

PERSPECTIVE

JULY 2019



**SERVING THE
WIDOWED &
HOMEBOUND**

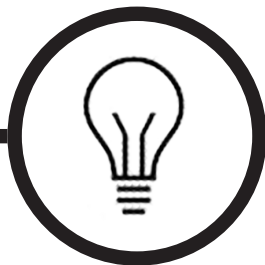
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Serving the Widowed and Homebound

This year at Mount Vernon, we are focusing on the church as one family in our different seasons of life. One season that we tend to overlook, and often fail to anticipate, is our later years, when we are unable to move as freely and independently as we always have. Most of us will reach this point in our lives.

My wife Jocelyn and I have been members of Mount Vernon for nearly a decade. For the past few years, I've had the opportunity to serve as the Deacon of Homebound and Widowed Members. I am truly blessed by the way godly men and women at Mount Vernon suffer well in this season.

As I reflect on ways we can serve these brothers and sisters, I'm reminded of three important practices we're regularly encouraged to practice at Mount Vernon. The first is to be an active member of our local church. The second is to preach the gospel to ourselves and others. The third is to help one another die well. Over the last few years, each of these encouragements has helped us love and serve widows, widowers, and those who are homebound.

BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF OUR LOCAL CHURCH

Joining a church means you are not only becoming a member of a local body, but you're also a visible part of the body of Christ. As members at Mount Vernon, we now have many brothers and sisters that we can come to know. We get to be part of each others' lives.

Over recent years, Mount Vernon's demographics have shifted. We have become a much younger congregation. Our current homebound list is very short and consists primarily of men and women that are only known by a few of our longtime members. This is sad, but presents us with the unique opportunity to care for brothers and sisters we may not know. As our current congregation has the opportunity to age together, we will increasingly have opportunities to serve those we know. Lord willing, we will serve one another better because we will have had time together as a family, getting to know and growing to love one another week after week—sitting with one another in Sunday School, talking on Sunday mornings after the service, praying for one another on Sunday evenings, and fellowshiping together on Wednesday nights.

In addition to our corporate gatherings, we will disciple

each other and share our lives by practicing hospitality in each other's homes. During these times, we will get to know each other by sharing our stories and will be better prepared to minister to one another during times of suffering. Practically, this may mean helping with rides, meals, and chores, but mostly it's spending time praying with one another and exhorting one another to love Christ. As the author of Hebrews reminds us in 2:13, "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

In short, one of the best ways you can prepare for your golden years tomorrow is by being an active member today. Make sure you are known. Invest in relationships. These relationships will be a means of grace in your life in the present and the future. As a faithful church member, don't forget the church members you don't know. Look for ways to get to know them better. Strive to be a source of encouragement to our homebound members and even to those members unable to come to an evening service.

PREACH THE GOSPEL

The most effective way to serve homebound and widowed members, or anyone in the church, is to understand, believe, and preach the gospel. I've found that it is very important to not presume that someone who has been in church all their lives has a clear understanding of the gospel, has truly been convicted of their sin, and has put their faith in Christ. We are fortunate at Mount Vernon that the gospel is preached regularly from the pulpit, in our Sunday School classes, and in our Wednesday night teaching. We also have books and resources within the church that help us better understand and articulate the gospel.

A few years ago, I witnessed the beautiful fruit that can come from preaching the gospel to an elderly, homebound member. There was an elderly woman who had recently lost her husband, and she had been in church her entire life. She had served regularly in the church, teaching children and rarely missing a Sunday or Wednesday service. As her husband was dying, he expressed concern to another church member about his wife's salvation. He was simply unsure that she understood her need for a Savior. Some weeks after her husband's death, a church member began visiting her regularly. She spent time with this elderly member, conversing about a variety of topics but spending focused time clearly explaining the gospel and the need she had for a Savior. This member did not presume that the widow understood the gospel or that she believed it. She engaged with this

homebound member, asking questions, answering her questions, and repeating the very basics of the Christian faith. It was through these conversations that the elderly homebound member realized she had not understood the gospel and was not a believer. The Lord opened her eyes at that point, and she accepted Christ as her Savior.

As Paul states, we simply need to present the gospel and pray the power of the cross transforms: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1 Cor. 1:17). Preaching the gospel to our widowed and homebound members is one of the most important and beautiful ways we can serve them. Let’s not forget to preach the gospel to all members. This may happen as we ask a fellow member how he or she became a Christian or as we encourage someone with examples of God’s grace in our own lives.

HELP ONE ANOTHER DIE WELL

During a sermon a few years ago, I was introduced to the concept of “helping each other die well” for the first time. Though it is clear that none of us know the number of our days, many of our widowed and homebound members recognize that they are close to death and eternity. Scripture explains that true believers persevere to the end: “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 24:13). Ministering to the widowed and homebound at Mount Vernon gives us an opportunity to remind them of the beautiful truths of the gospel and to encourage them to the end.

One of my fondest memories is spending time with one of our former members, reading Scripture and praying with him during the last few months of his life as he lay bedridden. He was physically unable to care for himself but found such joy listening to the Scripture being read—that was what he longed for. What an encouragement he was to me as he delighted in the word of God and found peace and comfort in it. His life was a clear example of dying well in Christ. As believers, it is our privilege and responsibility to point each other to Christ and the sweet excitement of eternity with our Savior.

Have you ever thought that every time you have fellowship with a believer you are, in a sense, preparing them for death? Unless Jesus comes back first, all of us are going to die. Will we be ready? Will Jesus be our overriding passion? Will we be able to say we lived for

his glory? Can we honestly say we’ve poured out our lives for the Lord? Let’s not just prepare our homebound members to die well, let’s prepare one another—all of us—for that great and certain Day of Judgement.

CONCLUSION

There are blessings and challenges in every season of life. A single person may struggle with their singleness. A young mother or father may struggle with the exhaustion of raising young children. Empty nesters may deeply miss having regular contact with their kids. In each season of life, we as members of Mount Vernon can seek to love, serve, and encourage each other in a variety of ways.

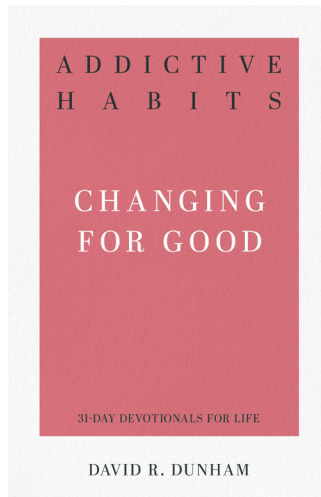
Let’s consider all the ways we can intentionally bless and serve our members in the widowed and homebound seasons of life.

I hope you will invest in the lives of others at our church by being a committed church member, sharing the gospel with others, and encouraging your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to persevere to the end.

– Bernie Davis

Addictive Habits: Changing for Good

Written by David R. Dunham



“You’re addicted to _____!” Have you heard someone say that to you? Sometimes we say that sentence to people when we are joking around, like saying, “You’re addicted to memes!” Joking aside, we may have said that sentence to a struggling family member or friend, “You’re addicted to porn” or “You’re addicted to eating.” You won’t find the words “addiction” or “addict” in the Bible (except 1 Timothy 3:8 ESV). The Bible doesn’t use our culture’s psychological jargon, but the Bible does speak to the very heart of addiction: idolatry. What you’re addicted to, whatever you put in that blank, speaks to what you truly love and worship.

Dunham’s 31-day devotional, *Addictive Habits*, follows a simple structure that he calls the 4 R’s: Responsibility, Relationship, Restructuring, and Remaining. To begin the process of change, we have to own up to our choices, attitudes, and desires that have led to our addiction. Change involves you, but change doesn’t happen alone. The Bible is clear, we can’t change on our own without God working in us and through the relationships of other brothers and sisters in the local church. Moreover, we have to restructure our desires and attitudes, avoid temptation, and be in awe of God more than our addictive habit. Finally, we have to remain in God’s transforming power to see change over the long haul. There’s no guarantee of the total absence of sin on this side of heaven, but we can have freedom from addictive habits as we set our affections on what God has done for us in Christ and resting in the power he gives us through the Spirit to change us each day of our lives.

If you are someone who can easily fill in the blank above (excluding memes), then pick up this book and read it as part of your devotional time or read it with another brother or sister who can hold you accountable. Before you start reading, make sure you have a pen and paper with you. As you read, answer the questions Dunham gives and fill out the assignments for specific days. I assure you that you will get more out of each day than simply taking 3 minutes to read a given day. If you are counseling or discipling someone who struggles with some addictive habit, this book is for you too. Read this book to help you better understand how to help another brother or sister change according to God’s Word. Addiction is not hopeless, and the Bible is not without help. With God’s Word, the power of the Spirit within you, and of course, relationships in the local church, you can find lasting to change to your addiction.

— RECOMMENDED BY KYLE GROSS

Excerpts From the Book

1

“Fundamentally, any addictive habit is a worship problem. We’ve lost our orientation toward the One who should rule our lives, and we need to turn back to him. The Word points us to Christ, who rescues us from our plight and reorients our life.”

— Introduction, p.10

2

“Addictive habits will convince us either that God can’t love us or that he doesn’t care. Both responses are wrong. God tells us what he is like; we need to submit to his self-revelation in his Word.”

— Day 10: Who Is God?, p.38

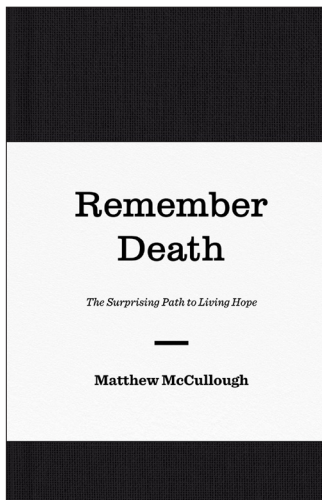
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“No book can produce change. Books are tools that God may use, but he is the one you truly need.”

— Conclusion, p.87

Remember Death

Written by Matthew McCullough



We gather on Sundays to remember Jesus died and rose for the forgiveness of sins and to give us eternal life. We sing of God's grace and proclaim his promises. Why? Because we know that this life is not our last. God "has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is...kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3b-4). Hopefully, we leave on Sunday with our faith, hope, and joy in the gospel freshly renewed. Life is put back in perspective.

But what about Tuesday afternoon? By then has our perspective been blurred by our weekly responsibilities? Has our identity been wrapped up in our jobs or relationships that will last twenty to sixty years at most? I know that happens to me. And it's why reading *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* by Matthew McCullough has been particularly helpful. As McCullough wrote, "I argue that an honest awareness of death puts these enemies of joy in their proper place, so that in turn the victory of Jesus can shine in its proper light" (27).

There are so many good books published today. It's impossible to keep up with them. I don't mean to be hyperbolic when I say this is the best book I've read in the last two years. So it's hard to limit my reasons for recommending you read it. But here are two.

First, younger congregations, in particular, need a book on this topic. The average age of everyone who has joined Mount Vernon since Jan. 1, 2016, is 37 and the median age is 31. Which means most of us, under normal life circumstances, have the majority of our lives ahead of us. We strive for our future goals and aspirations and have an unstated sense of identity, meaning, and security in what awaits us over the next 20-30 years. We're not looking back with fondness and regret but forward with deliberateness and eagerness. Death is far from our minds. We need a book like this to give us a "death-awareness" to put life's aspirations, joys, and striving in their proper place.

Second, the "death-awareness" that McCullough encourages helps us see how glorious Jesus is. Unless Jesus returns, one day your life will end. The shadows of death linger over all we do. Death is the "uninvited guest" that will end life's party. We cannot forget that. But as a Christian, you know that something far greater awaits. As McCullough wrote, "You must recognize that anything you might accomplish or acquire in this world is already fading away. Only then will you crave this unfading glory of what Jesus has accomplished and acquired for you" (24-25). So, it's good to "remember death" because to do so is also to remember the living King who conquered death.

— RECOMMENDED BY BRAD THAYER

Excerpts From the Book

1

"As long as we're consumed by the quest for more out of this life, Jesus' promises will always seem otherworldly to us...If we want to see the beauty of Jesus, we must first look carefully and honestly at death...By avoiding the truth about death, we're avoiding the truth about Jesus. Jesus didn't promise us so many of the things we want most out of life. He promised us victory over death."

— Introduction, p. 25

2

"We see ourselves as indispensable. And this is the self-identification that death so ruthlessly exposes for foolishness. This is where death is so humbling. Death tells us we are not indispensable. We are not too important to die."

— The Problem of Identity and the Promise of Union with Christ, p.61

3

"[T]he way to deal with the painful problem of loss is not to pull back from loving the transient things, but to press further in. To love them for what they are: precious gifts of a Father who loves you, foretastes of glory divine."

— The Problem of Loss and the Promise of Eternal Life, p.142

JULY

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

July 1	Genesis 12:1–9	July 17	Romans 5:12–21
July 2	Genesis 15	July 18	Romans 6:1–14
July 3	Genesis 17:15–21	July 19	Psalms 123–124
July 4	Genesis 21:1–7	July 20	Romans 6:15–25
July 5	Hebrews 11:1–16	July 21	Romans 6:15–25
July 6	Genesis 23:1–20	July 22	Acts 13:1–25
July 7	Genesis 23:1–20	July 23	Acts 13:26–52
July 8	Matthew 11:25–30	July 24	Acts 14:1–18
July 9	Matthew 12:1–8	July 25	Acts 14:19–23
July 10	Matthew 12:9–14	July 26	Isaiah 2:1–5
July 11	Matthew 12:15–21	July 27	Acts 14:24–28
July 12	1 Kings 12:16–24	July 28	Acts 14:24–28
July 13	Matthew 12:22–37	July 29	Psalms 4
July 14	Matthew 12:22–37	July 30	Psalms 5
July 15	Romans 4	July 31	Psalms 6
July 16	Romans 5:1–11	*Sermons in bold	

TAKE UP & READ



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH