Fear God. Number two: Know God.

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Number three: Seek God.

Luke 12:31 says, "*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else...*" How do we seek God's Kingdom? What should we be doing to accomplish this? To seek means to look for, but God's Kingdom is unseen - so what does this mean? Let's back up a bit. Verses 22-23 says, "*That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life, whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing.*" Life is more than food. I believe the main reason Jesus emphasizes this is because we are so concerned about the things that enrich our lives here and now - our physical lives even though our short life on earth pales in comparison to our eternal life. You see, we don't live like we really understand why we're made. This life is not meant to be our focus.

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In verses 29 and 30 Jesus says, "*...don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. **Don't worry about such things.** These things dominate the thoughts of **unbelievers** all over the world...*" Our 82 years here on earth is not meant to be all there is - there's more. This life just gives us an opportunity to get to know God, tell others about Him, and enjoy Him before we meet Him face to face. There's so much more to

come when our physical bodies have returned to dust. So the question becomes - what should we be doing now to prepare for our life after we die? If we're not going to focus on acquiring finite things, what should we be focussed on?

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In verse 33 Jesus says, "*Sell your possessions and give to those in need.*" Jesus says get rid of some stuff. Now, most of us have way too much stuff and having too much stuff makes us unthankful for the stuff that we do have. The more stuff we acquire the less thankful we are to have it. Get rid of some stuff today. Sell it; give it away; get rid of it.

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Streamline your physical life to make room for a rich spiritual life.

I've always admired the way that the apostle Paul was able to articulate his desire to be with Christ. He was so ready to die for Him and to be with Him. The physical realm and the physical body for Paul was just a means to get to God - to suffer with Him and to live and die for Him. Paul was never trying to cling to this life. He was never trying to make things better or easier for himself because he knew that his life was fleeting. He was so aware of his limited time - his countdown clock. His only mission on earth was to preach Christ to as many people as he possibly could before his death. His passion was for the eternal and He had this ability to live with such an awareness of the spiritual realm - the things unseen.

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In Philippians 1:21 he says, "*For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.*"

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Verse 23: "*I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.*"

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Chapter 3 verse 8, *“Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him.”* Paul knew what was going on around Him and what the battle in this life was really about. He never tried to create heaven on earth for himself because he knew that it was pointless. He knew that the earth and the people in it were fading. Live for Christ and tell as many people as you can before your days are done. That’s it, Paul didn’t have time for anything else. Every minute was used for the Kingdom of God. I don’t know about you but I completely confess that I’m not there yet. I’m still living for this life. For most of my time, I’m still working to try to make my life and the life of my family better for the right here and now. Can you relate to that? That’s why we all have too much stuff, right? I wish I had Paul’s focus. I wish I had Paul’s desire to live and die for the sake of Jesus Christ. I wish I was more aware of the Kingdom of God - the things unseen.

There are other things that we can be doing, in addition to getting rid of some stuff as we seek God’s Kingdom. There are other ways to spend our limited time.

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Ephesians 6:10-13 says, *“A final word: **Be strong** in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to **stand firm** against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.”* This is a graphic reminder about the things that exist that are unseen. We can’t see them. We are reminded once again of the spiritual realm. We are reminded that we are not living only in the physical world, but also among the spiritual one right now. These Scriptures are reminding us as believers to stand firm and be strong. Verse 13 says, *“Therefore, put on every piece of God’s*

*armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be **standing firm.***”

“**Stand your ground.**” “Stand your ground.” That sounds like an epic war movie when they shout, “Hold the line!” Some of you have heard Mel Gibson and Russell Crowe shouting that: “Hold the line!” “Stand your ground!” And that’s what Jesus is telling us to do - stand firm, hold the line against our unseen enemy, the devil. As believers we have the power to do that. I’ve noticed that many Christians don’t seem to want to acknowledge the devil or hell anymore. I have a couple of Christian friends, strong Christian men that have rich relationships with Jesus and have had a huge, spiritual impact in my life. Both of them have recently told me that they no longer believe in hell. They think everyone is going to be with God when they die regardless of whether they believe in Jesus or repent from sin. They believe everyone will be with God in the end because there’s just no way He could send anyone to Hell. That’s what they believe now. These are a couple of my Christian friends. You see, I believe that’s how the devil works: He seduces you and deceives you and you start to believe, because he’s the father of lies. Make no mistake, the devil wants to destroy you and your family - he’s bent on that. He wants to take you out because that is his purpose. He wants to tempt you with things that you might not be able to resist unless you stand your ground. Stand firm. Persevere. Hold the line because your days here are almost done. The clock is ticking. Your days are numbered.

In conclusion, I’d like to share two things that I can testify to that are changing my life and enriching my relationship with God as I try to seek Him.

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The first is praying in the power of Jesus’ name. We can pray in the powerful name of Jesus Christ. In this world, we can wield the power of Jesus’ name against the devil and his army and stand firm against any evil in the unseen world - we can resist any temptation of sin through the power of Christ and the power of the blood that He spilled

on the cross. When you feel like you're being attacked or oppressed by the enemy of this world, stand your ground and pray against the authorities of the unseen world as the Scriptures suggest. I'm still a sinner and I'm nowhere near where I could be in my relationship with Christ, but praying like this has given me the power and the strength I need to fight against temptation and sin. I want to encourage you, before you ask or rely on someone else to pray for you, make sure to also pray for yourself. Your relationship with Jesus is not a free pass against the temptation to sin. The devil will still tempt you even if you have a rich relationship with Jesus - maybe even more. The devil tempted Jesus when he was in the desert and he'll tempt you too. Ask God for the power to stand firm. Pray with authority against the powers of darkness that surround you. God's Word tells us that we are not fighting against flesh and blood. We are in a constant battle with the devil and his army. Stand firm. Stand your ground. Hold the line believers!

The second thing that I do to renew my mind and my heart and feel strong in my relationship with the Lord is

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memorize scripture. God's Word always has a way of keeping me centered - keeping me balanced - when I'm disciplined enough to be mindful of it. Scripture has a way of immediately lifting me out of whatever pit I'm in. God's Word is powerful and when I memorize it and speak it out loud it becomes even more powerful in my heart and my mind. I become more aware of God's Kingdom and the things unseen, and my mind is more focussed on things above. I really want to encourage you to hide God's Word in your hearts today. It doesn't have to be a whole book of the Bible, or a chapter or even a passage. Just start with one short verse that will encourage you when you feel down. If you think you can't memorize a verse of Scripture, stop and think about how you memorized the happy birthday song. How did that happen? How do you know the lyrics of so many of your favorite songs? It's because you've sung them in your car hundreds of times. So that's the secret - you have to be persistent. I think of Scripture

like a song. You have to say it over and over until you just know it. It's hard at first, but then add another short verse. Say them out loud when you're driving or when you're alone.

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In Psalm 119:11 David says, "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*"

And Colossians 3:16 says, "*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, **fill your lives...***"

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We've talked about 3 things this morning: Fearing God, knowing God, and seeking God. These 3 are going to take some of your time, but this is time well-spent. And you will want to make sure that you practice all 3 of these, not just 1 or 2, because they work together to prepare you for eternity. There is strength when all 3 of these are working together as one.

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Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us of this truth: a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. Let's pray.