

All In – Making our Passion Practical (Part 3 of 4)

Life: Redeeming Your Time

Ephesians 5:15-17

Mark Vroegop

¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
Ephesians 5:15–17 (ESV)

Kevin DeYoung, in his book *Crazy Busy*, says this about the way many of us live:

You and I have a problem. Most mornings, we drag ourselves out of bed, start the day's routine, and hope against hope that we can simply hold our ground. Maybe we can keep the house in only a mild state of disaster. Maybe we can break even on the to-do list. Maybe no one else will get sick. Maybe the inbox won't get any fuller. Maybe we won't fall asleep after lunch. Maybe, just maybe, we can get enough done in the next eighteen hours to beat back the beast of busyness and live to see another day. We wake up most days not trying to serve, just trying to survive.¹

Does that statement resonate with you? How often have you said the following: "Where did the week go?", "I blinked and the kids grew up!", or "What did I actually do today?" Or have you ever had it happen that you wake up and think about when you could go back to bed?

Or let me ask this question another way, just to get you thinking: In your social engagements, and as you ask people how they are doing, how often do you hear: "My life is really balanced and fulfilled right now," or "I'm excited about the margin I have in my life" or "I spent the last week doing mostly the things that are important and that I'm good at."

It almost sounds weird, doesn't it? Busyness, over-loaded, and survival are the words that many of us would use to describe our lives.

So, does this have anything to do with stewardship? I certainly think it does.

One of the most significant resources that we've been given is time, and that is because time is the divinely given place where we live out God's will. It is the arena where we work out the stewardship command given to us by God. Time is the dimension where we practice generosity. Time is the place where we express our gifts and live out what it means to be an image bearer. And while we are not all given the same amount of time in terms of years, every one of us had the same 168 hours last week, 744 hours in January, and 8,760 hours last year. And the question is: did we use them to survive the chaos or to serve our God? In other words, how did you steward your time?

¹ DeYoung, Kevin. *Crazy Busy – A Mercifully Short Book About a Really Big Problem*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway: 2013), 21.

Making Passion Practical

This is our third week of looking at what it means to make our passion for Jesus practical by sliding everything we are, everything we've been given, everything we do, and everything we have "All In." This began with an understanding of the foundations of stewardship and the important categories like God-as-creator, being an image bearer, using God's gifts, and taking specific action.

Last week we looked at generosity through the lens of what it means to be faithful and what it looks like to "kill the curl." I hope that you found some wonderful ways to trust God for the gap in your life – whether it was with your money, your time, or whatever that you chose to be generous with this week. And, by the way, the joke about "Hey Mark, do you have 10 minutes?" is not funny anymore. Way too many of you used it this week!

Remember that God is able to make all grace abound to you. He's promised to help you and provide for you. What's more, our generosity creates gratitude to God. Killing the curl produces thanksgiving to God.

If you took some steps last week, keep going! If you started giving, do it again. If you sought some help, keep meeting. Just take one step and then another and then another. And remember: this series is not about what we want *from* you but about what we want *for* you.

Stewardship of Your Life

Our primary text today is Ephesians 5:15-17, and my aim is to help us think through what it looks like to use our lives and our time in a way that fits with the mission of God in the world. To borrow from what Kevin DeYoung said, I want to help you not just survive another week, but to thrive as you are serving your Lord.

My hope is that by the end of our time together, you'll be ready to do things:

- 1) Pray something like this: *"Lord, I'm yours. Everything I have is a gift from you, including this day and what you have in store for me. Help me to be 'all in' for you. I'm ready for you to use my life to serve your purposes and your glory."*
- 2) To take some action step related to the stewardship of your life and the time that God has given you.

A friend of mine says that the challenge with the Christian life is that it is so daily. And my challenge for you is to translate this message into a few daily steps in the next week or two.

Let me show you four ways to think and live in light of Ephesians 5.

1) Look at your walk carefully

The first instruction from Paul in this text relates to the first phrase in verse 15: "look carefully then how you walk . . ." The command here is for careful, thoughtful, and intentional consideration about

how a follower of Jesus lives. In other words, how we live relates to stewardship and what it means to be “all in.”

Now, we are dropping into Ephesians 5, so you need to know a little about what is happening in this book and chapter. After three chapters of weighty doctrine, Paul turns to the application of theology in chapters 4-6. The word “walk” is central to what Paul is saying, and it is one of Paul’s favorite words for the Christian in its totality and daily practice. Let me show you this in a few places:

¹ *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you **to walk** in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)*

¹⁷ *Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer **walk** as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. Ephesians 4:17 (ESV)*

² *And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:2 (ESV)*

⁸ *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk** as children of light Ephesians 5:8 (ESV)*

As you can see from these passages, Paul is encouraging these believers to translate and connect what they believe about God theologically from chapters 1-3 into something practical in how they live. That should sound familiar because that is what we talked about in the first message on stewardship. There are theological beliefs underneath our lives that must inform how we live. There are sweeping implications to God as creator and us being image bearers, but we tend to get into a pattern where we neglect those realities.

The word “walk” is important and helpful because it is normal activity for humans. Unlike *run*, *stand*, *rest*, or *think*, the word *walk* is meant to summarize the application of the Christian life in its most normative context. In other words, Christianity (and in this case, stewardship) is meant to be transformative in the most basic elements of human life.

And what could be more basic and routine than time? Every day the sun rises and falls. Twenty-four hours in each day. We wake up, go to work, eat meals, talk with people, do “stuff,” and go to bed. And we repeat this cycle day after day, week after week, and (Lord willing) year after year. While there is something beautiful about that rhythm, it is also very possible – even likely – that we can slip into a routine in that rhythm of life that lulls us into a pattern of merely existing or surviving, rather than living carefully.

Now in the immediate context, Paul is concerned that they not be lulled into sleep (5:14) and fall into the kind of sin issues that are part of the gravitational pull of the culture. In verses 3-11 he mentions issues like sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness and “unfruitful works.” But he doesn’t mean to limit his concern to these issues alone. His point here is that believers are wake up to the reality of their walk in the world. It is dangerous for a believer in Jesus to just try to survive or to live in the world without being careful.

That brings us to the words “look carefully.” The word for *look* can mean seeing with the eyes (Acts 9:9), but it more frequently means to pay attention, examine with care, to consider or to perceive (see Mark 4:24, Phil. 3:2, 1 Cor. 1:26). It means to inquire about something in light of the risks and the opportunity. In the Bible we are sometimes told to *look* for danger and other times so as to not miss what is really important. And to do so *carefully* means to look with a level of intentionality, deliberateness, and accuracy.

When I put that together, it seems that how we live our lives needs to be something that we are intentional about. We’ll talk more about this later. But I just want you to be sure that you know that when we talk about stewardship and God’s purpose in your life, how you use your time and your life is on the table. It needs to be part of the “All In” strategy.

I think that this means a few things by way of application:

- 1) To not think about how we live is a huge mistake, and it potentially puts us in grave danger. How long has it been since you’ve thought about your life, your time, and what you are doing? An unexamined life or an unthoughtful life is, frankly, dangerous.
- 2) There are some really big questions related to stewardship that we need to consider. Questions like: *Why am I here? What is the calling on my life? What is my purpose? Why are we doing what we are doing? Does this activity matter?*
- 3) How we walk has divine purpose and a significant potential impact. Think, for instance, of what will be said about you at your funeral. If you walk carefully, there is the potential for great influence, but if you don’t look at your life carefully, just think of the disastrous effects.

Let’s apply this even to last week. Did you look carefully at your life and do your best to maximize it for God’s glory? Did you think about how to serve others? Did you think about how God may have ordered your day? Or did you just allow the pace, pressures, and pleasures of life to dictate your time?

One of the most effective strategies that I have used in this category is the daily habit of journaling. I find it useful to reflect on what the Lord has done in my life the previous day, what I’m learning now, and what my day holds in front of me. If journaling isn’t your thing, how about simply ending your day with a prayer where you reflect on how your life counted for the sake of God’s glory that day. The point of all of this is simply to prompt your heart to look carefully at your life. In order to be “All In,” you need to look at your life carefully.

2) Live your life wisely

This second command relates to the way in which we are to look at our lives. We are not only to look at them with care, but with wisdom as well. Actually, the text says “not as unwise but as wise.” This would indicate that Paul is as concerned about what we should *not* do as much as he is concerned with what we *should* do. In other words, you have to know what you are not going to do and what you are going to do. Life involves a constant choice of “Yes” and “No.”

What is wisdom? My short-hand definition sounds like this: wisdom is biblical truth applied to life. The idea is that the values, priorities, and teaching of the Scriptures begin to inform, very specifically, how I live my life. In context, Paul is applying this directly to critical areas of morality, but he'll extend it into very practical areas such as marriage, home, and work.

Wisdom is applying biblical principles and priorities to every arena of your life. When I was a teenager, my regular diet of the Word through junior high and high school was reading a Proverb every day. I began to see how the Bible spoke to money, business, relationships, girls, a bully at school, authority figures, and much more. It helped me understand the value of discipline, justice, and integrity.

Living wisely means that we are constantly making the connection between biblical principles and where we live. Twenty-five years ago Sarah and I were blessed to receive some excellent premarital counseling. Part of that counseling included a paradigm that became our family philosophy. If you have been around College Park for a few years, you have probably heard this before. The order of priorities for me is to be God's kind of person, God's kind of partner, God's kind of parent, God's kind of pastor or parishioner, and God's kind of player. This framework has been the way that I've tried to think about my priorities, what I spend time doing, and how I plan my life.

For those of you who are goal setters, I have often used this framework to establish some priorities for the next year. It helps me to think through what I want to see happen in my walk with the Lord, what I want to see happen in my marriage, in my relationship with my kids, in our church, and what I want to do for fun. Yes, I plan for fun.

The goal is to be sure that I'm making the very best use of my life for the glory of God and that the important things are in their right place. But even more, if I fail to set priorities in my life, I will not be able to effectively serve other people. Kevin DeYoung makes this very wise and helpful statement:

I can't serve others effectively without setting priorities. If I respond to every email, show up at every possible meeting, and have coffee with every person asking for "just a few minutes," I won't have time to adequately prepare for my sermon. I may help several people during the week, but I won't faithfully serve the many who come on Sunday. If I attend every possible church function, I won't be there for my son's basketball game. Stewarding my time is not about selfishly pursuing only the things I like to do. It's about effectively serving others in the ways that I'm best able to serve and in the ways I am most uniquely called to serve.²

The challenge is that often we are so consumed with busyness that much of our lives is filled with unwise living. And sometimes our busyness is a subtle form of pride due to people-pleasing, the need for affirmation, a performance-based identity, craving for possessions, the desire for pity, the need to be in control, the passion for promotion or power or prestige, or a relentless perfectionism.³

Any number of things could be at the core of our busyness. So are you walking wisely? Is your life ordered on biblical priorities? Are you able to serve and not just survive?

² DeYoung, 61.

³ DeYoung, 37.

3) Use the time strategically

The third way to think and live relates to the strategic and intentional use of the time. Ephesians 5:16 contains an important phrase: “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

If you are a Christian raised on the King James Version, you probably remember that it was translated “redeeming the time.” That is not a bad translation because of the presence of the word that means to buy something back or to efficiently use something. It is the same word used in Galatians 3:13, where Paul says that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.”

The idea is simply that we are to make good spiritual use of the time. Now this certainly applies to days, but Paul uses a word that is broader in its scope and application. It is a word that also means *era*, *occasion*, or *season*. There is a slight but important nuance here.

The days are evil, and that implies that the strategic use of time involves living wisely in light of that reality. Christians are not placed in the world at a particular moment in human history just to be busy. There is something more at stake here. Consider the following:

Providence: God, in His grace, caused you to be born into this era. He placed you in your mother’s womb during the 20th and 21st century. He put you in the home that you were raised in. He orchestrated the events of your living in Indianapolis. Why? There is a purpose. And redeeming the time means thinking about why all of that has happened.

Calling: God has given you particular gifts, passions, and interests. There are ways that you think, things that you feel, and actions that you take which are part of God’s special grace in your life. But how will you use them and steward them to serve others? What do you feel called to?

Mission: God intends for us to use our gifts and time for the service of others. Those gifts are for the purpose of bringing light into the darkness. The days are evil. Lost people are all around us. Brokenness is a part of the very fabric of our culture. What is your mission field? And could it be right in front of you?

Stage of Life: Redeeming the time looks different depending on your stage of life. If you are in school, be a good steward of your education so that you can enter the arenas of life, and look for people right now to reach with the gospel. If you are single, you typically (not always) have more discretionary time so use it to mentor students, go on a vision trip, or serve in some capacity. If you are married and have children, you need to work hard to know your priorities and not allow your life to run you, and you need to use all the activities as platforms for discipleship and evangelism. If you are empty-nesters, you have the beautiful balance between knowledge and energy, so use that to pour into people and help them grow spiritually. And if you are retired, don’t tap out from serving. We need your compassion and your wisdom in discipling younger believers.

Whatever season you are in, ask yourself why God has placed you where you are. You need to realize that none of this happened by accident. God knew exactly what He was doing by having you live in

this era. Maybe it is something that is really hard or is even connected to suffering. Maybe you need to pray: "Lord, help me not to waste my _____."

Jonathan Edwards was a man on a mission, and before his 20th birthday he wrote seventy resolutions. If you want to see an amazing life of stewardship, just read all seventy. Edwards was so committed to the stewardship of his life that he wrote statements like:

5. Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can.

41. Resolved, to ask myself at the end of every day, week, month and year, wherein I could possibly in any respect have done better.

52. I frequently hear persons in old age say how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again: Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age.

You may not need or want to write out your personal resolutions, but I think every one of us should ask the important question: *How can I redeem my time?*

4) Consider God's will thoughtfully

The final aspect of the stewardship of our time is both a question and a challenge. Paul says, "Don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The verse is a command based on what he has said in chapter 5. They are to know the will of God. Through how they redeem the time, they are to both discover God's will and live in light of God's will.

So here's my question: Is your life aligned with God's will right now? Is your calendar and the use of your time informed by God's plan for your life?

And here's my challenge: Find some way to take the great resource of your time and make it even more useful to the Lord. Don't watch *Jeopardy*; read a good theology book. Make time for coffee with someone you can disciple. Invite a spiritually searching neighbor over for dinner. Get away for a weekend with your spouse and talk about the future and your priorities. Go to bed earlier and stop sinning so much because you are grumpy all the time. Build some margin in your life. Get involved in serving in some significant way.

Take your time and your life and slide it into the "All In" circle. Say to the Lord: "*Lord, I'm yours. Everything I have is a gift from you, including this day and what you have in store for me. Help me to be 'all-in' for you. I'm ready for you to use my life to serve your purposes and your glory.*"

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Resources & Next Steps

Books:

Master Your Money by Ron Blue & Jeremy White (foreword by Charles Swindoll)

Your Kids Can Master Their Money by Ron & Judy Blue

Your Money After the Big 50 by Larry Burkett & Ron Blue

The Law of Rewards by Randy Alcorn

The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn

Next Steps:

1. Attend God Owns it All Class (North Indy)

Sunday, Mar. 19 – Apr. 9, Apr. 23, Apr. 30 // 11:30 a.m. // Chapel C

This 6-week study will give you the opportunity to wrestle with and answer heart-related questions about the Bible and money. You will be confronted with foundational questions about money like: Who owns it? How much is enough? Will it continue to be enough?

Register at yourchurch.com/godownsitall

For info on Fishers campus future class offerings, contact Dustin Crowe at dcrowe@yourchurch.com

2. Schedule a Financial Discussion with our Counseling team (All Campus)

Financial Counselors are available at College Park to discuss your concerns with budgeting, savings, retirement and debt management. Find out more at yourchurch.com/counseling

If you have questions about these resources contact Pastor Mark Schuitema at mschutema@yourchurch.com