

EPHESIANS 5:15-17 9-14-14

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME pt.1

(Ephesians 5) I once heard about a conversation that took place between two hog farmers from Tennessee. We'll call them Joe and Fred. They were talking about the market price they could get for their hogs and Fred asked Joe where he was going to take his hogs to market this year and Joe said, "I'm gonna be takin em up to Memphis. They are payin 17 cents a pound for good hogs." Fred shook his head and said, "17 cents a pound? I think I'll be takin mine to Chicago. I hear you can get 27 cents a pound in Chicago." "But Fred" said Joe, "Chicago's an awful long way off. Its gonna take you a long time to get your hogs up to Chicago." Fred paused a moment then said, "That don't bother me none. What's time to a hog?" What is time to a hog? Or should we ask the more pertinent question, "what's time to a Christian?" To be sure, time to a Christian is a very precious commodity. God gives us two things which we spend and over which we are stewards: possessions and time. How we spend our time matters greatly because it matters for eternity. Our passage today begins with a quote from the Old Testament, from Isaiah. Ephesians 5:**14** *Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.* This verse refers to the resurrection from the dead and the judgment to follow. The light of Christ mentioned here is the exposing light of His judgment and I say that because verse 14 leads us into verse 15 and the thought there **15-17** *Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* We can spend two things: money and time. We know what money is, but what is time? It's a mysterious thing. Time is what keeps everything from happening at once. Time is a terrible thing to waste. When it is past it is irretrievable. Spend it well the first time because you never get to relive a single moment. That's why someone has said, "only one life twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."

A major part of walking in wisdom is knowing how to use our time. Shelby Metcalf, former basketball coach at Texas A&M, had a player on his team who reported to him that he had just received four F's & one D. Metcalf said to him, "Son, looks to me like you're spending too much time on one subject." Balance. The elusive goal. Whenever I get in small groups of men where we share our needs together the most common need mentioned is that of knowing how to allocate the resource of our time. God calls us here to a wise allocation and what that means is what we will

examine together today and next Sunday. Let's consider how to use well the time that God gives and when you do that one of the first things to do is to scrap all your assumptions about how to spend your time. And you do have some assumptions. We make assumptions about how much time we need for sleep, and for work and for eating and for entertainment. Get rid of all your assumptions and begin to ask, "why" for everything you do. Look at your schedule with a critical eye and ask yourself what question? Not how do I want to spend this time but, "how does God want me to spend this time?" Give all your time to Christ and let Him set your schedule for you. Don't just carve out little pockets of time in your schedule that God can have. Give him all of it. He won't make you spend all of your time in prayer. He won't rob you of all your personal pleasures. He will distribute your time back to your work and your family and your own needs according to His wisdom. For most of you, God's will includes time for money-making endeavors, it will include time for the preparing and consumption of food and it will include time for sleep. But even if you spend eight hours per day sleeping, two hours involved with food, fixing, eating and cleaning, nine hours per day in work and travel for five days a week that still leaves you with over fifty hours in your week. How are you using those hours? If you could keep an account of where they go I bet that most of us would be shocked and maybe even a bit embarrassed.

What do you want to do with your time? What should you do with your time? I have one answer for that and this is the most important thing I'll say on this subject. It will sound terribly simple, very unprofound, but it is a fantastically helpful and liberating principle when you grasp it. The principle is this: please God with your schedule ®. That is what we are to do in all of life. Jesus, our model, speaking of God the Father, said John 8:29c *I always do the things that are pleasing to Him*. Many years ago I was visited by two men just starting out as pastors and they wanted some time to pick my brain. And I told these two men that the greatest thing I had learned in my years of pastoral ministry was this: that my goal in life was to please God. That is a challenging goal because God isn't happy with half-heartedness in anything but that is also a liberating goal because if my goal is to please God what is not my goal, what is not my job and responsibility as a Christian man? To please other people. Most of us live under this terrible burden of trying to please all kinds of different folks who have very different expectations of us. And you go nuts trying to live like that. It just cannot be done. I expect you have this problem. I know you do. One of my favorite cartoons shows a pastor's wife comforting her husband and saying, "God loves you and everyone

else has a wonderful plan for your life.”® That’s really the way it is isn’t it? Your parents expect you to be one thing. Your spouse expects you to be another. Your boss wants you to be like this; your pastor wants you to be like that. For me I hear all these voices telling me what to do with my time. My seminary prof tells me to study thirty hours for every sermon I preach. Leonard Ravenhill tells me to pray two hours a day. Bill Bright tells me I have to witness twice a day. James Dobson tells me to go home and be with my family. Another calls me to be the caring counselor, another calls me to be the dynamic administrator, another says I need to be doing one on one discipleship, another says I need to be leading moral crusades, another says, another says, another says. Forget all the others! What does my God say that you need to be and do? He alone has a right to tell me what to do. I will not shut out the voices of others because I hope thru them to get a better perception of what God wants; but that is my goal, to please Him, not anyone else. Galatians 1:**10** *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.* Did you get that? He said *If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.* A bond-servant of Christ has a single ambition. This means that, as you set your schedule, you must resist the pressure which comes from the expectations of others.® God is demanding but He is always fair and He will not push you beyond your ability. There is enough time in every week and every day to do the will of God. Say that with me: *There is enough time today to do the will of God.* There is seldom enough time to please yourself and God. If you find yourself too busy that may be what you are trying to do. There is also never enough time to please others and God. If you are too busy maybe this is what you are trying to do. If you are going to please God with your time you must not be enslaved to your own desires or to the expectations of others. Got that? There is no point in continuing if this principle isn’t clear in your head: you must seek to please God, foremost, with your schedule.

That principle has tremendous ramifications which we will discuss but one very critical one that I dare not overlook is that if your goal is to please God you had better find out what He wants. Now look at **17** *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* And if the Bible is God’s letter to His people, which it is, then you had better study it to understand your Master’s will. Here is where we learn what God expects of us as human beings, as Christians, as men or women, as husbands and wives, as workers and bosses, as church members or church leaders. Because your time is limited you need to understand what the will of God is. This is the beginning point in

Christian time management and you can learn how to please God with your schedule as you get to know Him in His word and as you thoughtfully and prayerfully apply what you learn to your life.

From here I want to begin giving you a list of rules or guidelines for good and godly time management. I have six. We will cover half of them today and the other half next time. Rule #1 and this has to be #1 is to determine and remember your priorities, aims and goals. ® With the Scriptures as your reference, strive to develop a vision for what your life is to be.

Think about what your life would be like if you, like Jesus, always did what was pleasing to the Father. How much time would be given to prayer, and study and work and sleep and family? For example, the various elements of my life have to be woven together into a fabric that adorns my profession. The first and most basic thing that I am is a Christian. So that means I am in relationship to God, a relationship that requires some time to communicate with my Lord, to learn from Him and worship Him. But, in addition to being a Christian, I am a husband of a wife; and God tells me to love her and cherish her, to provide for her and sanctify her. These things too require some time. Then I am a father to four children, a grandfather of five and God tells me to be their example, to provide counsel and these things take time. Then I am a son to a mother. My responsibilities to her are greater than ever as she is 92 and now lives close by. Then I am also an elder and pastor in the church. God tells me to teach with diligence, to lead faithfully and to pray for you with diligence. Those things take time. Then I am a citizen of this city, this state, this nation and there are civic duties that God would not have me ignore either. And I, with a prayer for holy wisdom and an open Bible before me, must balance out these relationships in a way that expresses the values of God. My perception of that balance is what I call my vision for my life. It is a sense of who I am and what I'm supposed to be doing. Not too many people seem to have a very well-defined sense of what they are supposed to be doing and so they get pulled by their own lusts and pushed by the demands of others. They think they are busy when in fact they are only confused.

That is why it is so important to take time to work out what your priorities, aims and goals are. Such a vision for your life, or such a list of priorities is developed by time alone with God, time spent in prayer and meditation and self-analysis. For me, this is done by spending hours alone praying and talking with God about my life. It is there that I normally make the necessary adjustments to my priorities. Now I know, I can do that because I only work one day a week right? You don't have time for long quiet times with God. My friend, you can't afford not to take that

kind of time. It is essential. I recently read a story about an interview that took place back in the 1930s between Charles Schwab, then the esteemed president of Bethlehem Steel and Ivy Lee a management consultant. Lee was an aggressive, confident man who, by perseverance, had secured an interview with Mr. Schwab. During the conversation, Mr. Lee asserted that if the management of Bethlehem Steel would follow his advice, the company's operations would improve and their profits increase. *Schwab responded, "If you can show us a way to get more things done, I'll be glad to listen; and if it works, I'll pay you whatever you ask within reason." Lee handed Schwab a little piece of paper and said, "Write down the most important things you have to do tomorrow." Mr. Schwab did so. "Now," Lee continued, "number them in order of importance." Schwab did so. "Tomorrow morning start on number one, and stay with it until you have completed it. Then go to number two and number three and number four... Don't worry if you haven't completed everything by the end of the day. At least you have completed the most important projects. Do this every day. After you have been convinced of the value of this system, have your men try it. Try it as long as you like, and then send me your check for whatever you think the advice is worth." The two men shook hands and Lee left the president's office. A few weeks later Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000, an astronomical amount in the 1930s! He said it was the most profitable lesson he had learned in his long business career.*

When you know your priorities and remember them in the crunch you won't let your life be bullied about by the tyranny of the urgent. Are you familiar with that term? It was popularized by Charles Hummel in his popular little tract called "Tyranny of the Urgent." Hummel's premise is that we give so much attention to the urgent things of life, the things that scream for your attention, like the telephone, or that new text message that we seldom get around to doing the important things of life like praying. Gordon MacDonald wrote this: *There are three things in my life that I need most, but they never scream for immediate attention: God, family and my mind. If I miss my devotions one day, God doesn't zap me. Gail and my kids are very understanding. If I say to them, "I'm awfully busy this week." They're liable to say, "That's okay, we understand." And since I'm pretty good with words, I can miss my study time this week and still deliver a credible sermon on Sunday – for three or four Sundays, probably. So what happens? I start paying too much attention to things that scream, the people who want to see me, the staff, the board meetings, the speaking trips. And I ignore the things that don't scream but are actually the most important.* (Leadership

Fall 1984 p.114) Do you understand that? You can always postpone prayer, but that telephone call, that text, has to be answered now -we think. So, you spend your life doing good things, nice things, but the best things don't get done. To avoid that trap know and remember your priorities and objectives.

That's rule #1. Rule #2 is to set a schedule and have goals. Here I am referring to specific short term scheduling and goal setting. When you start a new week do you have a good idea what you want to accomplish in it and when you intend to get it done? You need that. Those of you who, like me, are self-schedulers, you moms and several others, especially need this discipline. I begin every week by developing a "to do" list. In that list I know what has to be done and what is less critical. I also plan out when would be the best time to work on the various projects. And I never get thru my list. There is always something to do and I want it that way because if you stay focused at doing good sin has a harder time getting your attention. That is important. Having goals for every day helps you avoid laziness and prevents giving opportunities for the flesh. Idle hands and minds really are the devil's workshops. Over-taxing your schedule makes room for Satan too, but where there are major blanks in your schedule the devil likes to rush in to fill them up with vain projects or even worse. When you men who travel head out on a jet to some other part of the country do you have some goals for your trip? Do you have a good book which you plan to read, some exercise you want to obtain, some letters that need to be written, or do you go off like so many with no plans at all in order that Satan might provide something sensual or worldly to watch or read? Bad decisions about how to use your time are usually made impulsively, better for you to make those decisions in advance. Set a schedule and have goals each day and week, keeping in mind that your most important goal is to live consciously in the presence and for the glory of God.

This brings us to a warning that there will always be legitimate interruptions that will keep you from meeting your goals. That's okay. Your ultimate aim is not to mark things off a "to-do" list but to please God. And it is often God who brings into your life a schedule buster. Trust Him. And be careful not to get mad at the people who interfere with your progress. The Lord doesn't want us to schedule people out of our lives. If you over schedule, packing too many critical projects into your week you can get to where you have no time for others; you can get to where you are also always in a hurry. Over the years I have come to value more and more the concept of margins. Margins – somewhere to go when you run out of room or time. Hurry is not a Biblical way to live. It is not

good for your soul and it is not good for your relationships with people. I had a basketball coach in high-school who always reminded us to be fast but don't hurry ®. I want to live life like that. Pleasing God is more than achieving this and that and the other. God is not impressed with us when we are so busy for Him that we are fretting and anxious. I like what John Wesley said, "Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry because I never undertake more work than I can go thru with calmness of spirit." Does that sound like a lesson for you to learn? Listen to Wesley again. "Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry because I never undertake more work than I can go thru with calmness of spirit." So, set a schedule and have goals but don't overdo it and leave no time for human or divine interruptions.

On the other hand, let's also heed the warning not to under do your goal-setting either. Depending on your personality and cultural background, this may be your problem. You know, I often hear reports from people who have been overseas in third world countries describe their experience and one thing you normally hear is that the pace of life in these places is so much slower than here. Sometimes we are admonished to be more like these simple people who have not a care in the world. Doesn't that sound great? In some ways, maybe, but in other ways not so much. It is the slow, sluggardly pace of life that explains why these are third world nations dependent on foreign aid and in need of missionary support. Last I checked it is the busier church in the United States that supplies the bulk of the world's missionary force and is reaching the world with the gospel. As I read the Scriptures, we are at war. A leisurely pace does not befit a soldier, but neither does frantic rushing about. We must not overdo or under do and thoughtful goals and a God-directed schedule will assist us mightily.

Rule #3 for time management is critical. The rule is to simplify your life ®. **Philippians 3:13-14a** *Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal.* Paul says "one thing I do." Most of us have to admit that these forty things we dabble in. We are like Marthas busy with all our preparations and shortchanging the things in life that really count. James Dobson in his book, *Straight Talk To Men and Their Wives*, writes this:

Most people have honestly convinced themselves that their over commitment is a temporary problem. "Oh, this is a difficult year, you see, because I'm going to night school and trying to earn a living at the same time, but it won't always be so hectic at our house..." "My wife and I just bought this new business, and its gonna take a

year or two to get it rolling. Until then we are having to work 12 hour days. That cuts into our family life quite a bit, but it won't last very long." Or "we just moved into a new house and I've had to put in all the yards and build on a room in back. Our weekends and most evenings are invested in that project." Or, "my wife had a baby two weeks ago and he's not sleeping through the night, so our schedule is haywire right now. I figure it'll be kinda difficult until we get him in kindergarten."

Most people can tell you with a straight face that the pressures they feel are the result of temporary circumstances. Their future will be less hectic. A slower day is coming. Unfortunately, their optimism is usually unjustified. The hoped-for period of tranquility rarely arrives. Instead, these short-term pressures have a way of becoming sandwiched back to back, so that we emerge from one crisis and sail directly into another. Thus, we live our entire lives in the fast lane, hurtling down the road toward heart failure. We have deluded ourselves into thinking that circumstances have forced us to work too hard for a short time, when, in fact, we are driven from within. We lack the discipline to limit our entanglements with the world, choosing instead to be dominated by our work and the materialistic gadgetry it will bring. And what is sacrificed in the process are the things that give life meaning.

Amen Amen Amen. You have to quit excusing indulgences as short term predicaments. Eliminate the time-consuming clutter of non-essential activities. And the key to simplifying your life, the key to getting done the important things in life is learning to say "NO" ® to invitations and requests. Do any of you have a problem with this? We like to be thought of as helpful and kind. Some of us get our sense of self-worth thru all our activities and as a result we get tangled up in far too many projects or activities. Resist the temptations ® to accept invitations or requests immediately. Think about it. Take the time to evaluate whether or not a specific opportunity fits in with your God-given set of priorities. Simplifying your life should not be done so that you can indulge more, but so you can achieve more, and especially so that you can achieve the most important. Realize this: the freedom to say "yes" to the really important comes from the discipline of saying "no" to the less important. This is something far too few people seem to understand, that when you say "yes" to one thing you have said no to many other possibilities. The freedom to say *Yes* to the really important comes from the discipline of saying *No* to the less important. And remember that everybody has a plan for your life but only God's plan is wonderful. So, let's take a moment to practice saying "no". Are you ready? 1,2,3 -NO ®

Hey, we need you to come in to work on Sunday. NO!

You gonna stay up and watch Kimmel? NO!

Will you be coming to my party on Saturday? NO!

Will you please come work in the nursery at church? YES!

Hey, come help us set up for the company picnic. NO!

And even better than that would be “no, thank you.” Simplify your life by saying “no.”

Well, I think this may be a good stopping place. We have several more valuable guidelines for time management left to consider next week. So, if you believe God would like you to come back, and if you can fit it into your busy schedule, and if you haven't made any other less important commitments, then we will look for you here next Sunday. Same time, same place. Let's close now with prayer.