

Don't Waste Your Year

Ephesians 5:15-18

Rev. Brian Bill

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Several years ago, a man in Janesville, Wisconsin purchased ad space on a highway billboard and put up these words: *“Enjoy life now: There is no afterlife.”* After this sign came down, two area churches got together and put up their own message on this same billboard: *“Life is short. Eternity is not.”*

Life is short, isn't it? Or, as Dr. Seuss put it: *“How did it get so late so soon? It's night before it's afternoon. December is here before its June. My goodness, how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?”*

One guy captured the sentiment this way: *“New Year's Again? It seems like it was just New Year's last year!”*

On this second day of the new year, how many of you have already broken your resolutions? It's hard to keep resolutions because they often *go in one year and out the other!* I talked to a friend recently who told me he doesn't make any New Year resolutions because he always breaks them anyway.

Some of us are skeptical of change even happening because we've tried to change many times before. This is captured by the meme which says, *“My face when someone says, ‘New Year, New Me.’”*

While I certainly understand the cynicism and skepticism (all too well), the downside is we can end up not making any decisions to move forward spiritually. As Donald Whitney writes, *“No one coasts into Christ-likeness.”* I've said this before, but it bears repeating: *Spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.*

My guess is you'd like some things to change in 2022. I came across a very helpful post this week entitled, *“Don't Just Make a Resolution; Make a Habit”* by Joe Carter. Here's part of what he says:

“Making a New Year's resolution is one of my favorite end-of-year activities. Every year I'm encouraged by the idea that in a mere 12 months I will have become a (marginally) better person. But every year I'm unable to keep the resolve in my resolutions...this year I'm trying something different. Instead of just making new resolutions, I intend to make new habits.

A habit is a recurrent, often unconscious pattern of behavior acquired through frequent repetition...habits drive our behavior, which in turn forms our character. No one wakes up one day to find they've suddenly developed either an immoral or a godly character. It is through habits of rebelliousness against God that we become "slaves to sin" and through habits of obedience...that we become "slaves to righteousness."

We'll come back to this idea at the end of the message.

Instead of focusing on making resolutions, which are often futile because we try to accomplish them in our own flesh, let's allow God's Holy Word to shine the spotlight on four holy habits the Holy Spirit can help us cultivate this year.

Please turn to the Book of Ephesians. In the first three chapters, the Apostle Paul establishes the importance of doctrine and in the second half of the letter, he focuses on our duty to do what we know to be true. Based on our position in Christ, we must put these truths into practice as a Christian.

Please stand as we read Ephesians 5:15-18: ***"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."***

Our outline is simple:

- **Live wisely (15)**
- **Leverage your time (16)**
- **Learn God's will (17)**
- **Lean into the Holy Spirit (18)**

Here's the sermon in a sentence: *Since our time on earth is limited, let's make the most of the time we have left.*

1. Live wisely. Ephesians 5:15: *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise."***** I can't even count how many times my mom told me to "*be careful*" when I was growing up. I'm sure our daughters would say the same thing about our parenting as Beth and I were always urging them to watch out and be aware of their surroundings.

The word **“carefully”** means to be skillful and to be on guard, to look very closely so as not to stumble. It has the idea of exactness, precision, and accuracy. One Greek scholar renders it this way: *“Be constantly taking heed therefore how accurately you are conducting yourselves...”*

This is a present imperative, meaning we are commanded to continually pay attention to how we’re living. We’re to be *“constantly careful.”* The same word is used in Hebrews 3:12 to warn about unbelief: **“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.”**

Too many of us are spiritual sluggards, living sloppy lives. Instead of fighting sin and staying on the right road, we take exit ramps all the time. Someone has said the tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it.

Let’s live wisely. Secondly...

2. Leverage your time. We see this in verse 16: **“Making the best use of the time, because the days are evil...”** This is also translated as **“redeem the time”** and has the idea of buying up a bargain. I was tempted to do that at Walgreens a couple years ago when they had all their Christmas candy on sale for 50% off. I decided to wait until the discount was 90% but then I never made it back. Likewise, we’re to “buy up the bargain of time” before it’s too late. We’re to purchase opportunities before the evil of our day takes it off the shelf.

There are two Greek words for time. One is *chronos*, which is quantitative time and refers to the passing of moments, days, months, years, decades, and centuries. It’s how we measure time. Sadly, most people are just going through the motions, wasting time or passing time. Some are like the passengers on a plane who heard the pilot give this message: *“We have lost our position, folks, and have been flying rather aimlessly for over an hour. That’s the bad news. But the good news is that we’re making very good time.”*

The other word is *kairos* and refers to qualitative time. It’s the idea of an opportune moment, also translated as *“the appointed time, a fixed, or special occasion.”* It refers to a period of opportunity which is open for a while and then closes. It’s not clock time, but kingdom time. We also see this in Colossians 4:5: **“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.”**

Are you ready to move from living a *chronos* life to a *kairos* life so you'll focus on living each moment as a supreme moment? William Penn once said: *"Time is what we want the most but what we use the worst."*

I don't speak much Latin (Ok, not any), but the phrase, "Carpe Diem" has always sounded cool to me. It means, "Seize the Day." That's good advice but it might be more helpful to say, "Carpe Momento," which means, "Seize the Moment."

Sometime ago, I checked out some countdown clocks on the web. By entering your age and other factors, you can learn how much time you have left to live. One site I visited had this description: *"The Internet's friendly reminder that life is slipping away...second by second."* When I first checked this out a couple years ago, I was told I was going to die on October 17th, 2033. When I filled out the information again, I found out my life has been extended to April 19, 2048. I don't know how I've been given an additional 15 years, but like Hezekiah, I'll take it! I hope I do a better job than he did with his extra time (see 2 Kings 20).

Another site, which asked for a ton of additional input, including whether I floss my teeth (I do) and how much butter I use (not a lot - I'm glad it didn't ask about my cheese consumption), has me living for 13,098 more days.

Obviously, only God knows the number of days we have left but we are called to live with an acute sense of a countdown according to Psalm 90:12: ***"So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom."*** To number means to "weigh" or "measure" our moments so we live them for God's glory and for the good of others.

Psalm 39:4-5 also challenges us to redeem the time: ***"O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!"***

Billy Graham was once asked what he was most surprised by in life. He answered, *"It's brevity."* God has been teaching me four things lately about life.

- It is fast
- It is fragile
- It is futile apart from Christ
- It is final

The missionary Adoniram Judson wrote: *“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.”*

Let's not just 'mark time,' but use the time we have left to make a mark for the kingdom. Let's not waste time, but worship God with our time.

We live in a world filled with evil influences and evil individuals. It's easy to think Paul is exhorting us to action because the days are short. Actually, he urges us to take advantage of the opportunities *“because the days are evil.”*

Doesn't it seem as if evil has been unleashed in our world? What was considered right is now wrong and what was wrong is now considered right, and to be a right for everyone.

As I was reflecting on this a couple months ago, I wrote down this statement: What used to be considered an ABOMINATION which led to LAMENTATION has become a CELEBRATION demanding PARTICIPATION because the UNTHINKABLE is now UNQUESTIONABLE. Isaiah 5:20 says: *“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”*

Listen. Even in the midst of great evil, there are always opportunities. Every day is an occasion to grab the good and shun the sin. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: *“But test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”* Let's lament but also shine the light of Jesus in our dark world. *Every time you can do something good, you should.*

Have you ever used the phrase, *“I'm just killing time?”* I've probably said it. I wonder if you'd be willing to join me and never say this again. God doesn't want us to kill our time; He wants us to fill our time. Wasting the gift of time insults the giver of time.

Most time is wasted, not in hours, but in minutes and seconds. Someone said the only piece of eternity we'll ever hold in our hand is the opportunity at hand right now. We have no other time in which to live. *Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it is called the present.*

If you're looking for something to read in this regard, I highly recommend the book called, *“Don't Waste Your Life”* by John Piper. Check out this quote: *“But*

whatever you do, find the God-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated passion of your life, and find your way to say it and live for it and die for it. And you will make a difference that lasts. You will not waste your life.”

Maybe we should do what the 16th Century reformer Philip Melanchthon did. He kept a record of every wasted moment during his day and took his list to God in confession before he went to bed at night.

God has created opportunities for you in 2022. But there will also be obstacles and distractions because the days are evil. Ephesians 2:10 declares you are God’s workmanship to do His work in the world: ***“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*** He has work prepared for you this year. Will you do what He has for you to do?

Since our time on earth is limited, let’s make the most of the time we have left. Live wisely. Leverage your time. That leads to the third holy habit.

3. Learn God’s Will. Ephesians 5:17 clarifies what is most important: ***“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*** The wise know God’s limits, while fools know no bounds. In Proverbs, the fool is the one who doesn’t follow God’s ways. He’s the one who knows the right thing to do but instead does the opposite, or simply does nothing. Proverbs 1:32 says the ***“complacency of fools will destroy them.”***

The ***“will of the Lord”*** is primarily focused on transformation, and less on location. We tend to lock in on *where* God wants us and *what* He wants us to do, while God is all about *who* we’re becoming.

The word ***“understand”*** carries the idea of assembling facts into an organized whole, like putting pieces of a puzzle together. It’s in the present imperative, meaning it’s a command to make this a continual practice. How does one understand the will of God? Simply put, by reading, meditating, memorizing, studying, and applying the Word of God.

God doesn’t always tell us everything about the future, does He? Here’s a helpful principle: *If you want to know God’s will, then do the will of God you already know.* Many times, we ask God to tell us what to do and I imagine Him saying, *“I’ve already told you in my Word but you’re not doing what I’ve already said to do.”*

The adage is true: “*God doesn’t steer parked cars.*” We’ve learned this principle by studying the missionary journeys in the Book of Acts. If you want the Almighty to guide you, then start moving on those things you already know He wants you to do.

Here are eight things we already know about God’s will from God’s Word.

1. **God wants you to be saved** (2 Peter 3:9).
2. **God wants you to surrender** (Romans 12:2).
3. **God wants you to be sanctified and to avoid immorality** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
4. **God wants you to give thanks** (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
5. **God wants you to live a good life** (1 Peter 2:15).
6. **God wants you to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him** (Micah 6:8).
7. **God wants you to delight in doing His will** (Psalm 40:8).
8. **God wants you to be a devoted disciple who makes other disciples among your neighbors and the nations** (Luke 9:23; Matthew 28:18-20)

It was Will Rogers who said half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save. Someone else put it like this: “*Life is too short to do everything we want to do; but it is long enough for us to do everything God wants us to do.*”

Live wisely. Leverage your time. Learn God’s will. The fourth habit is no doubt the most important.

4. Lean into the Holy Spirit. If you try to make changes or live the Christian life in the power of your own flesh, you’ll fail. Listen to verse 18: “***And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.***” At its core, this verse is helping us see the ultimate issue is control. Who or what is running my life? Is it me? Or is it the Holy Spirit? Am I controlled by outside influences or by the Holy Spirit who dwells within?

In the culture back then, many believed the spirit world could be entered through drunkenness. If you wanted to contact the spirits, or a dead ancestor, all you had to do was get drunk. The Greeks even had a god of wine called Dionysus. They believed when you got drunk, this god came and inspired you to do and say certain

things. In light of that, I guess we shouldn't be surprised alcohol is referred to as "spirits."

Interestingly, the word "**debauchery**" has the idea of "*wasteful and excessive squandering.*" The way of the world is wasteful, isn't it?

The word "**but**" shows a contrast, or antithesis. Instead of squandering your life, surrender your life by being filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a command, not a suggestion. Because it's in the present tense, it means, "*to be filled constantly*" or "*to keep on being filled.*" If you are saved, you received the Holy Spirit at conversion. The question is not, "*How can I get more of the Holy Spirit but how can I give more of me to Him?*"

As the Holy Spirit fills you with His fuel, He will give you fruit and help you lead a fulfilled life.

Since our time on earth is limited, let's make the most of the time we have left.

We can do that by...

- **Living wisely**
- **Leveraging our time**
- **Learning God's will**
- **Leaning into the Holy Spirit**

Redeeming the Time

It's important when we hear preaching to put it into practice. Otherwise, it just becomes information which doesn't lead to transformation. I want to give just one application today – *read your Bible every day.* Simply put, if you're not reading God's Word, you won't know God's will and you won't grow in wisdom or in witness.

Let's circle back to the importance of establishing holy habits, not simply making resolutions. Most of us would agree reading the Bible is important but most of us struggle to do so. For this to become a daily discipline, it's important to establish a routine. Here are four simple things which have helped me.

- Find a Bible and set it out.

- Use a Bible reading plan. We make a new one available each month at the Resource Kiosks and online. This month our focus is on, “The Value of God’s Word.”
- Determine what time you will read.
- Sit in one place.
- Pray for insight and application.

I have my ESV Study Bible on a table in our basement. Next to it is the Edgewood Bible Reading plan and some daily prayer requests I’ve typed out for our each of our grandchildren. This is where I always sit to soak up the Scriptures. You’ll also note I have a cup of coffee on my Packers coaster.

Someone said there are two great enemies of time.

- Anxiety about the future.
- Regrets about the past.

I wonder if you’ve been gutted by guilt and you’re on the sidelines because of shame about your past. Christ came to give you a fresh start through the forgiveness of your sins. I like how Tony Evans says it: *“Regardless of what happened yesterday, if you stick with the Lord today, your yesterday doesn’t have to control your tomorrow.”*

Regret for wasted time is more wasted time. The way to overcome anxiety about the future and regrets about the past is to focus on your forgiveness today. *Since our time on earth is limited, let’s make the most of the time we have left.*

This rope represents a timeline of your existence (I’m grateful to Francis Chan for this illustration). Imagine it goes on forever into eternity. This short green section at the end represents your short time here on earth. Many of us are only concerned about this section.

- We work hard to enjoy this little sliver of time.
- Some of us are so focused on this life, that we don’t care what happens in the next life.
- Others of us are wasting our lives, not doing anything with the short life we’ve been given.

Listen. What we do here, determines where we will spend eternity. Or more accurately, what we *believe* here, determines our destiny. We get one chance at this life on earth and then comes eternity.

Hebrews 9:27 says at the end of this short life, we will all stand before God: “***And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.***” And all that will matter is whether we have believed in and received Jesus Christ.

Invitation

Lord Jesus, I confess I have been wasting my life. I admit I am a sinner, and I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I've been living. By faith I gratefully receive Your gift of salvation. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming to earth. With all my heart I believe You are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank You for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. Thank You for dying in my place as my substitute. I believe Your words are true. I repent and now receive You as my Lord and Savior. I surrender to Your leadership in my life. Make me into the person You want me to be as Your disciple who looks for ways to make more disciples. Help me to live wisely, leverage my time, learn Your will, and lean into Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Communion

Let's transition now to remembering the Lord's Supper. As we prepare to participate in what we have in common, let's consider these truths.

1. Look back – “***For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*** (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

2. Look in – “***Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.***” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

3. Look up – “***He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making***

purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”
(Hebrews 1:3)

4. Look around – *“This is my body, which is for you.”* (1 Corinthians 11:24)
The *“you”* is plural. We’re reminded we are members of the international, intergenerational, multi-ethnic, global body of Christ.

5. Look Forward – *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* (1 Corinthians 11:26)

We practice open communion here. You don’t need to be a member of Edgewood to participate, but you do need to be born again.

Directions for Opening Cup

1. Hold the cup with one hand and with the other find the clear tab and pull gently to open to take the bread.
2. Continue to hold the cup and now find the foil tab and pull carefully to open the juice cup. Be careful while pulling – you don’t have to pull it completely off.