

## “What Time Do You Want it to Be?”

### Ephesians 5:15-16

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Two months ago I lost my watch. I have no doubt that I will find it when I seriously look for it. Jackie is not as optimistic because she doesn't think men seriously look for anything. Down through the years, she has found in five minutes things for which I searched days. I told her that men are not born with the “seek and find” gene. It's another reason we marry.

Living without a watch has been quite interesting. It took a month to break the habit of constantly looking at my wrist to discover the time. Now I ask other people. I have talked to more strangers in the last couple of months than I have in a long time. People are very helpful. At least they are willing to tell me the time and not one has asked me why I don't wear a watch. They probably know I don't have that “seek and find” gene.

One of our fine church members loaned me his watch a couple of weeks ago. On his way out of church he handed it to me. This was after I asked one of the deacons on the front row what time it was while I was preaching. Nothing scares church members more than a preacher without a watch.

I am not sure if I am more or less conscious of time since I misplaced my watch. I guess I am less aware of the specific time at any given moment but it has not affected my awareness of the importance of time and the need to be a good steward of time. I've discovered that a person can be a good steward of time with or without a watch. I'm glad about that.

What do I mean by being a good steward of time? I thought stewardship focused upon money. How can I be a steward of time?

The way I use my time is as important as the way I use my money. Both are gifts from God and are to be used wisely. What does God expect? How would He have us use our time?

Paul addressed this question in Ephesians 5:15-16. *“Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*

This advice came on the heels of Paul's challenge for his readers to be good role models displaying the finest moral character. He encouraged them to be light in a dark world showing people the way to God. He concluded this reference to conduct by encouraging them to be good stewards of time.

I am especially intrigued by his use of the phrase, *“making the most of every opportunity.”* What does this mean? What are they to make the most of? I think he encouraged them to make the most of every opportunity to make the world a better place.

Paul borrowed the language of the marketplace and challenged the early Christians to “buy every chance to turn bad into good.” Just as a shopper would snatch a good bargain, so every believer should snatch up opportunities to turn bad into good and prevent the spread of evil.

How is this done? Let me offer some suggestions.

**First of all, live in the present.** Do you recall the movie, “Dead Poets Society” directed by Peter Weir? Robin Williams brilliantly played the role of Professor John Keating at a preparatory school for boys. Mr. Keating was not like other teachers at Welton Academy. He was a man before his time. His teaching methods were new and controversial for 1959 as he taught the boys in unconventional ways to think for themselves.

On his first day at the Academy, Mr. Keating grabbed the students' attention when he ushered them into the hall and whispered “carpe diem” while standing around the case containing the pictures of former professors and class members, most of whom were dead. He made it appear as if the people in these pictures were talking to the boys challenging them to “seize the day.”

“One day,” Mr. Keating said, “you, too, will be fodder for worms. Make your life count before that time comes.”

At the Leadership Network Conference that the staff recently attended in Dallas, one of the speakers talked about the importance of “seizing the day.” “Be present in the present,” he said. “As long as you try to see the future, you will miss the divine moment now.”

I like to ask people the question that is the title of the sermon. What time do you want it to be? Most people answer that question by referring to some time in the past or future.

“I wish I was young again and had the stamina I had in my twenties.” “I wish I was six years old again and starting school.” “I wish I was old enough to retire.”

I’ve discovered that very few people want to be where they are now. For some reason, people are not as fond of the present as they are their fantasies of the past or future. Maybe that is because life has not turned out to be what they thought it would be at whatever age they are.

Perhaps Paul’s readers were wishing to be in another place and time. After all, they were facing some tough times. They lived under the constant threat of persecution with all the fears that accompanied that. Who wouldn’t daydream of another time?

This was why Paul encouraged them to “make the most of every opportunity.” You’ve got to live in the present to do this. You have to quit wishing your life away. As Francis W. Beare wrote, “It is the ‘now’ of everyday that is important.”

**The second thing you must do to make the most of every opportunity to make the world a better place is to figure out ways to turn bad into good.** This will require a lot of creativity and will power. Evil is powerful but so is good.

Refuse to let anything unpleasant have the final word in your life. See misfortune, adversity and even chaos as challenges to be overcome. Figure out ways to turn sorrow to joy, grief to gladness, disappointment to anticipation, despair to hope, turmoil to peace, confusion to certainty and tears to smiles. It can be done and you can do it.

Paul told his readers that hard times were no excuse for becoming indifferent, bitter, angry or pessimistic. Instead, they were to be seen as opportunities to turn something bad into something good.

**Thirdly, to turn bad into good, you must rely upon God’s help.** You cannot do it on your own. You must seek God’s wisdom and power.

I hope you were here last week to hear the testimony of Antoine Rutayisire, the vice-chairman of the Commission on Reconciliation and Healing in Rwanda. In 1994, thousands of citizens of Rwanda were the victims of genocide, leaving 250,000 widows and 450,000 orphans in this country of eight million people. Of course, trouble had been brewing in Rwanda for many years prior to 1994. Antoine lost his father and other family members in the years leading up to 1994. He also lost his job teaching at a university because of his heritage. The results of these evil deeds left him bitter and angry. However, over time he realized that his anger was hurting him worse than anyone else.

This led him to turn to God to find another way of dealing with his anger. He read II Corinthians 5:16-19. *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation.”*

This passage convicted Antoine and led to a new way of thinking and living. He knew that forgiven sinners must also forgive. When the daughter of the man that killed his father asked for his forgiveness, he could not withhold it. It was in granting her family forgiveness that he was able to let go of his own resentment.

Today, he is employed by his government to spread the message of reconciliation. Government officials told him, “We have the army, police and laws in place to make people live

together but we don't have the message of love that can make it happen. Only the church has this. Will you help us proclaim that message?"

Antoine spends his days going from village to village proclaiming and modeling this message of love and reconciliation. He travels to prisons, orphanages and widows' support groups to help people reconstruct their lives. With God's help, he is seizing every opportunity available to him to turn evil into good. And so must we.

Do you recall the popular song Chicago sang years ago, "Does Anybody Know What Time it Is?"

"Does anybody know what time it is? Does anybody really care? If so, I can't imagine why we all have time enough to die. Do we know what time it is? Do we really know what time it is and do we really care? If so, then we all have time enough to live."

This is our time to live and God is depending upon us to use our time wisely, with or without a watch. Join me in asking for His help to be good stewards of the time He has so generously given us, seizing every opportunity to make the world a better place to live.