

Maximizing Time – Ephesians 5:15-21
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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Tick tock...Tick tock... What's the first emotion you feel when I say the word, "time?" Do you feel frantic? Do you feel helpless? Do you feel like it's slipping away too fast? Or do you feel like you've mastered time and that you're great at using every moment of it wisely? When I think of time I feel a clear sense that it's moving ahead like a freight train and that I'm usually running, running, running, trying to keep up. I feel a little frantic myself and an uneasy feeling that it's getting away from me.

Time, time, time...there just doesn't seem to be enough of it and with each passing year it seems to go faster and faster. How many times during the past year did you look back at a day and wonder, "Where did the time go?" How many times did you get to the end of a day and realize you wasted most of your time on meaningless things? How many times do you regret allowing busyness to keep you from spending time on what really matters?

Well, we've entered 2016 and it's a brand-new year. Maybe this year we'll get a handle on time and learn to use it more wisely. Maybe God will show us how to better use our time and how to offer it up to him and not allow it to steal our peace and make us frantic and desperately running to keep up.

How many of you have made any New Year's resolutions? Do any of your resolutions have to do with your use of time? How are you doing so far?

Well, using the time we've been given wisely is a noble pursuit and one that is important to God as well. Today in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 to 21, Paul is going to show us how we can make the most of the time we've been given and how those who walk wisely will watch carefully how they use their time. I've called today's message, "Maximizing Time."

Let's begin our study today by reading verses 15 to 21 of Ephesians chapter 5:

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

II. WATCH YOUR WALK

As we begin to dig deeper into the wisdom from God that Paul shares with us today, we see again, with the word, “therefore,” that what he's about to say is logically connected to what we learned last week: that we are children of light. The light of Christ is shining on us and through us. We've been changed from darkness to light. As such, we need to be careful how we walk and how we are representing the light to the world around us.

Now in the original language of the New Testament, the phrase translated, “be careful,” is actually two Greek words. The first word means “to see,” while the second word means “exactly, accurately, diligently.” So a more literal translation of verse 15 might read, “Therefore diligently watch your walk.”

What Paul is telling us here is that since we are children of light now, filled with new life and walking as representatives of Christ, we need to keep a close eye on our walk and be honestly and accurately assessing it on a regular basis. We need to be sure that in our daily choices and actions and words we are truly shining the light of Christ, rather than continuing to walk in darkness.

This tells us that our daily walk is important to God...it matters. And that we have a responsibility over our own walk. God calls us to monitor our own walk and subject it to the truths and guidelines of his Word. He calls us to be proactive and diligent and wise about the way we walk from day-to-day.

We see the importance of being wise in our walk in verse 15 when Paul says that in assessing our own walk, we should be sure that we are walking “**not as unwise men, but as wise.**” And what does Paul say wise men do in their walk? According to verse 16, people who walk wisely make the most of their time.

III. USE TIME WISELY

And so we arrive at the theme of this section of Ephesians, one that is so appropriate as we begin a new year and consider our goals and hopes and how we will spend our time differently than in years past.

I love the way God coordinates so perfectly where we are in Scripture each week, making it so applicable and relevant to what we're facing in each season of our lives. As we begin the year 2016, God is challenging each of us to watch carefully how we walk, learning how to walk wisely and make the most of the precious time we've each been given. Time can be up for any of us at any moment.

Adoniram Judson, the well-known Baptist missionary to Burma who lived from 1788 to 1850, once said these profound words about using the time we've been given wisely:

“A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity. The same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever. Each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny. How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness?! It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked.”

Adoniram Judson, in E. Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Anson, Randolph & Company, 1883), pp. 13-15

Don't you just love that picture he gives us of how to begin each day as we consider how we're going to spend it: approaching each day with the goal of spending our time in such a way that at day's end we will look back and see it as beautifully dressed and prepared for eternity... ready to wear forever.

May the Holy Spirit grant to each of us the wisdom and power to live each day of our lives with this perspective.

So Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 16, to make the most of our time because the days are evil. Interestingly, that phrase, “making the most,” actually means to redeem. He's literally calling us to redeem the time. And to redeem is “to recover something from the power of another or to ransom.” Redeeming is what Christ has done for each of us in freeing us from slavery to sin and releasing us from the wrath of God. The picture we get is of taking something that is being used by evil and darkness and turning it into something that is used for goodness and light. To redeem the time is to do battle with Satan's efforts to waste our time and lead us into all kinds of meaningless or even harmful pursuits, and to instead use our time in ways that fill us up, shine Christ's light and glorify God.

So what does Paul mean when he says that the days are evil? Well the Greek word, *poneros*, can mean “bad...in a physical sense [like] diseases or blind[ness],” or “bad...in an ethical sense [as in] evil [or] wicked.” But it can also mean “full of labours, annoyances, hardships,” which I think is the more appropriate meaning here. Have you faced any annoyances, hardships and difficult tasks during the past week? It seems as if there's a never ending flow of such things in our daily lives, doesn't it?

Well, as we already touched on briefly, Satan is very active every day trying to keep us distracted, depressed, annoyed, offended, busy and out of fellowship with God. This is why in order to redeem and make the most of our time, we need to do battle with Satan and constantly be aware of what he's trying to do to us. We need to be asking for God's wisdom and guidance moment by moment so that we can see where Satan is leading us astray, and be able to put those time wasters aside and instead spend our time in productive and godly ways that fill us up and lead us further on in our walk as children of light.

So what are some things we should be spending our time on? How can we be sure that we are walking as wise men, making the most of our time? Well Paul isn't going to leave us in the dark today. As we move on through verses 16 to 21, Paul is going to share with us 7 ways to make wise use of our time...7 different pursuits, activities and guidelines that will keep us always maximizing our time rather than recklessly wasting it.

IV. SEVEN WISE USES OF TIME

Now we know that Paul in our passage today is teaching us to walk wisely. And what's the opposite of being wise? Being foolish. So as we look at verse 17, we see that Paul begins by saying: ***So then do not be foolish...*** This is how he introduces the 7 wise uses of time. It's like he's saying, "Here's how you can be wise in your use of time and avoid foolishly wasting it."

A. SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE WILL OF THE LORD

So the first wise use of time that Paul presents is: seeking to understand the will of the Lord. Paul says: ***...do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*** There is no better use of time than pursuing and seeking and knowing the Lord and his will.

Now I think we commonly have a misunderstanding of the idea of the Lord's will for our lives. We may think Paul is calling us here to some mysterious process of trying to determine a secret ideal plan God has for your life. We may get a picture of what we felt like when we were in high school trying to figure out what we're going to do with our lives and people were telling us to try to find God's will for our lives...as if God had a secret hidden plan for us that we really needed to work hard to uncover so we could then be in his will.

But I don't believe that's what Paul's talking about here. Instead he's telling us is that there is no better use of our time than getting to know our Lord through his Word, through constant conversation with him and through anything that leads us deeper on in our understanding of who he is, how much he loves us and how he wants to teach us to live.

This process of understanding what the will of the Lord is, is simply the passionate pursuit of God himself using all the tools and wisdom he's given us to know him and what he wants to accomplish in the world and through our lives. This really is the most perfect use of our time and something that should undergird and surround and be a part of every other thing we do with our time. This is how we move away from the foolishness of the world and into the wisdom of our Creator.

We begin to understand what the will of the Lord is when we offer up our time, our energy and our very bodies to the pursuit of him. As we offer ourselves to him in worship, he renews our minds and teaches us what he is like and what his will is for our lives. This process is described for us clearly in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2:

12 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. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

This is how we come to understand what the will of the Lord is: by offering ourselves to him and allowing him to transform our minds through his Word and the power of his Holy Spirit. And there's no better use of our time than offering ourselves to God and pursuing him with all that we have. So if you want a great place to invest your time in 2016, spend it in this process of understanding what the will of the Lord is and using all the tools he's given you to know him more and walk with him more closely.

B. AVOIDING DRUNKENNESS AND DISSIPATION

The second wise use of time presented by Paul here in Ephesians, or rather what you should avoid so that you don't waste your time, is: avoiding drunkenness and dissipation. Did you know the Bible doesn't tell us we can't drink wine? Jesus himself turned water into wine to be used at a wedding party. Paul recommended to Timothy that he use a little wine to help with his stomach problems. But the key word is a "little." What Scripture is very, very clear about is that we are never to drink alcohol to the point where we get drunk. To allow ourselves to get drunk is to participate in dissipation.

That's helpful to know isn't it? If someone told you what you're doing is dissipation, would that mean anything to you? To be honest, the only reason I've ever even heard of the word, "dissipation," is because it's in the Bible. However, had I been asked to clearly define it without looking in the dictionary, I would've struggled.

So as I was trying to get an accurate definition of this word, I googled it and this is the definition I got: dissipation is "an abandoned, dissolute life; or profligacy, prodigality." Does that clear it up for anybody? Abandoned I can figure out; dissolute and profligacy mean absolutely nothing to me. How about you? So guess what else I had to google? Well on my second googling attempt I finally uncovered something meaningful. Dissolute basically means having no morals...just doing whatever you want with no sense of right or wrong. Profligacy means recklessly wasting.

So I think we can accurately define dissipation as recklessly wasteful living. And wouldn't that be an accurate description of the life of an alcoholic. If we could add up all the harm that's been done in the world as a result of drunkenness and alcoholism, it would be a staggering thing to see: families and marriages broken apart, jobs lost, years of wasted and unproductive time, domestic violence, hopelessness, depression, health problems, and on and on. And it's all for a brief and empty period of escape from the troubles and hopelessness of life, followed by a raging headache.

Getting drunk also causes a loosening of our morals and our judgment. When people are drunk they do many things they would never otherwise think of doing. So I think it's easy for us to see why Paul would tell us to avoid drunkenness at all costs. Getting drunk is completely counterproductive to our learning to walk wisely and making the most of our time. It's really the essence of wasting time and walking foolishly.

Now I know there could be some here who struggle with alcoholism, so I don't want to treat this topic lightly. If that's something you struggle with I want to encourage you that God can and will bring complete healing to you in that area of your life when you acknowledge your problem and reach out to him for freedom. I know there are some here with us today that have struggled with alcoholism in the past, but can now testify that they've experienced God's complete healing in that area. God can do that for you too. He wants to offer you a wonderful alternative to trying to escape the pain of life through alcoholism. Start praying fervently for victory in this area, get accountability with others who've experienced the same struggle, talk to somebody about it. The healing begins when you acknowledge the problem you have to God and others and start working on it together.

C. BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

This brings us to the third wise use of time and the beautiful alternative God offers to trying to escape the pain of life by being filled with alcohol and other addictive substances. Instead of recklessly wasting your life and time with these things, be filled with the Spirit. Find your joy, hope and power to face the difficulties in life by allowing the Holy Spirit to fill you up.

Now we know that each of us who have come to new life in Christ have the Holy Spirit living inside. But what Paul is speaking of here is us allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us and have his way fully in our lives. He's speaking of us learning to walk by the Spirit and relying on his power in everything we do. Being filled with the Spirit is something God brings about in us as we grow in our walk with him...as we give up on our own strength and wisdom and learn to walk in his.

In thinking of a picture that captures the idea of the filling of the Holy Spirit, I think of a hot air balloon. Apart from the hot air, the balloon just lays on the ground and goes nowhere. It looks very unimpressive and accomplishes nothing. But when the balloon is filled with hot air it becomes beautiful and majestic and it leaves the ground and does some very remarkable things, going places it could never go apart from the hot air.

In a similar way, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit and allow him to have his way in our lives, we do things we could never otherwise do and we glorify God like never before. The Bible even describes it as mounting up with wings like eagles.

In looking at the Scriptures that describe people being filled with the Holy Spirit, one thing I noticed is that the Spirit almost always gave them boldness and caused them to speak the Word of God powerfully. And the same will be true for us when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We will be given boldness and power and a passion for proclaiming and living God's Word.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit and experiencing joy seem to go hand-in-hand in Scripture as well. Do you want to find joy in your life? Be filled with the Spirit! Let's spend our time in 2016 learning how to walk by the Spirit and

be filled with Him. The result will be joy and boldness and victory. Nothing that the world has to offer can fill us up and bring us joy like the Holy Spirit.

D. SPEAKING SPIRITUAL TRUTH AND WISDOM TO EACH OTHER

This brings us to the fourth wise use of time shared with us by Paul in Ephesians chapter 5: speaking spiritual truth and wisdom to each other.

Verse 19 says: ***speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs***. A parallel passage in Colossians chapter 3 tells us to teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The picture we get here is the idea of talking about and sharing scriptural truths with each other, encouraging each other on in our growth in Christ. This truth is applicable to all of our relationships and is essential to healthy family life and to raising our kids to know God and develop a forever relationship with him.

Imagining what this looks like in our day-to-day lives I think of that passage in Deuteronomy chapter 6 commanding the Israelites to incorporate God's law into their everyday lives and conversations:

6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 "You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

In choosing how to spend our time in 2016, let's invest it in others by encouraging them on in their walk through speaking the truth of Scripture and applying them to everyday life and the daily challenges we all face. Let's let God's Word become such a living reality in our lives that we talk about it to each other all the time and apply it to everyday situations and encourage each other with the great and precious promises we've been given. Let's develop a discipleship plan for our kids and plan intentional activities and study times to spur them on in their growth in Christ. That will be an incredibly wise use of our time!

E. SINGING WITH YOUR HEART TO THE LORD

The fifth wise use of time that Paul shares of us is: ***singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord***. Worshiping God through music is a powerful thing and it's a great way to spend your time. Music is a special gift God has given to us that can express things in ways that words alone can never do. When you're happy and joyful, don't you just want to sing or whistle...and maybe even dance a little?

And notice that the singing and making melody is to be with your heart. This reminds us that just singing a catchy tune isn't really what Paul has in mind here. The singing and making melody he's encouraging here flows out of our hearts...expressing our heartfelt gratitude and trust and joy and even pain and sorrow to our Lord...engaging with both the words and the music to pour out our hearts to him.

I'm sure we can all testify how God has used music in our lives to lift our spirits, communicate his love and presence, and refocus our attention onto him instead of our problems, worries or discouragements. Worshiping through music is a wise and meaningful use of time that connects us more closely with our God and grows our faith and trust in him.

F. GIVING THANKS TO GOD ALWAYS FOR ALL THINGS

The sixth wise use of time given to us here by Paul is: giving thanks to God always for all things. Verse 20 says: ***always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father...***

How good are you at giving thanks? Would people describe you as a thankful and grateful person? Well thankfulness is an interesting thing in our relationship with God and others. To give authentic thanks is really the practical expression of a heart of humility. If you're not thankful or if you rarely give thanks to God or others, it's very likely that you're walking in arrogance, self-reliance and self-centeredness. To thank God or others is to take your eyes off yourself and acknowledge that someone has accomplished something on your behalf...maybe even that you needed someone.

And giving thanks is never a waste of time. In fact we should do it a lot more than we do...how about always as Paul tells us in verse 20. If we're being filled with the Spirit and walking in dependence on God, we always have something to give thanks for... Because everything we're doing will have been done in God strength and power rather than in our own.

Now Paul is specifically talking, here in verse 20, about giving thanks to God. This call to give thanks to God is repeated very often in Scripture. And here in Ephesians we see that we aren't just called to give thanks for the good stuff, but also for the things that may not be so pleasant. Notice we are to give thanks for all things. And we can do this only because we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and who are called according to his purpose. Even the painful, hurtful and disappointing things that happen to us will be used by God for our good in the long run. There's never a bad time to be thankful.

G. BEING SUBJECT TO ONE ANOTHER

This brings us to our final point for today: the seventh wise use of time given to us by Paul. He tells us, in verse 21, to ***be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.***

I want you to think for a moment about what the biggest time wasters are in the body of Christ, the church. What do you think it is that most often keeps the church from functioning effectively as the body of Christ and from being an accurate reflection of who Christ is? Wouldn't you say that the biggest time waster is strife and bickering among believers...Christians allowing their own personal agenda or their personal opinions or their sensitive feelings to create division in the body. This is what Satan uses very effectively to keep the church from fulfilling its mission and shining Christ's light into the community and the world.

Well, what Paul is telling us here in verse 21 is that the best way for us to maximize our time in the body of Christ and to accomplish the mission we've been given is to operate in humility towards each other. To be willing to put aside our own personal desires and opinions and feelings in order to be one

unified body working together to accomplish God's will by the power of his Spirit.

And what should motivate us to do operate this way?...the fear of Christ. We need to remember that we are Christ's body. Do you think he is pleased when we, acting as his body, behave in ways that are dishonoring to him and don't reflect who he is? Do you think there won't be consequences for us when we walk in arrogance and divisiveness, instead of humility toward one another?

The word translated, "fear," here is *phobos*, and means "fear, dread or terror." Vines describes it as "reverential fear" ...not just a fear "of [God's] power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him." We need to re-ignite that healthy fear of Christ that helps us put things in perspective and realize that his glory and representing him well is so much more important than our own personal opinions, rights and desires. ***...Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.***

V. CONCLUSION

So if you want a road map showing how to spend and maximize your time in 2016, Paul has clearly given it to us today in Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 to 21? Here it is again in review:

- 1) Passionately pursue God and seek to understand his will through the study of his Word, constant conversation with him, and anything else that leads you further on in your quest to know him more.
- 2) Avoid recklessly wasting your time with alcohol and other methods of trying to escape life's realities.
- 3) Learn to walk by and be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 4) Incorporate the Word of God into every part of your life and conversations, using it to encourage and teach yourself, your kids, your brothers and sisters in Christ, and even those who don't know him yet.
- 5) Fill your days with worship music and sing your heart out to God.
- 6) Give thanks to God always for all things.

- 7) Walk in humility toward others and be willing to set aside your own personal agenda, rights, opinions and even hurt feelings out of reverence for Christ and concern for his glory and his purposes.

These are rock solid ways we can be sure we are walking wisely and maximizing the time we've been graciously given by God.