

How to Make the Best Use of Your Time

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seizing opportunities to shine as lights in the world, exposing darkness and impacting outsiders for the glory of God. It challenges believers to be wise in making the best use of their time by engaging in sacrificial acts of love, serving the needy, and being strategic in reaching out to others. The message encourages Christians to be diligent in availing themselves of opportunities to bear fruit, make sacrifices, and live out the Gospel in practical ways.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14, James 1:22, Galatians 6:9, Isaiah 58:6, Luke 6:35

Topics: "Seizing Opportunities", "Living Out the Gospel"

Description

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Transcript

Ephesians 5, and I want to read the same verses that I read last week. Verses 7-17. Ephesians 5-7, "...Therefore, do not become partakers with them." From verse 6, you'll see that them refers to the sons of disobedience upon whom the wrath of God is coming because of the sins they are guilty of.

Don't be partners with them. Don't be partakers. "...For at one time, you..." He's speaking to the Ephesian Christians.

"...At one time, you were darkness. But now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.

For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." A Christian is to be light.

Light exposes. That's what he goes on to say here. "...It is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret, but when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible." That's what we do.

We are the light. We expose the unfruitful works of darkness. And when we do, it becomes visible.

That means that the people that we're communicating with, the people that we live in front of, see their lives, see their sin for what they really are. That's what Christian... You are a reality check for everyone else in the world. Because we know how things really are, and the rest of the world does not.

For anything that becomes visible, and I told you guys this last week, the New King James Version I really believe have that much better. Anything that makes manifest is light. Light makes manifest.

Turn the light on, things become manifest. The thing itself that's made manifest isn't light. The light shines on it.

That's what we're to be as Christians. Therefore, it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead." And as I preached last week, I don't believe Paul just took an aside here and decided to have a few words to lost people. That's not what he's doing.

He's telling Christians, you need to awake. Don't sleep. Arise from the dead.

Not that you are dead, but we looked at that preposition. It means to come away from. Don't stay among them.

That's what he's been saying all along. Don't be partakers with them. Don't partake of their unfruitful deeds of darkness.

You need to come away from that. You need to expose that. Not come away so that you're not able to shine your light on them, but come away from fellowshiping with them.

The impact you're supposed to have on their life is not to live as much like them as possible. The impact we're supposed to have on the life of people out there is we need to wake up and recognize who we are. We are the lights of the world.

We're the salt. We're the light. We have a task here.

We need to stop sleeping. Arise. You may have noticed Go Forth and Tell uses the verbs from this verse.

Awake. Arise. And Christ will shine on you.

And you can see, v. 15, it's all fluid. It all runs together. Look carefully then how you walk.

He's talking to Christians here. Look carefully therefore, based on all He's just said. Be careful how you walk.

Not as unwise, but as wise. These are the verses I really want to deal with today. V. 15, 16, 17.

Look carefully then how you walk. Look carefully why? Well, then, therefore, because of what He just said, be careful how you walk. Walk carefully.

Walk like people who don't sleep. Walk like people who are doing what He's telling us to do here. Now listen, not as unwise, but as wise.

Make Him the best use of the time because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish. And I'll tell you this, foolish people are people who are not heeding what's being said here.

Don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is and what's the will of the Lord. Well, it's being expressed to us here. The Spirit of God is moving Paul along.

He's being carried along to tell us what God's will is for us. This is such a good message. The first one of a new decade.

The 20th of a new year. I've entitled my sermon, How to Make the Best Use of Your Time. Now I know this, that if I came across a sermon called that before today and before I was studying for this, preparing to preach to you from this, that title would have got my attention.

Because I want to know, how to make the best use of your time. Like, oh, this interests me. Christian, I know this.

I know that if you will listen to what I am about to say to you and if you will apply it to your life, you will make improvements in the use of your time. How can I say that? Well, because of several basic facts. One, I know that we can all improve the way we use our time.

Two, I know that I intend to preach to you from Scripture, and Scripture shows us how to make better uses of time. And if we all stand to approve, and Scripture shows us how we can approve, and I mean to bring out that which... I'll tell you this, if you'll hear it and apply it, then you will indeed improve. So here we go.

How to make the best use of your time. This is applicable. Here's the first thing.

V. 15, look carefully. King James says, look circumspectly. The idea is this, and by the way, that is your primary verb here.

What's being said is think, look, consider. That's the primary verb. The making is a participle.

Making the best use of your time or redeeming those I-N-G's, participles. That means they modify. The primary thought here is this one.

It is that you look carefully, you consider carefully, you look circumspectly. It's a term that means accurately or exactly. Here's the thing, you can't be accurate unless you are careful.

People don't accidentally hit the mark. Some of you know that Zach likes to set up these shooting ranges out there at Sid's. I've run through those several times.

There's targets. You don't hit the bullseye unless you're careful. You may hit once in a while randomly shooting from the hip, not taking aim, not being careful.

It's almost accidental. Once in a while, everybody will accidentally perhaps hit the mark. But if you want to consistently do it, you've got to be careful.

Brethren, this is our life. It's something that's worth being careful about. It's your life.

It has to do with you. It has to do with your own greatest good. So what's the bullseye here? Well, it's making the best use of the time.

That's the mark. But Paul calls it something else first. Before he gets to making best use of the time, he calls it something else first.

Not as unwise, but wise. Let's just take a second and think about wise or wisdom. What does that mean? What is wisdom? Let me ask you this.

Is wisdom the same as knowledge? Somebody said no. Who said no? David said no. And I've heard David up here, you've said things on wisdom before.

I've heard you define it before. No, you can have a very knowledgeable person who's a fool. Would you not agree? Wisdom actually has to do with how we use what we know.

That's the issue. It has to do with being clever in matters of common life. Listen to this.

One of the lexicons, the Greek lexicons, which gives definition to the actual Greek word, one of them I looked at puts it this way. One who has quick and correct perceptions. Correct perceptions.

They weigh things out accurately the way they are. Oh, wisdom has a lot to do with that, seeing things the way they really are and acting on that. I looked at another one that gives I think one of the best definitions of wisdom that I've ever come across.

It says this, forming the best plans and using the best means for their execution. Oh, I like that one. You know why I like it so much? Years ago, studying the Proverbs, I thought this, I know what a dictionary definition of wisdom, you can pull the dictionary up online and you can see what a scholarly definition looks like.

But there was a time years ago when I was studying through the Proverbs and I thought I want to look at everything that the Proverbs say about wisdom. And if I knew nothing about what the meaning of the word meant, what would I come away from the book of Proverbs thinking that it meant? I tried to formulate my own definition of wisdom. And I was persuaded that one of the ways we can describe what wisdom is, is this, wisdom is pursuing your own greatest possible good.

Now, if you compare that to forming best plans and using the best means for their execution, wisdom is pursuing your own greatest possible good. And I'll tell you this over and over and over again, Scripture reveals this very reality. I'm going to read three different portions of the Proverbs and see how much wisdom has to do with your own good.

Just listen to these. The first one, Proverbs 3.13-18, Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, for the gain, the gain, this is personal gain, from her is better than gain from silver, her profit better than gold. She's more precious than jewels, nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honor. Who gets the long life? Who gets the riches and honor? Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Who gets the pleasantness? Who gets the peace? She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her.

Those who hold her fast are called blessed. Here's another one, Proverbs 4.7-9, The beginning of wisdom is this, Get wisdom. If wisdom really is forming the best plans and using the best means for their execution, the beginning of wisdom is this, pursue that.

The beginning of wisdom is get wisdom. The wise people are always seeking more and more wisdom. And whatever you get, get insight.

Prize her highly. Why? She will exalt you. She will honor you.

If you embrace her, she will place on your head a graceful garland. She will bestow on you a beautiful crown. See, self-advantage.

And look, if you ever say, well, that sounds selfish to me. Brethren, you have to recognize this, that the wisdom of Scripture isn't talking about your great advantage. It doesn't include you finding that great advantage in God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

It never is wise to seek to find your own greatest advantage aside from trying to help everyone else find their greatest advantage and loving others. Proverbs 9.12, listen to this. This is a classic text the way this is spelled out in the ESV.

Proverbs 9.12, if you are wise, you are wise for yourself. So there it is. It gives you an idea about wisdom.

Now, with that definition of wisdom, I want to move on. Because I want us to look at this word in your King James Bible. Redeem.

Redeeming. The New King James. Redeeming.

Making the best use. NASESV. Making the best use of your time.

I want to look at this. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise. And here's what's wise.

You have to see where Paul's going with this. What is the wisdom of the passage? Well, here's what's wise. Making the best use of the time or redeeming the time.

How often do we talk about redeeming the time? Well, that comes... I didn't exactly look at Tyndale. Usually, the way the KJV goes is the way Tyndale went. But it's classic.

I mean, for 400 years, we've had the King James Bible. We talk about redeeming the time. That is a very common expression among Christians.

Redeeming the time. But let's look at this. Does this have to do with your own best interests? Just that.

Redeeming the time probably does lend itself towards that. But if you can't see it, I want to help you see it. Making the best use of time or redeeming the time.

Listen to Thayer's Greek Lexicon. Here is the definition of this word. To buy up for oneself.

To buy up for one's own use. You see, that's the idea. It is you buying up the time for yourself.

That's the idea of the word here. Listen to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He says, if you like, it is the picture of a man who is looking for a bargain.

You see, Christian, you want to be a bargain hunter when it comes to this. This is Lloyd-Jones again. He wants us to buy something or he wants to buy something for himself.

So he says, if you like, it's the picture of a man who's looking for a bargain. He wants to buy something for himself. He is watching the goods on the stall or in the shop window.

He is anxious to get that bargain, so he looks around and shows great keenness. You see, the issue is this. The idea is you want to take advantage of the time.

In other words, there is something here that concerns time that has to do with your advantage. You see, this brings us right back to the definition of wisdom. This is a person who's careful to pursue his own best interest.

He knows what he's doing. He knows why he's doing it. He can give you reasons as to why he's doing it.

He constantly calculates. He's figuring. He's weighing things out in life.

He calculates the advantage. He wants to use time so as to get the greatest possible blessing for the greatest possible amount of time. You see, that's critical with wisdom.

If I'm seeking the greatest advantage, I want that greatest advantage for the greatest amount of time, which actually is forever. You see what a foolish thing it is when people seek the advantage that's only for the here and now and right for today? That which makes you feel good right now, but it has no eternal advantage, that's not wisdom. It's wisdom to get the greatest possible blessing for the greatest possible amount of time.

Well, it's the very opposite of wisdom when I fill my time with stuff that doesn't have any value. And this is the crossroads each one of our Christians faces daily. You know, there's lots of choices.

When this service lets out, you have lots of choices. The week ahead, many decisions. The Christian stands at the crossroads all the time.

He can go left, he can go right, he can go straight, he can go off at an angle. There's all sorts of decisions to make. We're all there.

And you know what? We have options. And some are wise and some are not very wise. Some are foolish.

That's why he says in verse 17, So then don't be foolish. Don't be foolish. Foolish.

Why? How can we be foolish? Well, because we pursue things that have no advantage. Or the advantage is very short. You know, it's like physical exercise.

What does Scripture say about physical exercise? Profits a little. But you see, there are some things that profit a whole lot more. That's not to say you shouldn't physically exercise.

I mean, if it helps you get through this life to do the things that are advantageous and do them better, there can be some advantage to that. Here's the next thing I want you to see. You see where it says, the time.

We're to redeem the time or make the best use of the time or to buy up the time for our advantage. But let's think about this word. Making the best use of the time.

Again, let me take you, one of the classic lexicons is Thayer's. It's probably the most familiar. Thayer's Greek lexicon.

Listen to this. As it defines this word time, it says this. It points out that when this noun for time is used along with verbs that have to do with advantage, which that's what making the best use of or buying up for yourself, that's advantage.

It says whenever this word is used with a verb like that, that has to do with advantage, it suggests the idea that time is not just being used here generically, it has to do with opportunity. That's key. Listen, this exact same word is used other places in your New Testament.

Let me just give you a sampling. Listen to how it's used. As Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for the present.

When I get an opportunity, I will summon you. That's our word right there. You see what it's saying? Make the best use of opportunity.

Thayer says that. Other verses translate it that way. Galatians 6, 9, and 10.

You know this, let us not grow weary in well-doing. For in due season we will reap if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, there's our word again.

Same word. Let us do good to everyone, especially those who are of the household of faith. And you know what's interesting? This text, Ephesians 5, 16.

Listen to how it's translated in the New English translation. Taking advantage of every opportunity for the days are evil. Do you know what's interesting? This text in Ephesians 5, it has a parallel.

There's a parallel passage to this over in the Colossian letter. If you've never noticed it, Ephesians and Colossians have a lot of similarities. Just keep your finger right here in Ephesians, but jump over to Colossians.

Right on the other side of Philippians. Notice Colossians 4, verse 5. What I'm going to do, I don't know what translation all of you are looking at, but you see it. You see Colossians 4, verse 5. The New American standard rendering of that text is this.

Conduct yourselves with wisdom. It's the same thought. Be wise, not unwise.

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. That's how the NAS reads. Now jump back to Ephesians.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says time here does not so much mean time in terms of calendars. No, it means opportunity. Redeeming the time should be translated buying up the opportunity.

Brethren, we need to think. What a profound thought this is. How does a Christian show forth that he's wise? Opportunities.

While I am here in this world before death takes me, I have opportunities and you have opportunities. And I need to make the best use of those opportunities. And you know this? We know it theoretically.

There's only a temporariness to the opportunities. This is a place of temporary opportunity. They don't last forever.

And have you ever noticed what we do in our lives right now matters for all eternity? You see, your opportunity to secure certain things on the other side are only offered to you right now. And when that opportunity is gone, it's gone. That's the way Scripture speaks.

That's the way it is. Brethren, keep your finger again in Ephesians. But go over to Revelation.

Last book in your Bible, Revelation. I often think of this verse. I find it to be a motivator.

Revelation 14, verse 13. I want your own eyes to see this before we turn back to Ephesians. Revelation 14, verse 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, write this, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Now, it's only if you die in the Lord. It doesn't matter what name you carry with you here.

You can call yourself Christian, but if you don't die in the Lord, none of this matters, none of this counts. You have to be a Christian for real. But listen to this.

The ones who are, they're blessed. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors. They did things in this life, but notice this.

What's it say next? For their deeds follow them. What a picture. Now, did you all hear that? Did you get that? What you do.

Not what we do cumulatively as a church. Collectively together. It's the labor you do.

Sometimes we can far too easily get into this mindset, well, my church is doing that. No, no, no. What matters, where did you fit? What was your involvement? What was your labor? You see, it's your labor that matters.

And it follows you. It's like a parade. You're at the head of the parade.

And it's like all these labor works you did in this life, they're like companions who follow you into glory. They follow you. That means they don't get left here.

They follow you there. I mean, do you see that? They aren't forgotten. There is reward and honor for them that follows you there.

That ought to be significant to you. You see, brethren, this is the thing. These are the opportunities that we have right now.

You are presented with just these kinds of opportunities. And what Paul is saying, look, Paul's being carried along by the Spirit of God, and that Spirit is telling you, take these opportunities and do not be foolish. And you see in verse 17, knowing what the will of the Lord is.

You want to know what the will of the Lord Jesus Christ is for you? It's these things. This is what the will of the Lord is. This is what you're being called to do.

Take these opportunities. Brethren, do you know what's remarkable about this? No lost person has this opportunity. The vast majority of the world does not have this opportunity.

Brethren, the fact is, lost people, their works, evil, damnable. Oh, you can be sure they'll follow them. But not in the way our deeds follow us.

You see, the beauty of the Christian is our evil and damnable things have been washed crystal clear by the blood of Christ. And our labors have been washed. You haven't done anything here perfectly.

So how does it follow you there? Because Christ came along and just made it perfect. Look, this is what we are faced with in this life. These are the opportunities that we are confronted with.

And the thing is, only Christians have it. But you know what, just because you're a Christian doesn't mean that you take advantage of every single opportunity or you wouldn't be being exhorted the way that you are here. The reality is, it's an opportunity, it's not a certainty.

We must avail ourselves of the opportunity. Opportunities can be missed. You ever hear, missed opportunities? We don't want to miss those opportunities.

That's exactly why we're being exhorted to be wise. Because these opportunities are there, and if we have wisdom, we will take full advantage of these opportunities and not squander them, not let them go away. Because they are unwisely wasted.

You see it. If you're not already back in Ephesians 5.17, go back there. Ephesians 5.17, Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

It's His will that we take advantage. And here's the thing, brethren, don't forget the context of Ephesians 5.15, 16, 17. Don't forget the context.

What Paul is saying is that we're being confronted with what sort of opportunities? Opportunities to be light. Opportunities to shine. Awake, says verse 14.

That's the issue. Awake to the opportunities. Life is full of opportunities, but they're temporary.

Every opportunity that gets past you is past you. You cannot go back and live this week over again. You can't.

If you had opportunities in this last week and you missed them, they're gone. All sometimes same opportunities present themselves again. But so many opportunities don't.

They come, they're there, and they're gone. And they're temporary. And they can be lost.

And if you lose that opportunity, you know what? It's a deed that cannot and will not follow you out into eternity. Brethren, have we not already spent a sufficient amount of time wasting our lives? I mean, Peter. Listen to Peter.

You know this verse. He says in 1 Peter 4.3, The time that has passed suffices. It's sufficient for doing what the Gentiles want to do.

In other words, the time passed when you were lost. That's sufficient. You were lost.

You know what you did? You did the same kind of things that the Gentiles do. Living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry. I mean, ouch.

Peter's saying this. You've already wasted a sufficient amount of time. Anybody raise their hand to that one? I mean, think about your lost days.

Yep. And I think we could say that even since we've been saved, we've sufficiently wasted too much time. And the thing about it is, Paul's not just being negative.

He's not simply admonishing us not to waste time. He comes at it from the positive. He wants to seek opportunities to do things.

And here's the thing. If you have eyes to see the Apostle, just look at how he thinks. Okay, he's out on the foreign mission field.

And he's out there preaching the Gospel. People are being converted. He's got this guy Epaphroditus with him.

This guy gets sick and it's bad. And you know what? There's this poor little Macedonian church in this Roman colony of Philippi. And they have sent help to Paul.

You remember these folks. Lydia, the jailer. Undoubtedly, the thing is multiplying.

I mean, now Epaphroditus is one of them. But the church is growing. We know from 2 Corinthians they're poor.

The Macedonian church is much poverty. And you know what they've done? They've sent money to Paul. Not just once, but once and again.

They've showed their concern for Epaphroditus. They've shown their concern for Paul. Listen to what he says.

He says, you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the Gospel when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only. Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Now listen to this.

Paul says not that I seek the gift. He says the thing that excited me wasn't the money so much. And the fact that my needs are met.

You know what really excited me about that, Philippians? This, I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. All other translations say your account. Christian, you have a heavenly bank account.

That's what that word means. And you know what Paul's saying? When that poor church helped that missionary, Paul was so excited because he recognized what these people did now bears on their account. You see what happened? They didn't miss the opportunity.

Here's a missionary. He's poor. He has needs.

We're going to help. Now listen, Jesus said this, I want mercy, not sacrifice. This isn't just a matter of oh, I'm going to pay for treasure in eternity.

Look, these people loved Paul. They wanted to see Paul used. Their hearts went out.

They loved Epaphroditus. In fact, Paul had to send Epaphroditus back to them because they so yearned after Epaphroditus that he recognized that it was best. He wants mercy, not sacrifice.

But you see what's happening here. They availed themselves. Brethren, I want to tell you this, that from the very beginning of the church, I have wanted the church to be involved in things that you could be involved with that would work to your credit eternally.

And even when they haven't been ministries that I've directly started up, the ones that get approval and support are going to be the ones that I and the other elders recognize that if our people are involved with, it works out this way. You know, when we're coming up on this financial meeting, these are the kind of opportunities. We're going to talk about a poor pastor in Austin who we know, love, and support.

I know Adam is further away. Many of you don't know him like you know Tawfiq. These are two pastors that we help support.

You see the opportunity? I mean, sometimes we can say, oh, you know, what's going on with James Dolly? He's way up there and he's far away and he's ministering to all these children. We don't really know him. But you know what? Even if that's the case, I anticipate this.

I envision this. I think about you, brethren, entering glory. And you were faithful to give and even though you never saw Royal Ambassadors Academy firsthand.

That doesn't mean we don't have to make decisions about what we're going to support, but when you're sacrificial and you give to these things, such things are happening that are going to follow you. These are opportunities. And you know what? If you let the rest of the church do it, you say, well, they have more money.

Just remember the widow. You can throw in two pennies and have on that day when you're entering the glory have a parade behind you that's greater than the parade behind the others who gave more. Because you gave more in giving those two pennies because it was all you had.

And he takes account of that. You can say, oh, they're more gifted. Well, he takes account of what he's given you up front.

He knows what you have. You know what? He doesn't expect you to be faithful with what you don't have. He expects you to be faithful with what you do have.

And you all, if you're a genuine Christian, you have something. And you have opportunities to use it. And that's what we're being faced with, brethren.

Make the best use of every opportunity. You see, Paul's book isn't entitled, Don't Waste Your Life. Rather, it's on the positive.

Make the best use of every opportunity. Now of course, his injunction, his mandate to us includes the negative, don't waste your life. But it goes on with the positive.

That's the thing that we want to look at. Eagerly keep alert to and seek out and be alive to and have your eyes open to. Don't fall asleep.

Be ready to eagerly grab the opportunities every time you're presented with one. And the thing is we want to be just like Paul. We want to rejoice in the fact that our brethren are getting that which accumulates to their account.

We don't want to be greedy and selfish in all of this. We want to encourage all the Christians to come along as much as possible. Now let's consider the nature of the opportunities that Paul is stressing.

If you just look at Ephesians 5, just think with me here. Follow the flow by which we arrive at v. 16. If you go back to v. 8, you're light in the Lord.

Walk as children of light. Go to v. 11, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. V. 13, when anything exposed by the light it becomes visible.

14, awake, O sleeper. 15, look carefully then how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise.

16, making the best use. Taking advantage of every opportunity. Now do you see what it is? It's the people in the darkness that we're supposed to shine on and expose their works.

This is what's on the table here. Did anybody catch what the parallel text in Colossians 4 said? Anybody remember it? What did it say? I know that was a long time ago. Let me tell you again.

Walk in wisdom toward who? Ah, the very people we're supposed to be shining on in Ephesians 5. You see, these are parallel. He's talking about the same thing in both. In one, he focuses more on the light and the shining and revealing the wickedness that they do.

Here he just says, be wise toward outsiders. Making the most of every opportunity. These are the opportunities Paul's stressing.

This is how we buy up the time. You know what? So often you will hear when Christians talk about redeeming the time, very often, they're thinking getting their prayer life together this year. Getting on track with their Bible reading.

That's not even on Paul's radar here. It's almost like that is Christianity 101. That's an assumption.

Those are the things by which you keep your light bright. By which God makes you light and bright. They're not even the things.

Brethren, all I'm saying is this, is if we approach this new year and we're thinking about redeeming the time, if the main thing that's on your mind is getting your Bible reading act together, you're not even where Paul is saying you need to be seeking to redeem the time. You're not even on the same page with him. Brethren, breathing for the Christian prayer is like breathing.

The Word of God is not bred alone. It's by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. You see, this is breathing and eating.

That's 101. Those are just the basics of life. If that's where you're at, you're not even hearing what Paul's saying here.

Paul isn't even dealing with seeking opportunity to get in the Word and get in the prayer closet. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the most of the opportunity. We've got to move beyond just praying, fasting, being in our Bibles.

Paul's very specific about the kinds of opportunities toward outsiders. You know, when you listen to Jesus, can you find words on prayer? Yes. Can you find words on the necessity of Scripture? Yes.

But if you hear Him as He describes good works that follow us out into the eternity of glory, remember those on His right hand and those on His left hand? Not to one of them did He say, I really commend you

for your prayer life. Now undoubtedly, that was a good thing. And there's plenty of Scriptures that say that it is.

But isn't it interesting the things that they're being commended for are not that they followed McShane's Bible reading program and they were faithful to accomplish it for the whole year. Oh, we need to be in the Word. You understand what I'm saying.

I'm not detracting from that. I just want you to know when judgment comes, you know what he looks at? I was in prison. Did you come? You see, being in the prayer closet, being in the Word of God prepares you for that.

I was a stranger and you took me in. See what kind of deeds? We're talking about things where you die to yourself. Things where you have to make sacrifices.

This is the sacrifice of the Christian life. This is the sacrifice of walking like Christ. Do you know what Jesus said? He said when you give a dinner, don't invite your friends.

You see, this is where we're at. You're giving a dinner. You know what He's saying there? You plan a dinner and you invite a bunch of the brethren.

Well, you know what's going to happen? Those brethren are going to invite you back and you're paid. Account settled. He says, you know what? When you have a meal, you have an opportunity.

Oh yeah, but if I invite the guy from down the street, it will make us all feel uncomfortable. Yeah, if you shine light on the unfruitful works of people. See, the unfruitful works of darkness.

That sounds so theological. You know what it really means? That guy, that neighbor, John, yeah, you go over and you expose his sin and you show him he's headed for hell and you show him Christ. It's real people.

It's you doing real things. You have a meal. You know what Scripture says? Don't invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, your rich neighbors.

When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. You know what He said? Love your enemies and do good. Lend expecting nothing in return.

He said sell your possessions and give to the needy. You see, these are the things true and undefiled religion before the Lord. This is what James says.

It's to visit who? Orphans and widows in their affliction. Do you know orphans and widows are some of the neediest people in the world? And we have people that we support that in turn support such people. And we can support such people right here in our own city.

You say, is there wisdom? Does that follow us? You don't want to let these sorts of opportunities slip away. You know why? Because listen, when you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.

See, this is the Lord Jesus Himself. And He says this to Christians. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Brethren, we're called believers. Do you believe that? Do you see opportunities? Look, I have to measure my own life. Like I look at physical exercise, I ride a bike.

Do I ride it too much? I have a garden in my backyard. Do I give too much time to it? I've been concerned about the paint on my vehicles. I haven't wanted to buy new vehicles.

Just kind of repair the paint so that it isn't a bad testimony. Yeah, there are things we need to think about. We don't want our grass to be overgrown.

We want to be good testimonies in our neighborhood. But you start thinking about what you give your time to and you know what happens? You miss opportunities that you would be repaid for. Am I going to be repaid at the resurrection of the just if I go ride my bike for two hours today? I doubt it.

Now, it may help me physically. It may help clear my mind. You don't labor forever.

There needs to be times of rest. I recognize that. But you know what? We need to be calculating.

Or how about this? When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. So we give to the needy. Oh, by the way, I know this happens all the time in this church, but you don't need to give your offerings to the offering box necessarily.

If you see somebody else in the church, you can go up and you can put a wad of money right in their hand. That happens all the time in the church. Luke 6.35 Love your enemies, do good, lend expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.

You seen any wisdom in this? You see what's not wisdom? It's when you don't live by faith and your eyes are stuck on what you see. This world, this time, relaxation and pleasure and hobbies and stuff, or your Christian liberties. How about this? Sell your possessions, give to the needy.

It doesn't stop there. Jesus Himself says this, provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, no moth destroys. And we have opportunities.

And you know why you need to be so strongly exhorted to this and reminded of this? Because we have another parable in our Bibles that to our shame says this, the children of this world are wiser. They're more prudent. The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

You know what happens to children in this world? The children of the world, the children of darkness, they jump at opportunities to further their ends. If they've got an opportunity to make more money or to somehow get ahead, they're jumping. Gain security for themselves.

They do it more wisely, more shrewdly, more diligently than we make the best use of the opportunities that we're presented with. And it's not just because that's my observation. That's Christ's observation.

That's bad. It's true. Why did Jesus say it? So that we would wake up and not let it be so.

And yet, it's a parable for this age. Why? Because we're so prone to this. You see, brethren, we're to be living in this world in such a way that we're making preparation and provision for the world to come, that if

you're only glued in what you see in cars and houses and children and education and the stuff here, you know what happens? You let opportunities go by.

And I have and you have. I know it. And we can become weary and well-doing.

And just when we're weary, somebody calls. Somebody says, could you help? Somebody needs something. And it's like, you know, what we have to do is remember our Lord Jesus.

He took the disciples aside to rest. And even then, here comes the people. And Jesus didn't say, no, you know, we need to rest.

We just can't do this right now. He availed Himself of all the opportunities. Brethren, don't live like those who have no idea what's coming.

Live in light of reality. We know what's coming. We know these truths to be so.

And we need to live wisely in light. Our works follow us. Let me ask you this, if you died right now, what would follow you? I know oftentimes, it's good to forget.

And we're forgetful. I forget all sorts of things. And in fact, those people in Matthew 25, Lord, when did we do that? Yeah, you could say, well, they didn't realize that when they did it to this person, it was actually being done to Christ.

You know, when did we do that for you? But I have a feeling we're just going to be really like, Lord, when did we do that at all? I mean, we forget so much. But what would follow? God help us to have a lot more to forget that we'll be reminded of then. And look, it can be things that seem small.

That woman throwing in two copper coins, that might have seemed small. When Jesus said it's more, where does that get borne out? Where does that get evaluated? Where does that get measured? Where is that going to come to light on judgment day? That means more, less. We know that's a reality.

Brethren, 100-fold, 60-fold, 30-fold. You say, what are those? That's good soil. Parable of the soils.

You know what? They're all good. They're all true. They're all real.

That's genuine Christianity. And what happens? Fruitfulness. What's fruit? It's the works.

It's the good works. Some, 100, 60, 30. You know what those are? Those are multipliers.

30-fold. What does that mean? I take a grain. Victor's given me wheat in the past.

I'm throwing it in the garden. One grain of wheat goes in the soil and the wheatgrass comes up and it sprouts ahead. And now there's 30 grains or 60 or 100.

For the one, you get 100. You see, they're not all the same. Why? I believe that if you boil it down, one of the main reasons, missed opportunity.

There are those who bypass many more opportunities than others. There are those that are more disposed to be ready to go. And look, it calls it labor.

You see, one of the things about all of this is that we have a natural affinity for rest. This is their labor. They'll rest from their labor.

Labor is blood, sweat, and tears. It's hard. It's carrying your cross kind of living.

It's making sacrifices. That's what it is. But there's a day of rest coming.

You see, this is only very temporary. This is why we should become weary and well-doing. Because in the end, those who don't get weary and well-doing and make it all the way to the end and try to be fruitful all the way through and really give their all, and they're making the sacrifices and they're looking for these opportunities that come up, brethren, it's going to be greatly to our advantage and it is very wise.

And you know what's on the table here? It's our opportunity to impact outsiders. That is one of the primary things. And brethren, even by loving one another.

Do you remember Jesus' words in John 13 after He got done washing their feet? He said to them, the world's going to know you're My disciples. How? Love for one another, but what does that tell us about the world? They're watching. They watch.

Oh, the world is watching. Have you ever noticed somebody's convicted of being a pedophile? Oh, if he was a Sunday school teacher 14 years ago, we hear about it. You know what? People embezzle all the time, but just let a pastor get caught.

The world's watching. The days are evil. And they like to put a negative spin on all of it.

That's how they are. That's what's happening. Brethren, we want to be ready to take advantage of the opportunities.

The Apostle Paul, you remember what he said? He said, I am free from all, but I make myself servant to all. This is kind of like the situation with charity. Do you know what Paul would have done if he had time with charity? He wouldn't have gone out drinking with her.

You know what Paul did? He looked at people and he measured where they are. He recognized this. All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful.

And he sized people up. To the Jew, I became like a Jew. To those under the law, like those under the law.

Those not under the law, like those not under the law. To the weak, I became as weak. You see, he sized people up.

And he specifically says this, I become all things to all people. And in the end, he says, I do it all for the sake of the Gospel. You see, the world's watching.

How do we come across? You say, I've got liberty to do this! Yeah, you go do that in front of your lost family, in front of your lost neighbors, and you just see how far it takes the Gospel. Yeah, nowhere. And so you miss the opportunity.

You say, I've got Christian liberty. Okay, you take your Christian liberties and see what kind of parade follows you. And you may push those too far and find in the end, after all, you were just lawless and

antinomian.

And he's going to say, I never knew you. Depart from Me. Because those on his right hand, all of them, they availed themselves of the opportunity.

You hear that? I was hungry. You fed me. I was thirsty.

You gave me something. They availed themselves! All true Christians do. But sadly, far too often it's 30-fold.

And far too often, we have to say that the people on their way to hell outran us in their own sphere faster and harder, more diligently than us in our sphere. They pursued their ends more strongly than we pursued ours. Jesus said this, you are the light of the world.

Same theme Paul's hitting on. And he says, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. So don't try to hide it.

Shine. He says people don't light a lamp and put it under a basket. Christian, God has not lit you to stay in your bedroom the rest of your life.

He's lighted you up to light the world. You put it on a stand, it gives light to all the house. In the same way, you know what he's referring to? Let your light shine before others.

That's them. That's the outsiders. Let your light shine before them so that they may see because they're watching.

See your good works and give glory to your Father who's in heaven. You see, yes, every bit has to do with being wise and pursuing your greatest, making the greatest possible plans and applying yourself to execute them for your own greatest good. But you recognize this is for the glory of God.

Why? Because Christ gave Himself to make us zealous of good works. When we show forth the light, we show forth what God can do with wretched sinners like us. How He can transform us.

Take us from darkness to light. You see, He went to the cross. He hung and He died for us.

He bore our sins on that tree. Why? So that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. This is what the cross is about.

This is the power of the cross. We glorify Him. We put the whole thing on display.

What you're doing here is you're looking for opportunities not just to have this parade follow you into glory, which the Bible teaches, but this opportunity to give glory to God. I mean, put it all together in your minds. What sort of works is it? You know, this last Wednesday, we were talking about Isaiah 58.

Isaiah 58. What kinds of things were there? This is the fast that I choose. What is it? It's these types of things.

Loose the bonds of wickedness. Undo the straps of the yoke to let the oppressed go free. The spiritually oppressed.

The Word sets them free. The Son sets them free. We need to tell them about the Son.

We need to break every yoke. It's to share your bread with the hungry. Bring the homeless poor into your house.

When you see the naked, cover him. Don't hide yourself from your own flesh. Pour yourself out for the hungry.

Satisfy the desire of the afflicted. Now remember, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. The King will say to those on the right, Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

I was hungry, you gave Me food. Thirsty, you gave Me drink. Stranger, you welcomed Me.

I was naked, you clothed Me. I was sick, you visited Me. I was in prison, you came to Me.

You see how all of this goes way beyond having the right prayer life and being constantly in Scripture? You need that. If you're going to be light, you have to walk. You have to have fellowship with the God who is light.

You need to be praying. You need to be feeding on that which makes you healthy and makes you shine. But those are the starting points.

God never intended you to sit in your room all the time and read Scripture and pray all day long. Now look, that can be a very sacrificial thing when your prayers are actually for others. Oh, there are people who undoubtedly have given great sacrifices.

Sometimes I fear when I hear Christians pray way too much for themselves. You see, that's not the kind of thing. There can be great sacrifices in prayer when it's intercessory.

Because by the way, that is a great fruit of the life and continuing life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He intercedes. Brethren, we don't want to just silence the accusations of the watching world.

It's not like they accuse us of all these things. We just want to shut their lips. Brethren, it's not that.

We want to make them feel like they're missing something. We want them to look at our lives and say, wow, whatever they have, I want it. We want them to recognize that they're missing something.

Oh, they're glorious. They're missing that as long as they stay separated from Christ. Opportunities.

You know what Paul's dealing with here? Are you buying them up? Are you buying them up for yourself? Are you taking advantage? Are you afraid of them? Are you ready to hide at home behind a closed door? Listen again to Scripture. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the Word and understands it. I trust we have a lot like that in this room.

He indeed bears fruit. All Christians are fruitful. In one case, a hundredfold.

In another case, sixtyfold. And in another case, thirty. Brethren, you know what this is like? I think you have an opportunity to buy a piece of land.

Right now, it's dirt cheap. Yeah, there's a bit of cost to it, but it's reasonable. You buy that and you know that in just a few short years, it's going to massively multiply in value.

Would you kick yourself to let that kind of opportunity get past you? And that's where verse 17 comes in. Therefore, do not be foolish. Understand what the will of the Lord is.

What's the will of the Lord? What's the will of the Lord Jesus Christ? You heard it. Sell your possessions. Give to the needy.

And you'll have money bags that don't wear out. That's His will for us. He designed us that way.

That's what He wants. Do you recognize that when you come into glory, that parade behind you just goes on and on and on? You know, crown Him with many crowns. We take them all off and we throw them all at His feet.

Because you remember what the Apostle Paul said? He said, I outran all of them. I do better than all of them. I work harder than all of them.

But you know what? After all, it's the grace of God. And it'll be that. Those who have a hundredfold over those who have thirty, we will throw it all at His feet.

It's all by His grace. But don't take away the responsibility aspect. Paul availed himself of the opportunities.

He outran others, but remember this, He outran them. His effort. God working in him.

His effort. He availed Himself. Here we are.

A new year before us. What are you going to do? You don't want to waste the opportunities. One of the things you should do is pray for them.

Don't pray for more opportunities to be at leisure and seeking pleasure and seeking hobbies and taking up hunting and taking up golf and taking up motorcycles. Don't be looking for that. That's not wise.

Yes, we need some times where we're not laboring or we just die. You wear out. You wear out.

We need to be paced. We're not in a sprint. This is a marathon and we need to pace ourselves.

And there are times when we have to rest. There are times we need that which is therapeutic. If you come by my house, if you go by Roel's house and you see me out there trimming one of his trees, don't think, oh, look, he's wasting the opportunities.

It's therapeutic. If you ever see me on my bike, there's a reason. But we need to be calculating because you know what happens.

The thing you allow in because it's reasonable and it's rest, it can take you. And next thing you know, it's stolen from you. Because the thing is, all the things in this world, they make all sorts of promises, but beware of what they'll steal from you if you let them.

And we need this because Jesus Himself says that the sons of light are not always as wise as they ought to be. Don't be unwise. Brethren, don't be unwise.

I want to encourage you. Let's be strategic. Remember, Kenny gave his report and he's talking about orphanage, like maybe off in Vietnam.

Oh, brethren, we all need to be like that. You know what? Even if some of your dreams never come to pass, dream. We don't want just dreamers who just dream all the time and never do anything.

But I'll tell you what, people that do things have the dream first. So think big. And I think it's much better to have a church that's trying all sorts of crazy things and sometimes failing than to have people that never do anything because they're scared to death of failing.

Listen, if you try to feed people, try to house somebody and see if you don't fail. What were we saying the other day about who should live with each other? Yeah, take the stranger into your home and see if you don't fail. You will fail.

You can't try to be like Christ, but you're not going to come up against failure because you're trying to deal with people out in this world who have entitlement mindsets like we heard in the Middle East. Oh, you can come up to people. You remember Brother Andy, he talks about you go to these faraway places, it seems so romantic.

Yeah, it's very romantic until you get there. And you have to deal with real people who have real ugliness about their lives. And you're trying to deal with people.

You know, in the early years, we were over there on Hackberry and we had all these people coming off the streets and everybody has an entitlement mindset. Everybody's trying to take all they can get from you. I'm sure that's the way it is with the Muslim.

They're trying to take everything they can possibly get. And if they see somebody get something and they don't get it, it's just horrible. You remember what Jesus said, hey, don't I have a right to do with my own what I want if I want to give this guy one? Well, you know, that's what's right.

That's what justice says. But you get among these people and they've just got these aggravating and annoying social, cultural peculiarities about them. But they're here too.

And you start rubbing with people out there and shining your light on them. Oh yeah, you get dirt all over you. It's not a clean business.

You run a lighthouse or a life-saving station off. Some of you heard MacArthur tell that story. You're bringing in the people that are swamped and been involved in the shipwrecks.

If we're really going to be a life-saving station, we want to bring people in off the streets. We want to bring people in here. You know what it's been like having Grace House, Ebenezer House, those kind of ministries? They're dirty ministries.

And ladies that are staying there, don't take that wrong, but they are. People come with all their baggage and all their lostness and all their sins. But see, we're light.

And Jesus got right out there with them. Not to become like them, but He got right in their midst and He shone His light on them. And that's what we have opportunities to do.

Take every advantage. When you pass out and you see Him, the God-Man greet you on the other side, you'll just say, oh, it was worth it. If anything, you'll feel, how could I have not done more for One so glorious? And He did this all for me.

Father, I pray, help this church. Fruitful, fruitful. Make us fruitful, Lord.

Wise, availing ourselves of every opportunity. I pray for it. I ask for it.

May we see just a resurgence. Lord, I pray, do things. May a new wave of sacrifice, overwhelm us, overtake us.

The kind of intercession that Kevin's looking for. Oh, Lord, I pray, make this church a church of interceding, praying warriors. I pray for that in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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