

Making the Most of Your Time

Ephesians 5:1-17

Today we have the privilege of enjoying the final day of the year 2017. This year has come and gone quickly. In fact, in my opinion it seems to have flown by. If we are honest, it seems to many of us that everything in life is moving at a dizzying pace. Many of us are wondering how we can slow things down. There are many things like this that we consider as the year comes to an end. We examine how we need to get more organized. We examine our physical health and set goals for diet and exercise. We examine our careers and look for ways that we might grow. We even examine our use of time and what changes we might need to make to be more productive. All of these things are good because they often lead to growth and further development. This morning, however, I want to ask you to examine yourself spiritually. More importantly, I want to ask you to look to God as the Great Physician and invite Him to direct you and convict you in areas where you need to grow.

This morning I want to challenge you to consider this question, “How are you making the most of the time that God has given you?” In other words, how are you spending the life that you have been given? We each have the same amount of hours, minutes, and seconds in the day. We each have specific opportunities that are given to us. However, we don’t all use the time wisely. We don’t all take advantage of the opportunities. We don’t always make the most of our time and sometimes the things that we think are important, from God’s perspective really aren’t important at all. So, how then should we live? What should we do? What things matter to God? What things matter in eternity? God answers all of these questions in His Word as we will see today.

Read Text

I don’t know about you, but in my opinion one of the most frustrating things in life is feeling as if I am wasting my time. I do not enjoy waiting for long periods of time and certainly hate feeling unproductive. Most likely you can relate to this. The thought of wasting time is not appealing to us at all. However, I do believe that when we stand before God there will likely be situations that we realize were wasted opportunities. The opportunities that God gives us are very important. How we respond to them will determine how effective and fruitful our life is. We actually see this illustrated in sports. In a game, a team will have so many opportunities to do well and to accomplish its goal. But, ultimately how the team responds to those opportunities will likely determine the outcome. Similarly, when it comes to living a life that matters for eternity we must take advantage of the opportunity that God has given us. He doesn’t want us to waste our life. As the Scripture says, He wants us to make the most of our time. This morning I believe that God is calling us to examine four key areas of our lives. God’s direction in each of these areas will reveal what we need to do to make the most of our time.

I. Examine Your Walk (vs. 1-2)

When I refer to your “walk” I am not literally referring to the physical way that you walk. I am not asking you to examine your pace of walking – whether you walk slowly or quickly. I am not asking you to examine your style of walk – whether you strut, swag, or walk with a limp. The idea of the

Biblical concept of your “walk” is referring to your lifestyle. It is describing how you live your life. How we “walk” matters to God. In this passage, especially, He has much to say about it. If we are going to make the most of our time, how does God want us to walk? He tells us immediately that we are to be “imitators of God, as beloved children.” What a wonderful truth that all who believe in Jesus are adopted into the family of God. **John 1:12** says, “But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” **Ephesians 1:5** explains that in love, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” **1 John 3:1a**, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.” What a privilege it is to be a part of God’s family! Though we are sinners, through His grace He has forgiven us and cleansed us and changed us. Through His grace we are co-heirs with Christ. So, as children what are we to do? We are to imitate Him. What does God do? He loves. **Ephesians 5:2a** says it plainly that we are to “Walk in love.” This means two primary things.

A. Walk in Love for Others

One of the chief characteristics of God is that He is love and if He is our Father then it is reasonable to think that we will follow His example. **1 John 4:7-11 declares**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Love is not simply what God does. It is who He is. It is His chief attribute and the description that is most fitting. This word “love” is “agape love” or Godly, pure, sacrificial love. Much that is called “love” in our modern society looks nothing like the pure, selfless, and sacrificial love of God. But, since God is love, and we have a personal relationship with Him, we must display His love in how we live. Since God is love, we certainly ought to love one another. Here in verse 11 the exhortation to love one another is presented as a privilege as well as a responsibility. What a challenge! I’m called to love others the same way that God loves me. I’m called to love my wife, my friends, my neighbor, my family, even my enemies – I’m commanded to love them all the same way that God loves me.

How we love others isn’t just an instruction. It is also a proof that we are right with the Lord. **1 John 3:14-16** explains, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” One of the primary evidences that a person is a child of God is that we genuinely have sacrificial, pure love for one another. Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Now think of that for just a moment. Without Jesus Christ as the

Lord of your life it is impossible to show this kind of love. We can't express divine, sacrificial, unconditional, faithful love unless that love has been imparted to you by God. And this love has been given to everyone that has accepted Christ as their Savior. Now, remember who is writing the words. Yes, God is breathing the Scriptures, but it is the aged apostle John that is picking up the pen. I imagine that as he envisioned what God was saying his mind was going back to the sacrificial love that he had seen displayed by the early church. In **Acts 2** we see of the early church that all who believed were together and had all things in common. Many sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to the apostles so that the needs of all were met. In fact, one of the men, Barnabas, sold an entire piece of land and brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet so that it could be used to minister to the body of Christ. That is the sort of selfless sharing that took place among the early church. Their selfless sacrifices were simply evidence, giving proof to the fact that they were saved. **John Phillips** said it this way, "One way a person can know that he or she has been born again and is in the family of God is by the person's newfound love for other believers."

B. Walk in Love for God

This should be very obvious, but it still needs to be stated. Who did Jesus give His life for? Most of us would say, "Us. Jesus died for us." It is a fair statement because we understand that His death was in our place. However, from God's perspective notice the end of **Ephesians 5:2b**, "Christ gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice TO GOD as a fragrant aroma." In the Old Testament times, a burnt offering or sacrifice was the highest expression of love for God. Jesus loved the Father and willingly gave Himself that the will of the Father would be accomplished. So, even when it meant bearing the cross, the shame, the suffering, and the sins of all the world, Jesus cried, "Father, let Your will be done." In the same way, we should lovingly and sacrificially offer our lives to God. **Romans 12:1** says it well, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Friends, examine your walk. Are you walking in love with God? Are you loving towards others, especially those in the body of Christ? Love is the first key test to the authenticity of our faith.

II. Examine Your Ways (vs. 3-7)

As we move into the next area of examination Paul continues to use the verbiage of the word "walk", but I will be using some different words to summarize for us what he is saying. Paul understood that many people profess things, but the proof of one's profession would be seen in their practice. In other words, if we have truly put our faith in Jesus then we will follow Him. Our belief always impacts our behavior. As Paul continues on, he causes us to examine our ways. In other words, how are you living? What is your conduct like?

A. The Separation

For those who have believed in Jesus Christ and are depending solely on Him for their salvation, the Bible says in **2 Corinthians 5:17** we are "a new creation. The old things are

passed away; behold, new things have come.” So, since we are a new creation, a work in progress, there are some things that we must do away with. This is not a comprehensive list, but he did spell out some things. The very first thing listed was immorality. In Paul’s day sexual promiscuity was the norm. Everyone indulged in it and it was openly accepted. Everybody did what was right in their own eyes and what felt good to them. There was no place that they didn’t allow their imagination to wander. However, when the Holy Spirit came into the life of a believer He transformed the mind and the lifestyle of that person. In fact, when it comes to immorality and impurity and covetousness, He says that these things aren’t even to be named among those who belong to Jesus because they are completely opposed to Him. **John Phillips** said it best, “Our society may be tolerant of these sins. Governments may pass laws legitimizing behavior that a generation ago would have brought a prison sentence. The Holy Spirit, however, will not tolerate such immorality. The conduct of a Christian is controlled not by a heathen society, but by the Holy Spirit.”

There are some things that we should separate from. I like the way that Paul illustrates in **Ephesians 4:22-24**. He said, “In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Paul was saying that the believer is to put off his former manner of life through deliberate choice and determined action. The phrase “put off” simply means to “put away.” **Romans 13:12b** says it this way, “Let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.” What this is referring to is that before you lived for Jesus, you lived for yourself and fulfilled your own desires. But when you believed in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God came in and took over and began to lead you to put away the actions of the old self. The victory over our struggle doesn’t just come when we put off the old self. We must also put on the new self. **Romans 13:14** says it this way, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” How do you put on the Lord Jesus? We must daily apply what Christ has given us to our lives. Through Christ we are a new creation. Through Christ we have been changed. So, we must apply that daily. As we surrender ourselves to the will of God and to the Word of God, He begins to transform us by the renewing of our minds.

B. The Solution

Have you ever thought about the many ways that thankfulness and gratitude impact us for good? According to verse 4, it is a part of the solution in us putting away immorality, covetousness, and even sinful speech. We all talk about something. We all spend our energy doing something. So, Paul basically says, “Focus your attention, your energy, and your talking on expressing gratitude to God.” Paul explains this further in **Colossians 2:6-7** saying, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” If you spend time with Jesus and grow in your walk with Him, you will be a grateful person. In fact, God gives us a picture of a river bank overflowing. His point is not that of destruction, but simply that when we are

rooted in Jesus and growing in Him, our inner man can't hold all the thankfulness in. It will overflow in such a way that it comes pouring out of our mouth, you can see it in our eyes, you can observe it in our service, you can measure it in our sacrificial giving, you can sense it in our joy. The life that is rooted and built up in Christ will overflow with praises to the Father. You will recognize the undeserved grace and mercy that He has shown. We will remember the many gifts and blessings He has poured out. When we realize how much we've been given, it causes us to want to give to Him. It motivates us to honor Him in our ways.

III. **Examine Your Witness (vs. 8-14)**

If we are going to make the most of our time on this earth, we must examine our witness for Christ. God clearly says here, "For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of light." Remember what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:14,16**, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Jesus is saying to all His followers, including us today, that we are lights in the midst of this dark world. And we do need to be reminded that this world is dark. So as God's children, we are to walk as children of Light in this world. **Warren Wiersbe** described our witness well, "Walking as children of light means revealing God's light in our daily lives. By our character and conduct, we bring God's light into a dark world. As God's lights, we help others find their way to Christ." How do we grow in our witness?

A. **Aim to Please the Lord**

Because of what God has done for us, our ambitions have changed. When I wasn't living for Christ I had a selfish, worldly ambition to please myself. But now that Christ is the Lord of my life, my ambition is to honor the Lord. As a Christian, then, my life is not lived for myself, my pleasures, or my wants. My primary goal and ambition is to live my life in a way that honors, exalts, and pleases the Lord. It is interesting to note that the first step in being a strong witness for Jesus is that we are to focus on Him and live for Him. This is what Paul prayed for the Colossian believers in **Colossians 1:10** that they would, "Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to PLEASE HIM in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." If we are truly devoted to the Lord, it will be seen in our determination or motivation. Our determination should be to please the Lord in every way possible. In the Greek, the word for "please" suggests that we are to study Him, to learn Him, so that in knowing Him we can do the things that are in keeping with Who He is. We can't come up with this on our own. We must depend on God's Word to guide us into all truth so that we are equipped to please Him. This should be our chief aim. ****ILL:** Illustration of how I lived and made decisions before meeting Heather, then how I lived and made decisions after we started dating. What is the motive for the decisions that you are making? Is pleasing the Lord your motive?

B. **Abstain from Things That Displease the Lord**

It is important to see the connection here. We have already seen that there are some things that we are to clearly put away from us because they will hinder us personally in our own walk with the Lord. But, here we see another aspect of this. We must choose to refuse to partake of the “deeds of darkness.” Why? Because they are unfruitful. They will not lead to anything good in our lives or in the lives of others. Remember the context here is that we are children of light and therefore need to shine brightly to point people to Jesus. Most will not refuse our witness of Christ because of a terrible past or a poor presentation or a lack of answers for every question. However, if our living contradicts what we’re saying we will be written off immediately. We must consider our actions before unbelievers. This is not a legalistic position, but is certainly one that causes me to consider what is pleasing to the Lord and what is beneficial to others. Many want to view certain actions from their perspective and ask, “Is this ok? Is this sinful or pleasing to the Lord?” But the mature follower of Christ takes another step and asks, “Is this beneficial to others? Is it a help or a hindrance to my witness?”

Paul summarizes this reminder of our witness by stirring us and calling us to awaken from our sleep. It’s as if he is saying, “Wake up! Open your eyes! Make the most of the day! There is much to be done! Get up and get after it!”

IV. Examine Your Wisdom (vs. 15-17)

It is a sad reality that many professing Christians just drift through life like sleepwalkers who never really make the most of their time. They never seem to make the most of the opportunities that God gives them. They are given opportunities to serve, but they continually prefer their comfort. They are given opportunities to give generously, but they continually refuse. They are given opportunities to share the Gospel, but they continually put it off. They don’t walk wisely. Only a fool drifts with the wind and the tide. ****ILL:** Builder building a house draws plans, gets permits, and sets things in motion. If we are going to live wisely, we will be faithful to do the same.

A. Spend Your Time Wisely

This phrase “making the most of your time” literally means “buying up the opportunity, taking advantage of it.” The phrase was often used to describe a ship that took advantage of the wind and the tide in order to arrive safely in the harbor. Friends, life is brief and it is passing quickly. Your life is like a vapor that appears for a brief period and then vanishes away. The old song said it well, “Only one life, so soon it will pass. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

B. Seek the Lord Continually

How then do we make the most of our time? How do we avoid being wasteful and foolish? **Verse 17** instructs us to “understand what the will of the Lord is.” And how do we learn this? By seeking the Lord. Friends, we must pursue our relationship with the Lord. Yet, many of us don’t know what we have in Christ. As we seek Him He will reveal His plans for us, even if one step at a time. In fact, others may be of help to us, but He is the only One that we NEED to seek. In Him we have everything we need. Literally the riches of

heaven have been offered to us in Christ. **Colossians 2:3** says that in Christ, “Are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In order to enjoy this treasure we must seek it, we must work it out as we would get below the surface and work out gold from a mine. ****ILL: Marriage is a wonderful gift. However, I don’t know how wonderful the gift really is until I work it out.** I believe that many of us who know Jesus haven’t yet fully discovered the treasure that we have in Him. We must spend time with Him. We must read His Word. We must meditate on His ways. We must praise His name. We must not neglect Him. ****ILL: William Randolph Hearst and his art collection.** He required an intense search for a specific work. He asked, “Did you find the treasure?” His associate confirmed that he had indeed found the piece, but he didn’t buy it because, “Mr. Hearst we found it in your warehouse. You already own the valuable piece.” The same is true for believers. In Christ we have all that we will ever need. You don’t need to search the world over for new answers, new explanations, or new understandings. We have it all in Christ. We should heed the words of **Psalm 105:3-4**, “Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad. Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face continually.”

2017 is coming to an end. If the Lord allows, tomorrow we will begin 2018. Here on this final day of the year I ask you to examine yourself. Have you made the most of your time in 2017? What have you done in 2017 that will matter in eternity? What opportunities have you been faithful in? Which ones have you missed? What changes is God wanting to make in your life today? My prayer is that as we move into the coming year we will be prepared, ready, and available to see God do greater things in and through our lives than we could ever imagine. So, let’s determine today that we will make the most of our time.