

Natalie W. Bell
August 19, 2018

Making the Most of Our Time
Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to YOU ***to make the most of your time?***
How do you do that?

If you ***Google “making the most of your time”***
you can find almost countless articles about time management,
planning, and productivity.

That kind of search on the web really reveals ***how busy so many people are***
these days—overworked, and overscheduled.
The same is true of even our kids and teens,
and college students.
Really ***anyone can fall into the trap of busy-ness,***
and trying to cram too much into too little time.

So some of the ***best ‘tips’*** for how to make the most of the day were:

Get plenty of sleep
Wake up early (hmm...do those two things go together?)
Smile.
Laugh (my personal favorite).
Focus.
Make plans.
Write lists (that you will actually use).
Prioritize what’s important versus what’s urgent.
Say No.

Delegate.

Slow down and think.

Think of the energy you have, not just the time you have (wow, how true for anyone with a chronic illness or pain).

Take breaks.

Exercise.

Eat well.

Show love.

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-lickus/time-management-tips>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/communication-success/201206/how-be-ultra-productive-10-tips-mastering-your-time>

<https://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/17-ways-make-the-most-every-day>

These were just a few of the tips and tricks.

I also read that ***busyness is not the same as productivity.***

Some of the most productive people are actually ***less busy***, and some of the busiest people are the ***least productive***.

Think about that.

We can become 'busy' with almost anything—right?

Henry David Thoreau once said, *"It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?"*

WHAT ARE we 'busy' doing?

Listen to this, in Greek when Paul says 'making the most of the time', the word for 'making the most' is actually '***redeeming***' the time, as in rescuing something from being lost, gaining possession of something.

That's helpful—because redeeming time is about ***making sure our days are not lost.***

Redeeming our time means ***WE are taking possession*** of our time, not the tasks themselves.

We all know that the things we do today are ***gone tomorrow.***

We may have the results later, the fruits of our labors, but we cannot 'get back' any of today after today.

We do need to “redeem” our time, don't we?

And then when Paul says redeeming the time,
because the days are evil, what is he saying?

If we go back to the original Greek again,

The word for evil—***poneros***—can mean evil, as in bad.

It can also mean ***full of labors, annoyances, and hardships***, causing pain and trouble.

Paul of all people knew about hardship and pain.

He knew that the days are truly evil, in that respect.

But he also knew ***WHO is with us in that pain***.

Which leads us to a special ***twist*** in this part of Ephesians 5.

It seems like this is just a ***list of things*** we should be doing.

Be careful.

Make the most of your time.

Be wise.

Don't be foolish.

Don't get drunk.

Praise and thank God.

But is that ALL it is?

What if Paul ***ISN'T just telling US to do*** specific tasks to make the most of the day?

Notice what he says in verse 17: ***do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, that's debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing and make melody and give thanks....***

Understand ***the will of God***.

Be filled with the Spirit.

Both of those things involve something truly difficult and profound.

They both involve: ***Surrender***.

To understand the will of the Lord,

we have to ***give up*** just wanting our will, and our way.

To be filled with the Spirit,

we have to ***open our hearts and lives*** to the Holy Spirit.

What if Paul is doing *much more than saying*
don't get drunk *and do* all this good stuff?

What if beneath it all he's telling us to do something far more powerful:
Surrender.

Give up control.

Now of course, there are times that our time is just not our own.
We have *emergencies and extenuating* circumstances.

But I'm talking about the majority of our time.

Aren't we the reason our days get so *out of control*?

Aren't we the ones who *overschedule*?

Aren't we the ones *over commit*?

Aren't we the ones who *don't delegate*?

Aren't we the ones who *procrastinate*?

We try *so hard to control* our days

(even though paradoxically it *feels out of control* much of the time!).

What if we were to *give that control---to God*?

What if we opened our calendars and asked—

God, what do you want me to do today?

What would you have me do this *week*?

This *month*?

Some of the most amazing saints are men and women who would get up early
in the morning and spend *hours of time---in prayer.*

People like Martin Luther. Mother Teresa. Susanna Wesley. Charles Wesley.

Now before you start making a grocery list in your mind,
and *tune me out* because you don't have time to get up earlier and pray,
hold on.

We all have life happening to us.

We all have something *stressful* going on—right now.

We all have *heartache and pain and hardships.*

No one has the market cornered on stressful living.

Just take the time to really talk to someone else and you'll see.

The stress is just different in different *seasons* of life.

The season of raising small children is different than raising teens, or being an empty nester, or retired.

But each season has their *challenges and the things that can over-fill a day*.

For some that might be changing diapers, or driving carpool, for others it might be caretaking, or dozens of appointments.

And, we all have the *same 1,440 minutes* in each day.

God knows exactly how much time we have, and God knows what we need to get done—

what we *actually need* to get done—not what *we WANT to do, or not do*.

What if we looked more to the *One*

who could help us make the most of our time?

Have you ever found that after *just pushing and pushing* yourself to do too many tasks in too little time,

that when you gave up, and took a break,

to daydream, or walk outside,

to do a little woodworking or crafting or reading....

and suddenly when you returned, you were even *more productive*?

What about when you spend time with God—what does it do for your day?

When Jesus started his ministry he started preaching, and said, repent for *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

He *ushered in* the new kingdom—

a *new way of living and loving*.

And all throughout the Gospels,

that kingdom *seems to be upside down* to the people around Jesus.

The kingdom *doesn't make sense* to the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

How can Jesus and the disciples be serving God if you don't wash your hands before eating, or *follow each letter* of the law? (Matt. 15:2).

How can you be a messenger of God if you *heal on the Sabbath*—and break laws to do good deeds? (Matt 12:10, Luke 13:10-17, Mark 3:1-6).

Jesus doesn't make sense, *even to his disciples*.

How can you feed **five thousand** hungry people, with a lunchbox of 5 loaves, and 2 little fish? (Matt 14:13-21).

How can you say to the crowds that **YOU are the bread of heaven**, giving your own flesh and blood to the people? (John 6).

How you say the **first shall be last, and last first?** (Matthew 20:16).

How can a widow dropping in her **two small coins** be more generous than the rich persons bringing their offering to the temple? (Luke 21:1-4).

How can a **tax collector** who says have mercy on me be closer to God than an upright Pharisee who thanks God for his faith and good deeds? (Luke 18:9-14).

Jesus didn't make sense a lot of the time,

Possibly because **he wasn't operating on human power.**

His miracles and healings and teachings and driving out the demons— it was all done through the **power of his heavenly Father.**

It's why he removed himself so frequently from the crowds, **to be alone and pray.**

To spend time with God.

Jesus is the focus of the Gospels, but it is **not him alone** who is at work.

It is God—the Triune God—it is Jesus relying openly upon his **Father God.**

It is Jesus promising his **Holy Spirit.**

If Jesus **ordered his life and ministry in full surrender to God,**
Why would we not strive to do the same?

Jesus said it very simply when he said in **Matthew 6:33:**

seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you as well.

You know **when** he said that?

After he told us we **didn't need to worry** about anything in Matthew 6:25-34!

When we become members of the church,
we answer a very simple question:

Who is your Lord and Savior?

If Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior, if we want to follow Him,
and become more like him,

why would we not follow his example of time management?

Why would we not **redeem our days with the ways he did his?**

With prayer.

With Surrender to God's will, and not our own.

All of that takes some time,
but somehow ***Jesus*** was able to teach, and heal and preach,
and still make time to be alone with God, and alone with his disciples—
and he was working a ***24/7/365 job*** with literally ***thousands*** of people
depending on him all the time!

Jesus was the ***CEO of needy people!***

If he needed God's help, ***if he surrendered*** his life to God's will,
why do we think we can survive without time with God?
Why do we think we can have peace, or joy, or fulfillment without
surrendering ***our*** lives to God?

Paul isn't just giving us a list of things to do—

Paul is giving us a way of living:

Seek the will of God.

Be filled with the Holy Spirit—not with wine, or anything else that numbs
you to the world around you—be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Give up control of your life.

Surrender to God.

The people who find healing in ***12 step programs*** know this method.

They ***admit they are powerless,***
and they ***need the help of a higher power***
to find true life.

When do we sit down and decide the same thing?

When do we ***admit that we feel powerless*** over our time—
and we need the help of God to find real life?

If we read all of Ephesians 5:15-20 thinking it's just a 'to-do' list,
the last few verses ***sound like extra work:***

***sing psalms and hymns, make melody in your heart, give thanks to God at all
times and for everything in the name of Jesus.***

But this is *not a 'to-do' list, right?*
This is a way of living.

So, what if the singing and praising and worshiping and thanking God—
 is all a **RESULT** of having **surrendered** control to God,
 and of **being filled** with the Holy Spirit?

Now that makes more sense, doesn't it?
 The joy of being filled with God—*that tends to seep out*—
 some might say it has to come out---
 into music, and singing, and worship....into praise and thanksgiving!

Sometimes we are a little **reserved** in our expressions of praise, and
 thanksgiving, and joy—even in worship!
 But, when are we moved by the **music**?
 Overwhelmed by **God's presence** in this place?
 Full of **gratitude** for what God has done, and who God is?
 And how do we show it?

Worship is the perfect place to express that,
 and there are a hundred different ways to praise and thank God,
 and make melody in our hearts!

I was reading a sermon this week that mentioned a worship service full of
 some very overt praise and thanksgiving, **in the Congo**.

Dr. Rick Dietrich says that his friend Gerald Stephens has "never seen so much
unmitigated joy during worship."

Gerald wrote: "probably the **most joyous times are the offering** times...
 Worshippers come forward **dancing and singing** as they put their money in a
 box at the front of the sanctuary.
 I most enjoy," Gerald said, "watching the older men dance to the front,
 chuck their money in the box, and then dance back to their places.
 Can you imagine in one of our churches in the United States,
 where the **clerk of session or the chair of the finance** committee
 would come forward with his or her offering like this?"

It's great stuff!

It's especially great because it's so *extraordinarily sincere*, in no way contrived." From the sermon, "Hey, Pay Attention", by the Rev. Dr. Rick Dietrich, Day 1, 2003.

Can you imagine?

Well, why not?

We can praise and thank God *any way we want!*

When the *result of our surrender is JOY*—and praise, and thanksgiving, That can flow out of our hearts, in so many different ways!

Friends, there is a *lot of Good News today*—

A lot of things to *think* about, to *praise* God about.

The first is that *we don't have to* manage our time all alone.

We can *ask God for help*.

We can go to God in prayer, and *surrender*,

We can rely upon God to help us order our time.

This is how we *redeem* our time, and *make the most of our days*.

And the result is joy and praise, gratitude and thanksgiving to God!

Who doesn't want that?

To that, all God's people said, Amen.

