

life groups' sermon guide

margin: giving God your time



Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Matthew 6:33

Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

Psalms 90:12

Time is the heritage of every person. Whether a king or street sweeper, an astronomer or truck driver, a business tycoon or grocery clerk, each of us has the same number of hours. Many necessities and opportunities demand much of our day. Our work takes up a large percentage of our life. Being a good husband or wife, father or mother, employer or employee requires time.

A survey was conducted by the U.S. News and World Report back in 1988. They surveyed 6000 people about how the average American spends their time. In a lifetime, as reported in the Jan. 30, 1989 issue, they discovered that the average American will spend:

- Six months sitting at stoplights
- Eight months opening junk mail
- One year looking for misplaced objects
- 2 years unsuccessfully returning phone calls
- 4 years doing housework
- 5 years waiting in line
- 6 years eating

Each one of us have been given the same amount of hours each day. Unless you live in a different universe than I, each day still has 24 hours in which we eat, sleep, and do chores, menial tasks, etc. As we start our journey into Christian stewardship, we start out by looking at how we should be good stewards of one of our most precious resources; our time.

In the 90th Psalm, the psalmist prays that God would teach him, and others, to become good stewards with time. "Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." (Psalm 90:12) When it comes to the end of your life, your entire impact on this world will be boiled down to the one inch hyphen between the day you were born and the day that you died. The psalmist knew that life is relatively short against the span of God's existence and eternity. "Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10)

Q: *How does it make you feel when you think about just how brief your time on this globe is?*

In a sense the psalmist asked God for the grace to allow him to "number his days" so that he could find the

value in each day. Each day he wanted to “gain a heart of wisdom,” or as it says in the KJV, “that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.” Not only did he want to value each day that he had, he also wanted God to give him the wisdom to see the hand of God move each day. He was asking for the ability to discern the things of God, and in learning His will and ways, apply them to make his life better.

We live in a fast-paced society. Things are changing at a faster pace than when we were children. In order to TRY and keep up, we find ourselves running here and there. Time, instead of being something that we cherish, becomes a nuisance. We thrive in the fast lane of life, only to come home, or come to church complaining about how busy we are.

Somebody once said, “We master our minutes, or we become slaves to them; we use time, or time uses us.” The hardest thing to hand over to God is our time. Our treasure is a simple matter, in one aspect. We know that He asks for the tithe, or ten percent. If we know what types of things that God has blessed us with, many are more than willing to worship God by using these gifts. But our time is our own, or so we like to think.

God has granted us the grace to get out of bed this morning. Our hearts are still beating. Our brains are still waving. Our lungs are still supplying oxygen to all parts of our bodies. Despite how busy we may be, or make ourselves, God is asking for our time. If Cain and Abel’s offerings were based on the “first fruit” principle, shouldn’t our use of time fall into that category as well?

Ephesians 5 reveals God’s expectation for us relating to time. In the NKJV, Paul addresses the Ephesians this way, “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15,16)

Q: What are some of the chief time wasters in your day/week?

1. Walk Circumspectly

First, we are to “walk circumspectly.” Our English word circumspect, comes from the Latin *circumspicere*, that means to look round about on all hands; to be in every way watchful, wary, and cautious, in order to avoid danger, and discern enemies. But the original Greek word *akribos* (ak-ree-boce) means correctly, accurately, consistently, or perfectly. We who have received the truth, are to be careful of our conduct; walk by the rule which God has given you.

When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied this way, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:27-40) If we are walking circumspectly, or being very careful about the way that we use our time, then two questions should arise:

Q: Have I faithfully served God with the time He has given me?

Q: Have I showed God to those around me?

In our busy-ness, it is easy to neglect an unseen God. Maybe you have been in a situation where you have an early doctor's appointment, and in your haste to be on time, you have neglected your prayer and devotion time. From there the day quickly gets away from you until it's bedtime, and you can barely keep your eyes open, let alone focus on Him.

When we think of tithing our thoughts naturally drift to the thought of money. Some have a hard time with giving God ten percent of their finances so this next thought is going to be a killer.

Q: What would your day look like if you gave God 10% of your day?

There are churches in other parts of the world who give God 2 hours 24 minutes of their day to God every day! For you folks who find there is not enough hours in a day to get done all that you feel needs to be done, giving up around 2 1/2 hours each day would seem like murder!

If that seems impossible, look at it this way. The average Christians spends a total of 15 minutes a WEEK in prayer. If we can spend, on average, three hours a day in front of the television, then something must be out of whack.

Our day should also be invested in our "neighbors." That is not just referring to the person next door, but also the people in your house. I believe that you would not think of only giving your husband, wife, mother etc. fifteen minutes a week. Sometimes we work so hard that our family gets the leftovers.

In my life, I have found that the quality time I invest with God and my family affects my day. As we are told in Psalm 90, life is short. We MUST prioritize our life. God must come first. Family is the next logical progression. Then the rest should fall into line. I know that emergencies arise, but even they can be dealt with if we deal with our two greatest relationships first.

Q: Think of one thing you can change in your daily routine to give priority to God, family and others. What would it be?

When you walk circumspectly, you show your principles, which are holy and good, by a corresponding conduct. Don't only profess, but live the Gospel. As you embrace all its promises, be careful also to embrace all its precepts; and behave yourselves so, that your enemies may never be able to say that you are holy in your doctrines and profession, but irregular in your lives.

2. Redeeming the time

I like what John Wesley had to say – "With all possible care redeeming the time - Saving all you can for the best purposes; buying every possible moment out of the hands of sin and Satan; out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business; the more diligently, because the present are evil days, days of the grossest ignorance, immorality, and profaneness."

The phrase "Redeeming the time" in verse 16 is a very descriptive one. It means to buy up those moments, which others seem to throw away. It means seizing opportunities, to rescue or recover our time from waste, thereby using the time wisely. Let time be your chief commodity; deal in that alone; buy it all up, and use every portion of it wisely to the glory of God. Time is that on which eternity depends.

I want to say something to all the people who are trying to keep all their plates spinning at once. YOU CANNOT DO IT ALL! There needs to come a time when you STOP. There was a pastor who was starting a new church. At home, he had a wife with two kids and one more on the way. In all honesty, he lived a life that said "God, you take care of my family, and I'll take care of the church."

He came to a point in his life when he came across the passage that said that husbands must love their wives, and the passage where Jesus said that He would build the church. He went home one night and asked his wife what she needed from him. She told him that she needed him most between 4:00 and 6:00 PM to help with supper, bed time etc. In the very earlier stages of the new church, this pastor left the church office early so that he could spend the time with his family that he needed.

He learned that if he had to be the man that God called him to be for both the church and his family, he would need to work more efficiently. With that, he focused on what he did best, and allowed others to work their gifts in the areas in which he struggled. He "redeemed" his time by doing that.

The church did not suffer, but it grew. His family never suffered, they grew closer together. His relationship with God grew deeper because he learned to lean on God.

Q: What things is God asking you to leave in his hands? What would it look like if you yielded to God's will in every aspect of your life?

We are told that we need to redeem our time because the "days are evil!" Let me say it this way.. There are too many things out there that will rob you of your time. This time can be better used in serving God and your neighbours. Satan doesn't care if you're busy in your own life, church life, family life etc. If he can keep you so busy that your time with God suffers, then he has you right where he wants you.

Conclusion

Take a look at your life.

Q: Are you too busy?

Q: Are you denying God the best that you can be?

Q: Are you robbing family and friends of you?

Take a careful look at your life. Look at areas where you feel the wheel is spinning out of control. Ask God to give you the grace to “redeem your time” wisely. Ask Him to help you to “number your days aright.”

We have all been given 24 hours a day in which we live. Let us declare before God and each other that we will use our time wisely! Let us encourage each other. Let us love God and our neighbors.

Adapted from a sermon by Frederic Whittier