

Balancing our Lives

Ephesians 5:15-17

Preached May 5, 2010 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Introduction. During Patty's spring break, we spent four days at the home of our 21-month-old grandchild. Not long after Ana Grace got up and going each morning, she would come to me, grab my finger and say, "Papaw, help!" Then she would tug until I rose to my feet and she would lead me to the door leading outside. She wanted me to take her outside to play – to push her car and take her to the playground. I must say that we had quite a time together. But I soon learned that her endurance level is greater than mine. She wore me out. Today I have a deeper regard for our mothers who are nurturing toddlers.

A wise sage and good friend of mine recently said, "Some very important things do not take a lot of time but they do take thought and love" (Al Bowles). I am so delighted that we had that time to spend with Ana Grace and could share our love with her.

This morning I want us to take a few minutes to consider the time we have been given in our lives and how we can use that time fully. I want us to give thought to how we can balance the many demands of our lives so as to have a healthy life and home. Hopefully, this will be a very practical message that will make a difference for each of us.

Time – the gift that must be purchased.

Time is the gift that must be purchased. (This statement is a paradox.) How can something be a gift to us if we must purchase it? Paul wrote: Redeem (purchase) the time.

Our lives and the time we have to live on this earth are a gift from God. As Christians, we affirm that our very existence comes from God. Life is a gift.

The psalmist poetically reflects on the fact that life is a gift as he writes about the span of life: *The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away* (Psalm 90:10). In his words,

one begins to feel the sense of brevity of life – 70 maybe 80 years. Then he writes: *So teach us to number our days* (12). I like to say it this way, "So help us make our days count." It is quite easy for people to count their days but it is another to make those days count.

Today the life expectancy in the US is 77.7 years. If you are average, you will live to be nearly 78 years old. (Of course, I know that most of you believe you are above average so you will live longer and some of you have passed that number.) If any of us reach the life expectancy mark, we will have been given about 460,000 waking hours on this planet. If you are 25, you have 314,000 hours left, 30 – 285,000; 40 – 226,000; 50 – 168,000; and 60 – 109,000. Regardless of how many hours we have left, each hour we have lived and will live is a gift. If you are a parent, you have a little over 100,000 hours with each child before they leave the nest.

At the end of his physical examination, the doctor said to his 80 year old patient, "You are in great health. What is your secret?" The patient responded, "I golf every day." Wanting to learn more, the Doctor asked, "Tell me, how did your father die?" The patient responded, "Who said my father is dead? He is 100 and plays golf every morning." The Doctor probed farther, "Well how did his father die?" The patient responded, "Who said he was dead? He is 118 but he did not go golfing this morning because he is getting married." The doctor responded in amazement, "Who would want to get married at 118?" The patient responded, "Who said he **wanted** to get married?"

Basically, there are two ways to look at time. One is from a temporal perspective that measures a particular period of time – seconds, minutes, hours, days and years. The NT typically uses the word, χρόνος, for this type of time. (It is our source of the word, chronology.) χρόνος is the type of time you think of when you look at your watch to see how long I am preaching.

The second type of time relates to the quality of life within the time we live or a decisive point of time. The NT word used for this type of time is καιρός. Καιρός time is expressed in this statement, "Our time together in worship meant a great deal to me." In our text, the word translated as time

is καιρός. A person may be given 460,000 waking hours (χρόνος) but how many of those hours meant something to the world and the person (καιρός)?

Demands on our time.

Paul makes an interesting statement in our text. He writes: "*Redeem (purchase) the time (καιρός), because the days are evil (spoiled or sick).*" I like the word "redeem" because of its significance in understanding salvation – Christ redeems us. It means to *purchase* or *to buy back*.

What would you be willing to spend to buy more hours (χρόνος) for your life or the life of one of your children? I can tell you that every day in Chattanooga, people spend hundred of thousands of dollars at our local hospitals in hopes of extending the length of their lives. Gyms are filled with people who spend time and sweat to extend their lives.

Let me ask you another question, What would you be willing to spend to purchase more καιρός time for your life and the life of your family?

We are living in a culture where the demands on our time (χρόνος and καιρός) are enormous. Nearly every one of us feels the pressure on a daily basis. The pressure in the homes of families with children and youth has probably never been greater. There are things we must do, need to do and want to do. The needs and opportunities are incredible. Most of know that if we attempt to fulfill all the demands, our lives and homes will not be healthy but will be chaotic and fragmented. Our lives and homes will become "sick." Perhaps this is one reason Paul wrote: "*the days are evil.*"

There are many things that rob us of our χρόνος and καιρός time. Most of us understand that chemical addictions, sexual promiscuity and violent behaviors often shorten our lives. We understand that bad eating habits, lack of exercise and stress can take hours from us. These act as enemies of our being.

Perhaps the greater enemies to our καιρός time are not what we label as "evils" but things that are typically good. Often the good robs us of the best. Trying to do it all often prevents us from experiencing life to its fullest.

I believe that parents of children at home face the toughest battles and choices in this

arena. There are so many things, generally good things that vie for our children's time – church, school, sports, the arts, family, activities with friends, etc. Recently, I was talking with our consultant who will lead our capital campaign this fall to retire our debt. He asked, "Do you know who fill the hotels in cities on weekends?" (David Lewis spends a significant number of weekends in hotels because of his vocation.) He said that the hotels are filled with children and youth softball and baseball teams, dance teams, tennis players, gymnasts, etc. Many of these youth spend few weekends at home and virtually never attend church and have their faith nurtured.

When it comes to our personal lives, we face all sorts of demands for our time – Facebook, Twitter, golf, woodworking, reading good books, etc. These are not bad. But when pressure comes to add the newest fad, which will take more of our time, we eventually find our lives spinning out of control. The new activity takes time from the other events. We might be able to be a bit more efficient in how we operate and multi-task but all of us run into limits. We only have so many minutes in a day.

So how can we redeem our *καιρός* time?

Redeeming our time.

Paul gives us an important clue. He wrote: *Watch carefully how you walk about.* He was exhorting his readers to observe with a keen eye to perception how they were living. Allow me to offer a few suggestions how to do this.

First of all, we must periodically analyze how we are spending our time. Where does our time go? From that analysis, we need to pray and to think about our priorities. Where does God want my family/me to spend my time? What are the most important things in my/our live(s)?

Recently I read a story told by a Lutheran pastor who shared about a family in his congregation. These were parents who were very faithful in the relationship to the church. Once one of the children asked one weekend, "Do we have to go to church?" The mother responded, "No. We get to go." She understood the family's priorities and did not have to make a decision that weekend because it had been made long before.

When our boys were at home, we often struggled with being able to spend time together, which Patty and I considered to be

one of our priorities as a family. One way we found to do this was to take day trips on the Blue Ridge Parkway. There were several routes we could take from Johnson City and return home before bedtime. Frequently when we loaded the car, the boys would say, "We're not going to the Blue Ridge Parkway again are we?" Today, do you know where my boys like to go – the Blue Ridge Parkway. Our Arkansas son is planning to vacation on the Parkway in June.

A second thing I have found helpful is not in scripture but in Stephen Covey's classic book *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People*. I am not interested in elevating his writing to the level of scripture but what he says is helpful. He speaks of looking at what we do in terms of their urgency and importance. He suggests placing our activities in one of four quadrants – urgent & important, urgent & not important, not urgent & important and not urgent & not important. He suggests that many allow the "urgent" to use their time and fail to give attention to those things that are important but not urgent. Many of us keep pushing them down on our "to do" list because can do them tomorrow. Unfortunately they never get done.

My brother has three children – 5th grade, 2nd grade and kindergarten. Mark believes it is important to spend time with each child apart from the others. Most would agree that that is not an "urgent" activity. Taking one of them to the hospital for a broken arm would be an urgent and important activity. I admire my brother for doing what is not urgent but extremely important with his children.

The third suggestion is this: *Seek to live life in balance instead of doing a juggling act.* When we attempt to juggle all of life and family activities, we become frantic in trying to keep all the balls in the air. But when we have given careful consideration to our priorities and what is truly important and keep these in balance, life runs along much smoother.

Many of you may remember The Ed Sullivan Show in 1969 when Erich Brennd did a routine of keeping plates spinning. He rushed from plate to plate to keep them spinning on the table and on rods. It was maddening to watch. Have you ever felt like you were spinning plates?

I have found that keeping life in balance is a challenging exercise at any stage of life – keeping faith, family, work, self-care in the

right proportions is tough to do. It demands some tough calls. When our sons were in the prime of youth sports age, they were better than average athletes and good students. At that point Patty and I made a couple of decisions related to what they could do. We wanted them involved in sports and arts if they chose. But we said, "Only one per season." We also said they could not participate on traveling teams because of what that would do to our weekends in terms of both faith and being together. I realize that none of the three are professional athletes, yet they are healthy and mature young men.

The final item I want to mention is this. Redeeming our time requires discipline – taking time to watch, pray and think, maintaining discipline in making choices that may not seem popular, and staying the course.

Peter wrote: *Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour* (1Peter 5:8). If we fail to be disciplined, that lion will devour our time.

Exhortation. Time as we know it at some point will yield the ultimate consummation of God's kingdom. But until then, "Redeem your time."

The Table.

This table points toward a banquet that will be held in the ultimate consummation of time. There we will sit with Jesus. This table gives us hope in living our lives to their fullest through faith in Christ. By spending time at this table this morning, we accept a down payment that Christ has made to redeem our time.