“It’s About Time!”

First in a new series: Wisdom for Life

# Scripture: Ephesians 5:8b-17, Prov. 14:8

# Key Thought: Wise people use Biblical perspectives in prioritizing their time.

# Intro:

The key verses for us this morning are Eph. 5:15,16

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Eph 5:15-16 NRSV

To make the most of our time is also to

“Live as children of light” Eph. 5:8

So, let me ask you, “Is your calendar a tyrant or a servant?” If you are like me, you are not quite happy with the way you use your time. But it’s hard to put your finger on the changes to make.

One thing is sure, the stress of busyness is not just in our heads.

Article from Web MD site

* Continue reading below...
* Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
* Seventy-five percent to 90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
* Stress can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, and anxiety.
* The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) declared stress a hazard of the workplace. Stress costs American industry more than $300 billion annually.
* The lifetime prevalence of an emotional disorder is more than 50%, often due to chronic, untreated stress reactions.
* <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/effects-of-stress-on-your-body>

When we get busy, something gets squeezed out, something has to give in our schedules. Sometimes we are intentional about those choices, but most of the time it just happens. In my own exper5eince and that of other I talk with, one thing that happens too often is that in the rush, we don’t seem to have time for God.

# Problem 1: Life’s busyness squeezes out time for God.

We say we are too busy for prayer, sometimes even too busy for church, certainly too busy to read the Bible consistently. The busyness of our lives becomes a danger to our spiritual lives. From my own experience, I’m quite sure that we have the best intentions, but the urgency and the multiplicity of all that comes at us day by day overwhelms our good intentions.

Jesus, in his famous parable of the soils, or of the sower, as it is sometimes called, warned us that the busyness of life can choke out the beneficial life that sprouts in our hearts from the implanted word of God (Matt. 13:22).

Many years ago, I read an excellent quote by Engstrom & Mackenzie in Managing Your Time (p. 24). Since we belong to God, “Management of time for the Christian becomes management of His time…When times get out of joint. . . when tasks pile up ... how often do stop to ask God if we're doing what He wants us to do?"

In our text, Paul admonishes us that making the most of our opportunities will mean that we need to find out what God’s will is (Eph. 5:17). That will include finding out what God’s will is for our time today. John Maxwell has a book title, “Today Matters” and I have heard Maxwell say that if you tell him how you use a single day, he can pretty much tell how successful you are going to be.

I’m sure all of us have had the experience of making it to-do list for the day for the week or even the month; and then immediately upon completion of the list being very conscious that it was way too long for the time frame. Early in my ministry, I was at a seminar at which Ted Engstrom was one of the presenters. I remember him saying that if there’s more on your to do list than you can do today, then there are some things on your list that God doesn’t want you to do today because God knows better that you what you are able to do in any given day.

So how do we fix this experience we have where the first victim of the busyness of our lives seems to be our devotional time with God?

# Rx 1: Prioritize seeking God.

## Realize how crucial time with God is

If we time allow life’s pressures to push God from our lives, one key result is that we increasingly lose perspective on what is most important. But if we remember that all our time is a gift from God and we are accountable to Him for the use of it; then it will be more crucial to seek God’s perspective on each day.

ILLUSTRATION: But, you say, haven’t you just added to the problem by asking for more of my time? Let me illustrate from the field of time management itself.

Time management experts tell us that in order to make the best use of our time, we should take the last moments of the day to organize and plan what needs to be prioritized on the next working day. Of course, this takes time from the working day. Now to be honest, I struggle to keep up this discipline, but I have noticed that it was during the very busiest times of my life that I needed that discipline the most and it was then that it was most helpful. Rather than stealing time it paid me back in time. Currently, since I am partially retired, I am using a variation of this theme, taking time each month to make a listing of what needs to be done in that month. The listing takes a little time, but it is very helpful and saves time overall.

In the same way, time alone with God is like that. Jesus repeated demonstrated this in the priority he gave to spending time alone with his Father. For example, in Luke 4:42 Jesus was pressed by crowds who wanted healings, but he withdrew to pray. He wanted, can we say, needed, the perspective of that time with his Father.

The great spiritual leader, Martin Luther, testified to the same effect upon his whole life with regard to spending time alone with God. He famously said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.”

In Luke 4:42, we read how Jesus used a time of prayer away from the crowds to get perspective. He was busy in a ministry of healing and was very popular. But after a night of prayer, Jesus sensed a direction change in his ministry and decided to move on to other towns.

He said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” Luke 4:43 NIV

Jesus apparently used his time in prayer to sort out priorities for future ministry. In Luke 6:12 when he was making a major decision, the choosing of the 12, he prayed all night.

## Benefits of time with God

So, what will be the results if we take time to pray? How will it help us? I would suggest three big long-range time-savers that come to us from taking time to pray.

(1) A Better perspective on what's important.

"Only eternal values can give meaning to temporal ones. Time must be the servant of eternity." (#11311) Oswald Chambers

(2) Better sense of direction

ill. A person in a big woods who is off the trails without a compass can go in circles or in entirely the wrong direction. Knowing the right direction will save them time and, in some cases, might safe their life. Taking time for worship both personal and collective, gives us spiritual direction. That saves us a good bit of wandering in the spiritual wilderness with all the pain and loss and danger that such wandering can involve.

People who reach their potential and fulfill their dreams determine and act on their priorities daily. John C Maxwell in Today Matters p. 69

(3) Better discipline of ourselves

The Holy Spirit in our lives helps us with self-discipline. As we spend time in prayer, we gain spiritual strength. This is why our relationship with God is the main focus of our passage in Ephesians where Paul urges to make the most of every opportunity. We can’t do that unless we are also living in God’s light, striving to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and living with praise and thanksgiving on our lips as Paul also instructs us.

## How do we do this today?

We also need to talk about how we are going to meet our spiritual needs in today’s world. Those of us in leadership in the church greatly bemoan the fact that church attendance is decreasing in our culture. Because of all the options available in our society, even those who are a regular part of our churches, attend much less regularly than they did a generation ago. When I was growing up, it was common for churches to have three different services in a given week. Now, it is most common for churches here in New England to have only one. But there is no use bemoaning the changes in our culture. We are not going back to the 19th century, or even the 1950s. So, we need to ask ourselves how are we going to take time for God in 2019?

Part of the answer to our need is to be motivated to prioritize our relationship with God, that has always been true. Yet part of what is needed today is wisdom about how to meet our spiritual needs in the culture 2019.

The good news is, that we have many options today that were not even dreamed about even when I went to college. For example, a week ago, Cory put his cell phone up on the balcony ledge, streamed our service live on Facebook and Mary McCorison watched it at home during here illness. This past Friday, I watched on my computer monitor a video recording of a message for pastors by Dr. John Maxwell that was given at The Gathering, the convocation of Wesleyan ministers in Florida, in January. This last week, I completed several devotionals on my You Version Bible app on my phone—some while waiting in the doctor’s office at the VA for a test. On another day recently, I listened to some inspirational Gospel music on the CD player in my car as I was traveling to an appointment. All these kinds of options did not exist 40 years ago. Perhaps you can get some ideas from them is to ways that you can enrich your life with God using contemporary means.

One idea is use double tasking-doing two things at once. For example, JoAnne exercises about four or five days a week on her treadmill. During that time, she also reads her Bible. A man in my previous church, who had to drive long distances, bought the New Testament on CDs and played them while he drove. So essentially, the Bible was read to him while he was driving.

The fact that we take our phone with us so much, means that we can complete devotional series on our You Version Bible app in between activities, while waiting at the dentist office, while waiting for a child’s activity to finish, even while waiting in a long checkout line.

**What’s the key? It is to not allow the busyness of the 21st century to squeeze our time with God out; it’s too important.**

# Problem 2: We run on empty.

A second problem, and one that is getting worse in our contemporary world, is that we expect our bodies and minds to work like the famous Energizer bunny. You know- the one who “just keeps going and going and going.” No matter what the stresses or problems, no matter how little steep, we try to just keep going. When we approach life like this, one or more of several undesirable things usually happens.

1. At some point, we just stop going - like a car out of gas. This stopping might take the form of a physical illness, or even an emotional breakdown. Sometimes it happens by bailing out of our lifestyle altogether such as when an executive runs off with a secretary and starts works at a fraction of his former income. I remember a severe case where I received a call from a local Doctor to come and be a part of advising a patient who had reached this point. She was in the treatment room just literally curled in the corner on the floor. She was on empty.

2. A less severe but still not helpful thing that can happen is this. We slow down involuntarily. Maybe our mind tries to get the break we need by daydreaming repeatedly, we find it hard to concentrate. Maybe our body moves at a slower pace, work becomes drudgery, creativity plummets and joy is gone. We’re still showing up at work most of the time, but our attitude isn’t the best and we are aware that we’re not performing as well as before. It might be that our tank is on empty.

# Rx 2: Value rest, recovery and exercise.

Our message today is focusing on how we wisely shepherd our time. When we are running on empty, it often is affecting us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

One of the most common reasons is that we have not prioritized some of the simplest practices for a healthy life.

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians–

 “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” Eph. 3:16 NIV

–requires both time with God and a practice of Sabbath rest for its realization. But in today’s world where our phones and home computers have greatly blurred the line between home and work, between when we are on the clock and when we are not; Sabbath rest is increasingly elusive. In addition, since blue laws were largely eliminated in the 1990s and sports events both youth and professional are increasingly on Sunday, the idea of Sabbath is more and more remote.

But might it be that the lack of a Sabbath is one of the key reasons why we as a culture find ourselves more and more running on empty? I think so!

## The rest we need

Ron Hutchcraft has a great line in his helpful book,

"A Sabbath day of rest is built into creation. It cannot be cheated against."
Peaceful Living in a Stressful World, p. 55

It was a command given to the Israelites, the principle started with the creation story itself.

"Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest." Ex. 34:21

Notice that God explicitly included in this command that the busiest times of the year for farmers, planting seasons and harvest times were not to be exceptions. Usually our excuse for breaking Sabbath is - this is my busiest time. But that's actually when you need Sabbath the worst!

There are three kinds of rest we need

1. Daily rest - we need our sleep.

joke -- "Most of us object strongly to the speed of light - it arrives too early in the morning." This is probably because we watched too much television or played computer games, or were on social media, too late last night. I love that my iPhone has a built-in app to help me get enough sleep. If I don’t turn it off, it actually reminds me an hour before bedtime, so I start thinking about going to bed on time. Doctors are saying that 8 hours sleep is needed to ward off dementia. Psychologists often tell mildly depressed people as a first step to go home and get 10 extra hours sleep in the next week.

2. weekly rest – The Sabbath principle was established in the creation story where we read that God himself rested on the seventh day. Today, as Christians, our Sabbath is usually Sunday, in honor of Jesus’ resurrection. But people who work on Sunday’s may need to have another Day as their rest day. My day-off, my rest day, is Monday.

3. Extended rest times are the kind provided by annual vacations. In the O.T. times, feast days served this purpose. The community took time off from work for the feast days.

## The Exercise we need

In addition to rest times, in our modern western world where sedentary lives have become normal, we have learned that we need exercise. It is not optional. In history, humans walked everywhere, and in most places of the world they still do. But we ride. Our work usually involves sitting, though a few people now are experimenting with stand-up work stations. I saw one this past week.

Most of us have been made aware by doctors of the need for exercise for our health’s sake. But many people do not realize that exercise is also essential for emotional and mental health. I do not understand the physiology of it, but I know from my reading and counseling experience and from my personal life that exercise is beneficial to mood, clarifies our mind, and helps us to think more creatively. We simply cannot do what Paul is encouraging us to do, that is take advantage of our opportunities as human beings, unless we also exercise our bodies. Talk about preaching to myself! I don’t want to labor this point, only to emphasize that it goes with taking advantage of the opportunities to pursue our overall wholeness–mental, physical and spiritual. As I always say, “Holiness and wholeness go together.”