

## Redeem the Time Ephesians 5:15-18<sup>1</sup>

I think it's probably a fair assessment to say that most people don't fully appreciate things until they're gone or almost gone. I think back now to when I was a child and I realize that I didn't enjoy it as much as I could have. I mean, I played a lot. I played outdoors. I got sweaty. I swam. I played in the snow. I actually enjoyed my childhood. However, now that I'm older and I don't have the "ease" of childhood, and I'm busy with various other things. And, I'm starting to realize I can't do certain things I used to be able to do, I look back and say, "I didn't appreciate the ease that I had then. I didn't maximize those years as much as I could have."

So, when we lose something we value, we then realize how much we didn't value it as much as we could have. I'm already thinking that, not only with my childhood, but my parenting. As my children are getting older, I'm beginning to understand the many people who would tell me to enjoy the time with my children because it goes by so quickly.

Now, you may be able to predict where I'm going with this. What about this time period we're in? I've heard many people comment on how much they miss the church family gathering together in person. We long for what was. This time has caused many to grow in their desire to gather again and also caused many to grow in their appreciation for one another. In addition, this time period has, I assume, caused many of us to appreciate the many simple blessings God has given us in the United States – from cars, to heated homes, to grocery stores. But maybe we didn't appreciate them as much as we do now!

I don't say all of this, though, to make us feel guilty or to wish we could go back and enjoy the past moments more. That's impossible. But what is possible is to maximize our days *right now*. If it's true that God ordains everything, and is working all things (including stay-at-home orders and the spread of the Coronavirus) for the good of his children, then those of us who have trusted Christ and are followers of him, can live for his glory today – this week. May we not make it through this time and then look back saying, "I wasted it." Instead, let's look to the Lord for his wisdom to know how to live and act time that feels so much like a holding pattern for many of us.

Today, I want to take you to Ephesians 5:15-21. I find some of the words extremely helpful for us, and I pray that we would learn more about what it means. Let's pray and then read the text together this morning:

*<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. . . .<sup>2</sup>*

In these few verses we see God's commands for how we ought to live. This comes right after being told how our lives are to contrast with the world by shining the light of God's truth – especially shining light into the darkest of scenarios around us. Then in verse 14, we read, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."<sup>3</sup> Then Paul writes, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise. . . ."

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon manuscript is a rough draft. I recommend you utilize this along with the audio file of the sermon so that you can get a more complete understanding of the sermon and also the text of Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:15–18.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:14.

I like what one person said of these verses by using the illustration of sleepwalking. Have you ever walked in your sleep or have you seen someone do that? When you're sleepwalking, you don't really know what you're doing. Your brain isn't functioning as one who is alert. It's like Paul is saying the world has problems. There's darkness and sin. Christians shouldn't be sleepwalking. In the midst of this COVID-crisis, where we are hearing that we haven't even reach our peak yet – we can't numb ourselves or pretend things are fine. We also shouldn't coast on our past spiritual life. All of this is sleepwalking. We need to be alert. Be awake!

So, the main idea of this sermon is that **believers must be proactive with our daily lives, seeking God's will.**

Paul then gives us a guide as to what this looks like. He starts off by revealing that:

### **1. Believers must be proactive with their lives (vv. 16-17).**

Let's read verses 15-17 again: <sup>15</sup> **Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,** <sup>16</sup> **making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.** <sup>17</sup> **Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.** <sup>4</sup>

Paul reveals the reason why we must be proactive. He uses the word "because" in verse 16. This is the reason why we should be careful with how we live. We should be proactive in how we live. We should be wise in how we live. Why? Because the days are evil. How are days evil? Does it mean that I should be afraid of getting up because this 24-hour period of time is completely wicked. No. Paul is using this to compel us to obey and to not be afraid. So, what does it mean?

This phrase is used in various scriptures, and I'm going to read to you some of them. Ephesians 6:13 states, ". . . take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day . . ." <sup>5</sup> When Jacob speaks to Pharaoh, he says, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life . . ." <sup>6</sup> I think you might be able to gather what this phrase means by those verses, but if we go to two other passages, I think we begin to see clearly. Psalm 49:5 says, "Why should I fear in the days of evil, *When* the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?" <sup>7</sup> Many times in Hebrew poetry, they use a form of parallelism. So, when the psalmist says, "Why should I fear in the days of evil," and then talks about the "iniquity at his heels," he is defining what evil days are: they are days in which evil exists and affect us.

So, what does it mean by "the days are evil?" That means that the days have so much temptation to sin. It also means that the days have much difficulty in them. Like Jacob losing Joseph because of the selfish ways of his sons, so we can lose things we value because of a broken world. Time vanishes away so quickly. What we love dissipates in this world. In various ways, we've experienced "evil" in our days. Whether we've brought it on ourself or we're experiencing days now of uncertainty with a virus that brings with it pain and death – with is a sign of the curse on this world.

If we know the days are evil. If we know today, this week, is filled with evil days, do you really want to be spending your time playing video games all day or sitting in front of the TV or being a workaholic and trying to go back in time and mimic previous months? Will we act like a sleepwalker in the midst of COVID-19 or will we wake up?

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:15–17.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Eph 6:13.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ge 47:9.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ps 49:5.

In the book *Don't Waste Your Life*, the author writes the following: "I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider a story from the February 1998 edition of *Reader's Digest*, which tells about a couple who 'took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.' At first, when I read it I thought it might be a joke. A spoof on the American Dream. But it wasn't. Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: 'Look, Lord. See my shells.' That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. Over against that, I put my protest: Don't buy it. Don't waste your life."<sup>8</sup>

Don't waste it. Now, I put my protest in – don't waste stay-at-home order! This isn't to say you can't enjoy godly rest. That's not the point of this statement. The point here is to say that if that's "it" and that's the ultimate aim, how tragically flawed. You're living for minimal pleasures – and God deserves maximal glory, which is your supreme joy!

Therefore, don't waste your life. God wants us to maximize it! Why? The days are evil. Sin seeks to bog us down. Temptations come our ways. The joys of life are fleeting fast. Many are without work now. Some of you wonder what to do financially. Still others are engaging with people daily and are concerned for your health and your family's health. In the midst of this, time keeps moving. Children are getting older. We're getting older. Death is coming soon. Life is a vapor. How do we maximize our lives?

Remember Jesus' words: "<sup>19</sup>Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."<sup>9</sup> Far from our work being meaningless or only lasting for a moment, Jesus teaches that life lived for God's glory (seeking first His Kingdom) actually matters for eternity. And, by the way, the reason it matters for eternity is because Jesus' life, death and resurrection purchased people's forgiveness so that they could have eternal life! Praise His name that our actions can matter. Because of him, our time can be maximized – the evil days are overcome by the Good Savior!

When you realize that, you could begin to think, "Ok, let's get moving! I'm ready to maximize." That's a great response. Now, what does Paul say we ought to do?

### **Evaluate carefully how to live.**

Verse 15 says, "Look carefully then how you walk." That's talking about how you live your life. Before you *do* anything, you need to think about what you're going to do. The phrase "careful attention" brings two Greek words together that mean "precision" and "accuracy." In other words, we are to be really, really purposeful about how we live our lives.

This may seem like a crazy analogy, but when I heard these words, it reminded me of the game "Minesweeper." Some of you have probably never played it before, but many of you probably have (if you were ever bored). If you haven't played, bear with me in the analogy. The goal is to not touch a square with a hidden bomb. You start the game by pressing a box, and hopefully that opens up the area so you see a bunch of numbers. Those numbers indicate how many bombs are close to that box. What if you approached Minesweeper without precision. You may say, "Well, I just want to win. That's the goal. Who cares about anything else?!" Within a couple turns, you're done.

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<sup>8</sup> Piper, John. *Don't Waste Your Life*. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 45–6.

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mt 6:19–20.

Most of us would say, “Ok, that’s just a game. We don’t have to take it seriously.” What if it wasn’t a game anymore. What if there was a real bomb out in a field? How seriously would you take it then? Let’s bring this closer to home. God says all our works will be judged and a Christian’s works can matter for eternity to come. How serious is it that we believe our works matter? We must evaluate our lives and seek to live them with precision and accuracy towards the goal of glorifying Christ!

So, evaluate how you’re living life now. Don’t let these weeks be wasted! I know for me, my mind keeps making me think that I’m just in a holding pattern. What do you do in a holding pattern? You just sit on the plane and wait to land. Then when I land, I’ll get off the plane and get to work. But that’s not how I should be thinking about these days. While I am called to wait on the Lord – not understanding all that he’s doing and resting in his care, I still am called to evaluate carefully what to do and how to act in this seeming holding pattern. I cannot sleepwalk. You cannot sleepwalk.

Therefore, evaluate purposefully your to God’s plan for his Kingdom first. Align it with the current circumstances. Pray to know how to live. This is how we ought to live. Evaluate carefully. You’ve been rescued by God. You’re called to make disciples. You’ve been given specific gifts for the good of the body of believers. How ought *you* to live? Sit at Jesus’ feet, pray about it. Then sit down and plan through it.

Now Paul gives the second point in being proactive.

### **Walk wisely by redeeming the time.**

“making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish. . . .”<sup>10</sup>

Paul states that walking wisely (and not like a fool) means that we make the best use of the time. Or, maybe you’ve heard it said as, “redeem the time.” What does it mean to redeem time? The phrasing of “redeem” refers to purchasing something. How do I purchase time? In one idea of redemption, you’re purchasing something from slavery and giving it freedom. Couldn’t that be what it means here? I think Paul is giving us a word analogy here. Especially in the context of saying that the days contain evil in them, I believe that what Paul is saying is that Christians have this glorious joy of being able to live life in such a way as to “buy time” from its slavery to the fall and a Christian can actually live in time for God’s glory! Time, in this sense, has then been purchased for the fame of Jesus’ name!

Do you understand what’s going on here? Paul is therefore telling us that we are not victims of our schedules. We are stewards of King Jesus – who empowers us to use all our time for his fame! Thus, time (and what we do in time) can be used for eternal purposes! So, walk wisely! Live on the basis of eternity in the here-and-now. Glorify God and enjoy him! Love your neighbor because Christ has loved you so greatly.

Now, in the midst of saying all of this, I have a personal concern. There could be some of you who are tight planners. You have your organizers, your Gmail calendar or some other sort of planning tools. You love the idea of planning and maybe you want to get to work at planning. And, you may think that all I’m saying here is that if you plan, you’re doing the right thing.

Paul emphasizes the words wise and foolish in this text. Someone who is wise “fears the Lord.” That’s the beginning of wisdom. Joyful submission to the King of kings. Awe in the Creator over all! I believe wisdom includes a rest and trust in God’s working in the circumstances of life and therefore we change course as needed. James says in James 4 that we are to plan, but in all our plans have them submissive to God’s will – no matter what! So, we don’t plan in order to feel in

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:16–17.

control. We plan because God is in control and we want to show his control in all our actions! The days are evil – everything is vanity. Yet, Jesus empowers us to work in time for God’s glory, doing works that matter for eternity.

Therefore, evaluate carefully how you are living. Redeem the time. But how do I do this? That takes us into the next point.

## 2. Believers must seek God’s will (vv. 17-18).

Verse 17 says, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”<sup>11</sup> This “therefore” is important. I believe Paul is restating what he has already said, but he’s making it more specific. In verses 15 and 16, he has told us what to do, but he hasn’t told us how we are going to be wise in making priorities. He also hasn’t told us where to turn in order to evaluate our lives. Without verse 17, we could simply use our own standards and feelings to evaluate whether we’re too busy or lazy. We could say, “Well, life is weird. Who knows what tomorrow holds. I’ll just wait until I get some sense of control back.” Or, we could spin our wheels trying to gain certainty today and never truly rest in the Lord.

How do we not simply turn inward for the answers? Paul gives us something much more solid. He reiterates that we don’t want to be unwise. Since I haven’t explained what it means to be unwise, let me do that here. To be unwise is to be a fool. A fool is someone who doesn’t understand the seriousness of this life. A fool is someone who refuses to realize the eternal nature of existence. They live only in light of their own desires, and not for God’s glory. But someone who is wise is someone who lives in light of eternity. The fool ignores God. Wisdom comes when someone has a healthy fear and worship of God. As a result, they saturate their minds by thinking on things above, not merely focused on earthly things.

So, don’t be a fool. Be wise. Paul shows us that someone who is wise is one who seek to understand the will of the Lord. Now, this phrase can be highly confusing to people. In trying to figure out how to live life, we could misinterpret this phrase here and go off into some type of mysticism that the Bible doesn’t endorse.

What does this mean and how do we discern the Lord’s will? Let me give a couple bad examples first. When I was a dating Tracy, I had doubts as to whether or not it was God’s will to date her. We both wanted to follow God. Yet, at certain points, I went to absurd things to try to “discern God’s will.” I would be working and I’d say something like, “If someone gives me a Delaware quarter, then I should stay with Tracy.” This type of mystical way of discerning God’s will went on in other types of choices, too. Is this what Paul is saying by seeking to discern God’s will? I still remember a time I heard a story where a person tried to discern God’s will by playing Bible roulette (i.e. – when you open your Bible and point to a verse, close it and then open to another verse). The first verse this person saw was, “Judas hanged himself.” The next verse was “Go and do likewise.”

I think we would all recognize that these are not wise ways to go about discerning God’s will. So, where do we turn to discern God’s will? First, let’s look at the definition of the Greek word for “understand.” This word means, “to employ one’s capacity for understanding and thus to arrive at insight . . . .”<sup>12</sup> This means that we are to use our brains and develop our thinking and then make practical application as a result. But where do we turn to develop our thinking? I believe Paul is calling us to the Scriptures primarily. In Proverbs 16:20-21, we read, “<sup>20</sup> **Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.** <sup>21</sup>**The wise of heart is**

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<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:17.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 379.

**called discerning . . . .**<sup>13</sup> Who is someone who is wise and discerning? They are people who trust in God and take heed to the word. And how will you become a discerning person? The Bible says through the means of prayer, he saves us! Call on the name of the Lord, and he answers. So, to know God's will, you must be in a relationship with God where you listen to him in his Word and you speak to him in prayer. If you're wanting God to talk to you and you're not opening the Book, you don't really want to listen to God. If you read the Word, but you never pray, then are you actually living in dependence on God?

### **Through the Word and Prayer**

This is the first place where we develop wisdom: in growing in the Word. If you're not in the Word, you will not have powers of discernment for life. But, for some, they'd rather play Bible roulette and have some nebulous sense of "peace" instead of actually disciplining themselves in the Word and prayer. Why waste your time in these things. Seriously. Think about it. When you just want a feeling, you're sacrificing a relationship with the eternal God. But so sadly we're a quick-fix people. Please hear me carefully. Going back to the main priority of a Christian in scheduling your life – you must be a person that is developing and growing your relationship with God.

I can't help but wonder if the current stay-at-home order is a special gift to many of God's children. So many have said before, "If I just had more time, I could read the Word and prayer." Well, God isn't giving you more time, but he's allowing you to evaluate your life and incorporate habits in this time. Are you filling your time with mindless activities? Are you sleepwalking right now? Wake up. Take up the privilege of being able to spend *more* time in the Word and prayer!

You know what amazes me. Many of the people who have done the most of eternal value are those people who grew deeper in the Word *and* prayer. I can look at Martin Luther or Charles Spurgeon or Augustine or Susanna Wesley or Jesus, and you know what you'd see? *Relationship with God through the Word and prayer*. You know what you also see? A hundredfold fruit.

But that hundredfold fruit comes through consistent, persistent growth in that relationship. So, don't treat the Word and prayer like ordering through the drive-thru. There's no relationship there. Take time. You're not always going to *feel* certain things after reading and prayer. But you know you're growing in relationship with the Lord, and praise him for that! So, we grow in knowing God's will through the Word and prayer. As we study the Word, he tells us how we ought to live. He shows us his priorities and how they ought to shape our decisions today. And, in prayer we confess our need for him and we praise him that he'll meet those needs.

Then, living in the Word and prayer, we grow in knowing God's will:

### **Through Obedience**

In 2 Peter, we read, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord . . . ." <sup>14</sup> This word for knowledge refers to "knowledge gained by experience" (Wuest). This experience can be through reading and study, but it also carries with it the idea of life-experience. So, how am I going to maximize time? I need to prioritize my life under God's sovereignty. I need to evaluate where I'm at and where I need to go. I need to redeem the time in my actions and attitudes. I need to be in the Word and prayer. And, then, I need to obey.

Paul writes this, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*."<sup>15</sup> Titus

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<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Pr 16:20–21.

<sup>14</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 2 Pe 1:2.

<sup>15</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 1 Co 15:10.

2:14 says that Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.”<sup>16</sup>

Jesus Christ, in taking the punishment we deserved on the cross and giving us his righteousness and also reconciliation with God, is God’s grace to us! Because of Jesus, we now can live zealous for good works! Sometimes I think people tend to want to have a magical pill that makes obedience easy, but that’s not the case. Sometimes obedience is easy. But sometimes it’s difficult. And, incorporating new habits – addressing your life and how you’ve been doing things – can be very hard. But we cannot be content knowing what we need to do and sitting back and waiting until we somehow magically do it.

As Paul says in Philippians 2, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in us! If you have turned to Christ for salvation, then you have the *fear of God in you*. That fear and trembling isn’t a phrase talking about living in terror. It’s a holy awe and amazement and wonderment at God. Look at God and all that he is for you in Christ Jesus! Know his holy splendor and that this God is at work in you! Because he is at work in you – work!

As you take steps of obedience, you’ll begin to learn more of God’s will. The Word will become even more alive. Things will make more and more sense as you trust the Word and actually do it! That’s why Peter says to grow in the knowledge of him through obedience! So, in the midst of this season – evaluate on the basis of the Word and through prayer. And, because of God’s grace in you – live out your salvation!

Finally, I want to bring up one more point:

### **By the Holy Spirit**

Verse 18 of chapter five goes on to say, “<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. . . .”<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:11, “. . . if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”<sup>18</sup>

God is calling you to a task you cannot do on your own, and graciously, He’s granted you the Spirit to do what only He can do. Then He tells you to follow Him – believing that He will do exactly what He promises to do. Do you see how the Triune God is calling you into relationship with him? By God’s will through Jesus by the strength of the Spirit, God calls all of us to see that these days are evil and that he empowers us to redeem those days. Can we do this? Not in our own strength. But Christians don’t live in their own strength. We live in the strength of the Spirit!

So, Ventura, **May we not be sleepwalkers. Let’s Prioritize: Don’t be unwise. Let’s redeem the time and grow in our relationship with Him through the Word and prayer. Let’s apply the Word to our lives. Let’s depend on the Spirit.**

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<sup>16</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Tt 2:14.

<sup>17</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 5:18–21.

<sup>18</sup> *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Ro 8:11.