

“Don’t Waste Your Life”
Ephesians 5:15-17

Have you noticed what a throw away society we’ve become? It’s not just that our landfills are overflowing with garbage, but rather what they are overflowing with. If we don’t like something anymore, we throw it away. If something breaks we don’t fix it, we throw it away. Sadly, the same is true in life. If we don’t like how a relationship is going, we throw it away. Divorces are at an all time high. If we don’t like how our life is going, we throw it away. Drug and alcohol use and abuse is at an all-time high. The suicide rate continues to climb.

No doubt you’ve seen the altar area. You may think it disrespectful, dishonoring, and inappropriate. The altar of God should be clean, reflective of God’s creative and holy nature, and an honor to God. You’re right. But, it does reflect the altar of our hearts though; doesn’t it? So, isn’t it even more disrespectful to God is when we trash the altar of our heart.

If we are living our lives without accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, without receiving the gift of salvation and restoration of our relationship with God, then ultimately our lives are trashed. No matter how our earthly lives seem to be going, if we have not received God’s love gift, our spiritual lives will remain in that place of darkness and decay. I urge you to consider receiving that gift of love today.

Most, if not all, here would say that you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but if we are not living the life that God has given us, then our lives may still be in disarray and chaos. The wonderful blessing is that when we make Jesus our Savior and give our lives to God, then we’ve given the Holy Spirit the right to clean us up. Boy does he have a job to do, especially when we keep trashing our heart and wasting our life.

Our text reminds us: “*Be very careful how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity.*” Take note of the word *careful*, because the opposite of careful is

careless. When we live carelessly not paying attention to what God wants us to do, our life becomes messy and chaotic. Instead, we should “*understand what the Lord’s will is.*” How many of you here would say you know what you are going to do with the rest of your life? How many have a sense of what God wants you to do with your life? Are your plans and God’s purposes the same? Or maybe the accurate question is, Why Am I Here?

You’re in luck! We’re about to embark on a spiritual journey. No, we will not discern whom you should marry, what job you should apply for, or how to best use your retirement fund. But we are going to discover that God has a purpose for us! And when we live in God’s purpose for us we find that our earth-focused intents are often used to achieve God’s purposes for us.

To prepare for that journey, let’s think about the three basic questions in life that really matter: What does God want from me? What does it take? and Why should I do it?

What does God want from me? In a nutshell: my whole life. God wants all of it. “*Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.*” (Rm.6:13). No where in the Bible does it say you can be a Christian and do whatever you want with your life. Sometimes we act like our life is like a pie that we slice into different parts. We’ve got our social life, our work life, our retirement life, our family life, and then there’s a small slice for our spiritual life. God’s a piece of the pie. No, God says, “I want your whole life, all of it.”

This is the issue: What’s going to be number one in your life: a successful career, to raise your family, to maintain your health? Where are you saying “Me first” to God? When you say, “Lord, I’ll live for you but let me first finish my schooling, or raise my family, or achieve financial independence, or build my career...” When you say “Me first,” God’s not number one in your life; you are!

Solomon instructs us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will direct your paths (Pr.3:5-6). Jesus tells us, “*Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (Mt.6:33). God does not bless what he’s not number one in. But he blesses in amazing ways when we put God first.

What does God want? He wants my whole life.

What does it take? Discipline. Paul instructs, “*Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, [discipline] yourself to be godly*” (1Tm.4:17). Now the word “discipline” means different things to different people. Some of us don’t really like the word. But discipline is really delayed gratification: doing the thing I don’t want to do or don’t feel like doing now to gain the benefit that comes to life later. Spiritual discipline is the letting go of things that are not so important so we can do the things that are very important.

The writer of Hebrews counsels, “*Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress*” (12:1). The reference is to someone that is preparing for an athletic event. Similarly, we are to be constantly ready to accomplish the purposes of God for us.

Notice there are two things that can hold us back spiritually, that can keep us from doing what God intends for us - things that can trash our life: sins and weights. We all know what sins are. That’s when God tells you to do something and you don’t; or, God tells you not to do something and you do anyway. Weights can be good things but they can hold you back from the best. A weight can be a relationship, a job, an activity, an expectation; it can even be a fear, a memory of your past, or a club you belong to. In life there are some things that are not necessarily wrong. They’re just not necessary at the time. To grow you have to say no, not now.

To be ready to participate in God's purposes for our life we likely need to add some things to our schedule; which means we may have to say no to some good things to make time for that which is best. This is what we need to be prepared:

1. A daily devotional reading - at least 15 minutes a day – reading through a portion of the Bible, listening for God's instruction. Perhaps accompany the reading of the Bible with a devotional written to give meaning or insight.
2. An hour and a half a week in a small group (Sunday school, Small group, 4th day, or I am willing to help set up another) where you can discuss God's instructions and hold one another accountable.
3. Participation in a ministry or mission in our church and community.

You need to decide right now what you're not going to do in order to have time to have time to learn what God's purposes are for your life. I know, your schedules are already loaded and you're not sure you can make time. Paul reminds us, "*God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*" (Ph.2:13). God will give you the desire and willpower to do what is best, what is his purpose for you. Are you willing to put God first?

Why should I do it? There are many benefits which we could spend hours on. There are benefits for both now in this life and for eternity. But even if there were no benefits you should give your whole life to God for one reason: the cross. Jesus gave himself completely for you and he wants you to give your life completely in return. If God never did another thing for you, you still owe him your entire life just because of the cross. Without the cross you would be hopeless, damned, and without a future. Because of the cross you have freedom, hope, security and an eternal destiny, all because of what Jesus did for you on the cross.

Why does God want us to live for Him and not ourselves? Because God knows that living for ourselves is an empty, meaningless, and fruitless life. We were made to live in connection with God. That's why Jesus came to save us; he gave his life for us so he could give life to us. "*[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again*" (2 Cor.5:15).

And that's why our personal response should be to live for God whenever we think of the cross. Paul begs, "*As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain*" (2 Cor.6:1). It cost Jesus to die for you. And it's going to cost you to live for Him. You have to give God your whole life. You cannot be a part-time Christian. Don't miss out on the real reason you are here. God has something special in store for us all.

Prayer beginning: "*Lord I have heard the news about you; I am amazed at what you have done. Lord, do great things once again in our time; make those things happen again in our own days*" (Hab.3:2).