

A black and white illustration of a sloth, positioned in the upper left corner of the page. The sloth is looking towards the right.

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## Use the energy you have while you have it

(Jared)

**I vividly remember** the exact moment I got old. My first mistake was accepting a friend's invitation to play full-court basketball. I hadn't played any ball in years, but I missed it, and I longed to get back on the court. Back in the day, I was pretty darn good. I was always first or second pick in regular weekend pickup games at the park, and my buddies and I had played in the NBA's touring Hoop It Up tournament when it came to Houston every summer. But years of a sedentary lifestyle were about to catch up with me.

## GO OUTSIDE

The game started well enough. I was keeping up, trying to get the rust off, mainly passing. You know, just kind of laying low, biding my time. I was huffing and puffing a little harder than I expected, but I was trying to push through.

Then it happened. We were on defense, and one of my teammates nabbed a steal. Direction shifted back up the court, and I was leading the way running toward the opposing goal. My teammate threw a perfect football pass across half court, which landed beautifully in my hands while I was mid-stride. I immediately began dribbling a line of fire up the court, heading to an easy layup.

But it was possible I was not moving as fast as I thought I was. And in my peripheral vision, I could see one of the opposing players remarkably moving across the court faster than I'd ever seen a person move, and before I knew it, he was between me and the goal. As I approached this collision with my defender, my brain was sending signals that felt wonderfully familiar. When you're young and athletic, you don't really even have to think about such things. There's no time at all between the brain sending signals and the body obeying. My brain sent the signal to "fake left and go right." It's something I once did instinctively, smoothly, convincingly.

At this moment, my brain said "fake left and go right," but my body basically said, "Nah, I don't think we're going to do

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that today.” In fact, my body said, “We’re probably not ever going to do that.” And instead of picking up the move to fake out my defender and dart around him, my legs got confused and instantly locked up. I’m ashamed to tell you that I fell face forward onto the court, and the ball bounced sadly out of my dribble and rolled out of bounds.

One of my buddies came to give me a hand and pull me off the court. “What happened?” he said. I said, “I don’t know. But I think I just got old.” Another teammate very helpfully said to me after the game, “If it matters, I could tell you used to be good.” That was a cold comfort.

I think about this moment a lot, especially since I’m significantly older now than I was then! But I mark it as the moment of my reaching the “other side” of the journey of aging. Firmly ensconced now in middle age, I look back at the days of my youth with a lot of warmth—but also a lot of regret.

I feel warmth because I am grateful for the joys of seemingly boundless energy, of the “glory days” of legendary games of weekend football and basketball with my friends, of feeling like the world was brimming with possibilities and I was brimming with potential. But I feel regret, because I think I squandered so much of those days focusing on things that don’t ultimately matter.

## GO OUTSIDE

If I could go back and talk to myself then, I would say, first of all, “Enjoy this! Enjoy it more than you already are enjoying it.” I would tell myself to really cherish the days of youth and all the energy and strength and health that often come with it. Because those days go by so much faster than you think they will. When you’re young, time seems to move slowly. But it’s really not. And all the abilities of youth are a great gift from God. We should really appreciate them—to the glory of God—

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while we have them and not take them for granted. Don’t let them go to waste in your twenties and thirties. Stay active. Get outside (see chapter 15). Enjoy God’s creation. Join a team. Go for regular walks or runs or swims. Don’t let your body get lazy or unkempt.

The book of Ecclesiastes is basically the old King Solomon reflecting back on his life with both warmth and regret. He is, in a way, talking to his younger self. He warns his younger self. He encourages his younger self. He longs for young people reading to not make the mistakes he made. And in Ecclesiastes 12:1, he refers to how the “days of adversity come” and the years approach where the pleasures of being young are impossible. And the word of exhortation he gives to the young

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who so often cannot yet feel or see the approach of the days of “getting old” is this: “Remember your Creator.”

While you’re still young and have so much energy and ability, remember your Creator. Don’t waste these precious gifts on everything but the Lord’s business. While you have the energy, use it to serve and to love. Use your youthful energy to repent of laziness and work hard at your studies and your job. Use your youthful energy to go on mission trips. Serve in local outreach efforts. Be a faithful evangelist to your friends and classmates.

I wish that I had spent more of my energy on things that matter more when I had the energy to spend. It’s gotten harder as I’ve gotten older, and in a lot of ways, I have felt like I’m trying to make up for lost time. I have a lot more interest in pursuing a kingdom vision these days but a lot less energy to do it. I don’t want you to share this experience.

You don’t get these youthful days back. Even if you’re dedicated to maintaining physical health, make sure not to neglect your spiritual health. Channel your energy that way too. Because, as strong and healthy as you are now, it’s going to go away. You won’t be young forever. But Christ is yours forever. You’ll never

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## **GO OUTSIDE**

regret investing intensely in the business of His kingdom. And your investment *there* is something that will never get old, never decay, never be lost.

Abandon yourself, then, with gusto to the pursuit of Christ's kingdom.