

## The Road Less Traveled – September 22, 2017

I was scrolling through the news earlier this week when a particular headline caught my eye. “Woman breaks record with her 18-foot-long fingernails.” Sucker for the extreme that I am, I clicked on the link and read the story. It seems that a Texas woman named Ayanna Williams will be featured in the upcoming edition of the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the human being with the longest fingernails. When you add up the nails on both of her hands, the total is a whopping 18 feet, 10.9 inches. That’s an average of nearly 2 feet of fingernail per finger.

There were pictures accompanying the story, and you can imagine what Ayanna’s hands looked like (you can see for yourself [here](#)). You can imagine, Ayanna said the length of her nails makes it difficult for her to perform a lot of everyday tasks. I would imagine brushing her teeth and putting on make-up in the morning would be laced with danger. But luckily she has an understanding family who helps her with chores so she doesn’t damage her nails.

As I read the story, I could not help but wonder what drives a person to start down such a path. Growing her nails took Ayanna 20 years. So what was the thought process two decades ago, and how many times along the way did she considered cutting them off and resuming a normal life? The easy answer, of course, is 15 minutes of fame. She gets her name and picture in a book that is seen by millions of people. No doubt Ayanna will be invited to appear on television shows, and she’ll make some money for her accomplishment. But 15 minutes of fame is probably pretty accurate. She likely won’t become a big star because of this, and the money she makes probably won’t be life-changing. And many will simply consider her a freak.

So why do it? Why would someone sacrifice easily a fifth of her life for such an odd endeavor? I firmly believe it’s not just for the fame. I think all of us long to do something important in our lives. We long for people to know us, not just for the fame, but to be recognized for doing something more noteworthy than simply getting up, going to work and coming home each day. Perhaps to be known for doing something no one else has done. I think our greatest fear is to reach the end of our lives and not be remembered for anything other than the ordinary, and by no one but our immediate family.

We want to leave a legacy.

The funny thing is that legacies are not created in the pages of a book of world records or even in the pages of celebrity magazines. Legacies are created in the lives of those we touch in the ordinary days of our lives. Last weekend, I officiated at the funeral of 25-year-old Ashley Robbins. Ashley graduated from Aledo High School and was confirmed right here at our church. She died Sept. 8 after a brave battle with cancer. As you might imagine her death was a tragic loss for her family and friends, not just for the loss itself, but for the brutal reality of a promising life cut so short. Ashley had a successful career, was engaged to be married, looked forward to raising children. She had the same hopes and dreams that most of us have, and those dreams will now go unrealized.

But I wonder if Ashley really knew the impact she had on people’s lives. I heard it over and over again as I visited with her parents, Bruce and Janet, and her sister Nicole. I heard it as I chatted with her friends after the service. I saw it as I watched her fiancé Owen grapple with the loss of his beloved. They all had stories, stories of how Ashley had not just touched their lives, but how she had changed them. How she had made them better, how she had inspired them. The thing is, though, that Ashley didn’t really do anything newsworthy. Her death was not reported by the media, save for the obituary in the newspaper and on a funeral home web site. By all accounts Ashley lived a fairly normal life. She went to high school.

She was involved in various extracurricular activities. She went to college. She got a job. She met a guy. She largely lived the same life that many of us lead.

What made Ashley's life extraordinary had nothing to do with her doing extraordinary things. What she did was lead an extraordinary life one ordinary day at a time. But she lived those ordinary days to the fullest. In the last 10 months of her life, as she battled cancer and prayed for a miracle, she took to blogging about her experience. Not to gain fame, but because she believed that her experience might help someone else. She planned to write a book about her journey, not in hopes of striking it rich as an author, but because she believed her story might help someone navigate similar waters. And now her mother Janet will write the book. And Ashley's legacy will live.

All that is say that God blesses us with life, and that life can seem ordinary, even mundane a lot of the time. But God also gives us the potential for those ordinary lives to touch people in extraordinary ways. Each morning when we wake, we are blessed with another day. At the end of that day, it will be gone forever, leaving in its place something we traded for it. To trade that day for a mere 15 minutes of fame seems like a waste of potential.

See you Sunday.