

# Know How to Die

## Michael J. Wilkins

Announcer:

I have some potential good news for somebody, and that is the announcement of the Clarence Erickson Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship will provide five hundred dollars a year for one student. And you can get an application from Ellis. She's on the front pew. And it's, uh, Mr. secretary. And it's quite a deal. So we are hoping that one of our people will take advantage of that.

Also our excellent student body officers are providing a donut chapel for us after, uh, after the chapel's time. And, it is I wish I could say everybody, but it is for the Talbot graduate students. So that is something that we are interested in.

And at this time, the seminary wives have a very particular kind of announcement, and give your attention to this.

(Video until 05:33)

We all know that God created the universe, but we need to remember that He is the same God who called you and me. Hymn No. 24.

(Music until 7:58)

Wilkins – Know How to Die

Would you remain standing please, when Dr. Doug Geivett leads us in prayer?

R. Douglas Geivett:

Let's pray. Father, today is a day of new beginnings for us when we have welcomed students and faculty and staff to our community for the first time. And during this semester, you have work for us to dare and to do. Our future on this earth is uncertain; our destiny is secure. Even our present is sometimes confusing, but we rely on the strength of your mercy for all that we do. We study and we teach by your mercy. Our breathing depends on you. Every breath we take is by your permission.

We thank you for that. And we pray that these sobering thoughts will teach us this morning to prepare to do our work with courage, the right kind of ambition for your glory. And now we want to thank you for our dean Mike Wilkins, for the gift that you have given him to open your word for us this morning. Help us to quiet our hearts so that we are prepared for the message, prepared to understand, to discern, to be obedient. And we thank you for your gift to us in allowing ourselves to enjoy the exercise of Mike's gift this morning. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Announcer:

Talbot is very blessed in having a number of world class scholars, and one of the finest, perhaps the best known of them, is our dean of faculty. And I don't want to take any more of his time. Dr. Wilkins.

(Applause until 10:16)

Michael J. Wilkins:

One of the nice things that happens when I leave here and go home is that I'm just Mike, dad, and now grandpa. So, I've learned not to take myself too seriously. But what has become a, a lifelong motto for me now is I've learned not to take myself too seriously, but I've learned to take God's calling upon my life with deadly seriousness. And that's really what we're all about, isn't it?

I'd like to add my welcome to all of you, and new faculty John McKinley. Where's John? I saw... John is a brand new faculty member for us. He's here. We have other faculty returning from sabbatical. Those are the ones who are somewhat, uh, depressed this morning.

And we have lots of new students. And I'd like to welcome you the new students. I always enjoy the new student banquet. But I had to go out of town this last week, and I missed the banquet. So to you new students welcome to you.

The reason why I, I had to miss the banquet this year was that my wife Lynne who is here. And she said that I can't tell you where she is, except she's in about the fourth row back there in the green top. So I didn't say where you were, Lynney. Anyway, my wife Lynne and I, we had, we just returned from a trip to Portland Oregon, where a lot of my family have moved over the years. It was quite a unique trip. My mother also lives there now. She developed breast cancer about four years ago, and it's now, uh... How is it said...? Metastasized into bone cancer. She

turned eighty last December, this last month. And the doctors had told her, they just said bluntly, "You should begin planning your memorial service."

Now my mother has a remarkably good attitude about all this. She's a believer and she has absolutely no fear about her future. So she has set about planning her memorial service. She asked one of her doctors, who's a believer, too he's that the internist who actually found the bone cancer. He, she asked her doctor to sing at her memorial service. She selected the passages of Scripture to be read. She chose music to be played, the hymns to be sung. And as she went along planning this memorial service, she started thinking this is going to be such a great service. I wish that I could be there. Said, I'd love to hear my doctor sing. I'd love to hear Edelweiss, that's one of the songs she wanted played song. I'd love to hear scripture read.

So as she talked to her pastors, they all decided that they would have the service right away, so that my mother could attend. So, this last weekend, Lynne and I flew to Portland for my mother's memorial service. It was one of the strangest things that I've ever done, giving, giving the eulogy for my mother with her sitting right there, taking it all in. And she just loved every bit of it. She just enjoyed so much hearing all those nice things being said about her. And she was just absolutely the center of attention and loved every minute of it.

Now what was interesting is that nobody there had ever heard of anything like it. But as I talked to different people, a lot of them started, "That's a great idea." There are a lot of older people there, and I could just see them starting to jot down what they would like at their memorial service.

During the service, I leaned over and said to my mom, who has a great sense of humor. I said, "You know, Mom, you'd better not recover after all of this." She just laughed. You know, I, I still don't know how I really feel about all of it. But what struck me during the service that this was, it was a, a remarkable demonstration of the fact that we, as believers, really need to know not only how to live, but to be well-prepared to know how to die.

As my mother faces her impending death, and it could be within weeks, we don't know, she was giving all of us her last bit of guidance. And she loves to give guidance. The pastor, who gave the message, interviewed my mother, and my mother wanted to share some last bits of advice to all of us.

My mom has lived one of the toughest lives that I know, starting at the age of three until she was sixteen. She spent most of her childhood in the tuberculosis ward at Orthopedic Hospital in Los Angeles. She had tuberculosis of the bone, quite rare, which required her to be in a body cast most of her childhood. But what she remem-, remembered the most was the kindness of the doctors and the nurses around her. And she, while she was that young little girl in the hospital most of her life, she learned a lifelong lesson that has guided her life, and she passed on to all of us. She said, "The one thing that I would wish for all of you is to be kind to each other." Sounds a lot like Paul.

So I went away from my mother's memorial service with several mixed feelings. I'm not sure that I'm going to plan to attend my own memorial service. But I was struck and knew that we, of all

people, can face each day with the courage and the confidence that whatever comes our way, we know our ultimate future. And because we know our future, we can look back over our lives and objectively view ourselves, the good and the bad. And we can give guidance to those who will follow.

I've been spending a lot of time studying the apostle Peter's two little letters. And this is a perspective that I believe drives Peter's reasons for writing. The letters were written by Peter while he was in Rome, toward the end of his own life, just a year or less before he was executed by the Roman government. Peter writes to give last guidance to those who would follow. And he writes especially to leaders.

If you have your Bible, take and turn, if you would, to 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 12. 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 12. For those you haven't read it recently, it's toward the end of the New Testament.

Peter facing his own death in about a year, less than a year, now at 2 Peter. He writes 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 12, "Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind."

And then in another very well-known passage, in 1 Peter chapter 5, just a few pages earlier. 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 1 through 5, passage that is immediately relevant for each of us this morning. Peter writes, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Powerful passage that gives us an indication of Peter's passing words for those. In less than a year from the writing of these words, Peter faces his own death. And what we have here is an inside look at his heart as he reflects upon his own life and experiences and gives guidance to those who are going to follow. And this is a passage that is immediately relevant for each one of us, because in it Peter gives guidance to us in all of our motivations for ministry.

Why do we do the things that we do? Why are you going into ministry, if that's God's direction for you? And what motivates those of us who are already in ministry? Unless we examine carefully why we do what we do, our motivations will surely lead us to failure. And Peter has seen the failure of many people in leadership. He has seen the leaders of Israel fail as they reject and condemn Messiah Jesus. He has seen the failure of Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve as he

betrays Jesus to those religious leaders. But Peter has also witnessed his own failure as the leader of the Twelve, when he denied his Lord Jesus.

So as Peter reflects back upon his own life and experiences, he gives three words of advice in verses 2 and 3 to those are in leadership, the elders who are to shepherd and give oversight to God's sheep. Notice that there are three parallel admonitions in verses 2 and 3 that each modify the exhortation to shepherd and exercise oversight. First, they are to shepherd not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God. Second, not for sordid gain, but with eagerness. And third, nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Now, each of these admonitions are directed toward those in leadership positions as elders, but they provide rich material for anyone whom God has put into a position of leadership, including virtually every person here.

Notice that Peter first describes three motivations that will lead to failure. And then he gives three reverse characteristics that I believe reveal corresponding positive motivations, each of which I also believe are rooted in Peter's own experiences. Both positive and negative. And it's three, these three positive motivations that will accomplish God's purposes in our lives as leaders, whether now or in the future, to look deeply into our own heart and say "why do we do what we do?"

Let's look at each of these three very quickly. First of all, elders are not shepherd under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God. Faulty motivation is when we lead, because we are under compulsion, which can come from a variety of sources. We can be compelled to take leadership by outside forces, such as when those in leadership over us force it upon us. And we feel the pressure to lead just because it's expected of us, or because no one else will, or no one has the ability. Or we can be compelled to take leadership by our, our own inner issues, as when we need the approval of other leaders. Or because we want to please other people, who think that we should be in a position of leadership.

But when we lead out of external or internal compulsion, we run the very real danger of failure through burnout or oftentimes by simply running away. But the proper characteristic is when we lead voluntarily with a sense of personal willingness, according to the will of God and according to the manner of God. And this is especially modeled by the shepherding of Jesus, who freely and willingly became incarnate to carry out the will of the Father.

And the motivation behind this is very simply love. A verse that we all know much too well, because it loses the impact on us. It is John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." In the resurrection scene by the Sea of Galilee, three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, and three times Peter replied that he did. And then three times Jesus charged Peter to feed and shepherd His sheep. Much can be made of this interchange, but most importantly is the reality that Peter's and our own leadership must be motivated by love for Jesus, because the sheep that we shepherd are Jesus sheep.

Secondly, the elders are to shepherd not for sordid gain, or shameful gain, but with eagerness. Jesus gave the principal early on that the worker is worthy of His support in Matthew 10:10. And that's a principle that guided the early church, but what also arose quite early was the abuse of the principal. Ju-, Judas was driven by greed. And Paul takes note of false teachers in the church, who believe that godliness is a means of gain. Greed is a well-documented motivation of many throughout church history, and even into our own day.

But instead of being motivated by greed, Peter exhorts the elders to carry out their leadership eagerly. The adverb "eagerly" is a fitting way to describe how leaders are to serve their people. It's an eagerness to serve that gives no thought to being compensated. We all struggle with that very real balance. As we try to avoid being greedy in ministry, some will take advantage of us and almost expect us to minister for free. That's been a sad experience of many in ministry. Or you can be so focused on being properly compensated that your ministry becomes simply a job. Or you can deceive yourself by misappropriating funds for your own use that have been given for another purpose.

So what would motivate us to lead eagerly? Again, I believe that Peter's own experience gives us insight. Peter's denial of Jesus, Je, Jesus could have caused him to run from any kind of leadership position, because he had denied Jesus when he said, "Even though all the le-, the rest leave, I will stay." He could have run away because of his own shame and the accusations from the other disciples that they could have thrown his way. But he must have remembered well the words that Jesus spoke to him at the upper room, where Jesus said, "Simon, Simon, behold,

Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you..." Note here, "you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Jesus gently restored Peter and forgave him. And gratitude for that forgiveness became for Peter a driving motivation throughout his ministry, causing him to turn and eagerly shepherd Jesus' sheep.

In my view, in the hierarchy of motives, the leading impulse is gratitude. A year after I returned from Vietnam as just a young man of twenty years of age, I was exposed to the gospel message and surrendered my life to Jesus. Not long after that I, I married that fine young lady over there. And we were on staff of Hume Lake for the summer. And I was one of the kitchen boys, and she was the dining room hostess, and developed a, a wonderful friendship with the other kitchen boy. As we unloaded trucks, and as we flip pancakes, we just became the closest of friends.

And during that summer, he once asked me, he said, "Mike, if you would have been killed in Vietnam..." I was with the, an, an airborne infantry unit in the, in the middle of some of the harshest combat of that time. He said, "If you would have been killed when you were in Vietnam, where would you be right now?" And it just, it hit me like a ton of bricks, cause I didn't believe in hell when I was there. But I did now. And if I would have died without knowing the Savior, what would have been my eternal destiny? And from that day, gratitude for the saving grace of Jesus has been my entire impelling motive.

As such this motive is directed away from self, gratitude is developed as a motivating force by continually looking away from myself to the finished work of Jesus' ministry and considering

deeply the alternative consequences of my fate without it. When you and I consider the depth of our own sin and eternal salvation, gratitude becomes a powerful motivation for eager ministry, because it comes out of the fullness of a life lived in the experience of Jesus' forgiveness.

And thirdly, in verse 3, the elders are exhorted to shepherd God's sheep, not as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. The expression "lording it over" recalls Jesus' statement to the brothers James and John, who wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left hand side. And Jesus said that his way of leadership will be quite different than the way of the world. He said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

There is a dangerous temptation of ministry to lord it over others by using your education, your learning, your titles, your position of authority to manipulate people, manipulate people and things to get what you want and to get people to do what you want.

But we can be driven by an entirely different motivation. When we look clearly and solely at the example of Jesus, who sacrificially gave Himself to serve us, we will experience a transformation that enables us to operate from the motivation of servanthood, which in turn becomes an example to our people. Peter teaches us here that leadership is to be driven by the

motivation of servanthood, which comes out of a clear reflection upon Jesus' own example of selfless servanthood.

Those are the characteristics that Peter gives to these leaders as proper motivating forces for ministering to their people. And Peter gave them out of the fullness of his own experiences and failures.

I saw something similar this weekend. My mother was abandoned by her husband, my biological father, just six months before I was born. That was an abusively cruel treatment of a trusting soul. She remarried, and her next husband abandoned her on Christmas Eve, when I was just eleven years old. That was another abusively cruel act to another person. But this weekend at her own memorial service, my mother's word of advice to us, as she faces her own imminent death, was be kind to one another. Her advice came out of her own experiences and even failures as she has struggled with bitterness and anger. But she has learned that the motivation that will dispel bitterness and anger is kindness. And that only comes out of walking with Jesus and experiencing His transforming power.

What motivates you? Why do we do the things that we do? There are many things that can motivate us as we carry out our ministry, some bad, many good. Peter looks at his own experience and tells us that when we have truly experienced and dwelt in the love of Jesus, the forgiveness of Jesus and the sacrificial servanthood of Jesus, we will lead our people willingly, eagerly, by proving to be examples to the flock. Solid words of advice for each of us. Why do we do the things that we do?

Join me in prayer. Father, we do want to look deeply into our own heart, because we know that you are looking there. We all have mixed motives. And Father, help us from being paralyzed by examining ourselves too closely. Father, help us to free ourselves from mixed motives, to be pure, to be given over to being those who live in your love, in your forgiveness, and in your sacrifice through your Son Jesus. Father, I pray that this semester we would all look closely and carefully that as we prepare for lives of ministry, we would be driven by pure motives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you all.

(Music until the end)