

Making the Most of the Year
Eph. 5:15-21
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, Jan. 1, 2012

Well, did you get what you really wanted for Christmas? What item was at the top of your wish list?

...share my favorite Christmas present.

According to Scripture, one of the items that we should bang on God's door and beg for, is wisdom. We should cry out for wisdom. And what exactly is wisdom? Obviously it is not the same thing as intelligence. There are some very intelligent people in the world who do some of the most absurd things. And there are some people who have not had access to education but live their lives in wisdom. No, wisdom is not necessarily connected to a person's IQ.

In 2011, did you live your life wisely? Were you a good decision maker?

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was accused of stupidity. They were not living well. So this is what God said through Moses:

***They are a nation without sense,
there is no discernment in them.
If only they were wise and would understand this
and discern what their end will be! Dt. 32:28-29***

Foolish people fail to think about the end. Where will this decision take me? The nation of Israel had no sense. They were not paying attention to where they were going.

A modern parallel is the person who is text messaging while he drives. He is driving aimlessly, meaning he no longer pays attention to where he is going. All who text and drive put themselves at high risk. One only has to see the highway statistics to see this is true.

In the same way, people often walk aimlessly through life. Just like the nation of Israel lacked sense, just like distracted drivers lack direction, all of us can veer off course if we aren't careful. All of us can sink into an undisciplined lifestyle.

How can we live our lives most wisely? Ephesians 5:15-21 provides principles for making 2012 your best year ever.

Read Ephesians 5:15-21.

Let's make the most of our time and get right to it!

There are 5 principles here for living wisely in 2012:

Making the Most of 2012

1. Prioritize your time most effectively.

Look at v.15 in the ESV:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Eph. 5:16 ESV

Wise people make the best use of their time. Some translations render this: redeeming the time. That means we should take it back from Satan. Because we live in a fallen world, fallen people tend to waste time. But God is not a wasteful God. The Lord calls his servants to be good stewards of all that has been entrusted to them. When a teenager gets \$50 for Christmas from Grandma, he rightly asks himself, “what would be the best use of this money?” What would maximize my joy?

Somebody once advertised as follows: ‘LOST, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone for ever’. By contrast, Jonathan Edwards, (**show image**) the leader of ‘Great Awakening’ in America in 1734, he once wrote down 70 resolutions for his life. The crowning resolution.

#70 was this:

Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

--Jonathan Edwards, just before his 20th birthday

Edwards was a wise man, for the first sign of wisdom which Paul provides here is a disciplined use of time.

Every seasoned business man has taken a chunk of his capital and invested that money in a new venture. Over the course of time, he watches that expenditure closely. If it fails to bring a return, if it does not prove profitable, he reconsiders whether he shouldn’t cut his losses and direct his investment elsewhere.

In the same way, we as Christians have been given a chunk of time. We are responsible to God for its use. We must eliminate the time wasters, and maximize the moments.

I like the way the Scripture reads. The times are evil. What that means is, by default, we do what the Devil wants us to do. We let time slip away. We miss out on the moment. But when we walk with God, we improve upon the time.

So, it is not within the scope of this sermon to offer time-management tips. That would be a worthy rabbit to chase, but let me just challenge you as Paul said to Timothy: watch your life closely. When the clock strikes midnight, if you had to face God and give an account for your time, would you be proud of the way you used it? Would you be able to say, "Lord, look what I have been doing!" Or would you have your head hung low saying over a sigh, "I'm sorry, Lord. I just couldn't get motivated."

2. Pray fervently about God's particular plan for your life.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is!

When we think about the Lord's will, we often think often think in terms of his "revealed will." That is, what does the Bible say about this or that? What commands has God given on this subject? Paul is not speaking here about what the Bible explicitly says about your situation. No, Paul is talking more about the mysterious ministry that he has assigned only to you. His hardwiring of your heart.

I believe that every Christian has a life message. He/she has a burning passion inside his heart for some Kingdom advancement. Find out what God wants you to do, and then, let no person push you off that post. Look up with me at vv.8-10 and see what Paul says here:

..find out what pleases the Lord.

Will you do that in 2012? I can assure you of this: When you are doing exactly what you were pre-programmed to do, then you are swimming downstream in the current of God's will, you are living inside the sweet spot. You have enlisted in God's army.

So what part of the army have you been assigned to? Everybody knows that an army has diversified soldiers. Some can shoot a gun, some can sneak in and engage in espionage, some can fly planes, some can steer a tank. Every person in an army specializes.

In the same way, God has created his people with particular passions and this is good for the Kingdom. This keeps everybody honest. We balance power with power, ambition with ambition, and balance comes to the body as people take up their tasks. So the evangelistic people say: "Let's reach the lost before it's too late!" And the disciple-makers scream, "Let's turn these babes into full-grown warriors" And the preachers resound, "Let the Word run free" And the musicians cry out, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" And the missionaries say, "what more can we do to get the gospel over the sea?"

There is an area of ministry that will move your heart and when you find it, you should make it your chief ambition. More than amassing wealth, more than acquiring trophies, more than attracting applause, be most concerned with what pleases the Lord.

Are you pursuing your passion with boldness? You should do that this year.

3. Pursue a greater filling of the Holy Spirit.

Now watch what the text says in v. 18...

I quote this verse a lot because I agree with Gordon Fee who says: this command is the key to comprehending all others. This imperative is essential to understanding Paul's writings. The filling of the Holy Spirit is a must-have to the New Testament Christian. I cannot overemphasize the role of the Spirit in your life. You will not live life well if you are not drawing from the deep well of the Spirit.

Now, don't misunderstand. Many have tried to make this a proof text for pursuing a second work of grace. Many have marred the meaning of Scripture by saying we must have a subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit manifested in mystical experience or supernatural speaking in tongues. This may happen for some. I would never limit what God might do in a person's life, but this is clearly not what Paul is pushing for here. Paul is way more practical when he describes life in the Spirit looks like.

Now, before we go any further, let me be sure that we don't gloss over the alcohol analogy. The surest way to waste a life is to become dependent upon a drink or a drug. People who come under the spell of a substance soon lose their sense. Any practice that diminishes a person's awareness of God and robs him of self-control is destructive. So Paul says, "why would a person want to put himself in a position to make poor choices?"

On the other hand, human discernment is enhanced and improved by the influence of the Spirit. You will make your best decisions when you are walking in the way of God. This way will provide the most joy, the most peace, the most satisfaction. You will feel most alive when you seek the Spirit!

So how do you know if you are walking in line with the Holy Spirit? How do you know if you are investing your time and energies in the right places?

Paul now provides tells us what happens when a person is walking with God. Supernatural speaking in tongues is not the test, but instead, much more practical indicators are involved. They are, as follows:

Evidence That A Person is Under the Influence of the Holy Spirit

- **A pronounced presence of praise and worship.** The Spirit-filled life produces music. If you are like me, then you know that your music will never sell a single CD, but it should not prevent me from singing His praises. As one commentator puts it, "Nothing is more indicative of a fulfilled life, a contented soul, and a happy heart than the expression of song."

Whenever you spontaneously sing, this is evidence an inside joy. Something is trapped inside of you and it has to get out. It must manifest itself and it does so

through music. I know that I am walking with God when He has placed a song in my heart. I also know this: if I go prolonged periods of time without a song, then I should wake up and smell the coffee. The joy-tank is depleted. It's time to reprioritize.

Now the text says that we should share our song with people. This is interesting! V.19, "Speak to one another with songs." Singing is a special activity in Scripture. When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, all the people came together and sang a song to the Lord (Ex. 15:1–18). After they finished, Moses' sister, Miriam, led the women in further singing and dancing (vv. 20–21). After Deborah and Barak delivered Israel from the Canaanites, they "sang on that day" (Judg. 5:1). Of the 38,000 people who ministered at the Temple in Jerusalem, 4,000 were musicians; and in Nehemiah we read of antiphonal choirs (Neh. 12:31, 38). Throughout the Old Testament, and particularly in the Psalms, we read of many kinds of musical instruments that God's people used to praise Him.

The New Testament echoes the Old. The last thing Jesus and His disciples did after the Last Supper was to sing a hymn before they went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was arrested (Matt. 26:30). While they were imprisoned in Philippi, "about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). On the heavenly Mount Zion the 144,000 who will have been purchased from the earth will sing "a new song before the throne" of Christ (Rev. 14:3).

For over a thousand dark years of its history (c. 500–1500) the church in general did not sing. From shortly after New Testament times until the Reformation, what music the church had was usually performed by professional musicians. The music they presented could not be understood or appreciated by the average church member. In any case, they could only sit and listen, unable to participate. But when the Bible came back into the church during the Reformation, singing came with it. Martin Luther and some of the other Reformation leaders are among the greatest hymn writers of church history. Where the true gospel is known and believed, music is loved and sung. God's Spirit in the heart puts music in the heart.

So we should sing to one another, but also, it says that we should make melody in our hearts to God. When we praise the Lord, we experience the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why we should not neglect our personal devotions and our public meetings. When we praise Him, we live wisely.

A second evidence of the Spirit is this:

- **Habitual expressions of thanks.** V.20....

Thanksgiving is not reserved for the third week in November. We should always give thanks. The practice of Thanksgiving is transformational. It's hard for a

person to be bitter and thankful at the same time, so whenever we express gratitude, we attack the stony heart that grows within us. The most difficult part of this text is the word “everything.” We should give thanks for everything. How can this be? Should a parent give thanks for the sudden loss of a child? Certainly not. Jesus did not thank God for the death of Lazarus. Should Americans thank God for terrorists who kill innocent people? I don’t think so. Should we thank God for demonic forces that infiltrate schools and cause suicide? No. This word everything should not be pressed beyond its intended meaning. What we can be thankful for is that God will eventually work this evil out for God, that God will teach me to trust him more deeply even through seasons of sorrow, that the Lord will eventually seize the serpent by the tail and cast him into the sulfuric lake of fire. We give thanks because God will vindicate and triumph in the end. We thank God that the world war has been won, even when earthly battles bring defeat.

Even the prejudiced and disobedient Jonah ended his prayer from the stomach of the fish with these words: “But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

No matter what situation you face, search for ways to be thankful. In doing so, you will invoke the Spirit of God and you will strengthen your inner self. You will gain power.

The third and final evidence of the Spirit...

- **Self-sacrifice.**

Life in the Spirit involves the sacrifice of self-centeredness. Perhaps we describe the self-centered man to be sure we know who we’re talking about. The self-centered man:

- likes to talk a lot about himself and his own experiences. Everyone else’s story must be matched or topped by his own.

- makes sure that no one invades his time or his space, when he’s doing what he wants to do. Personal pursuits trump all other distractions.