

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

February 12, 2017

Building Faith at Home Series - Stretched Thin: A Series on Time and Money

Jeff Harrison

Making the Most of Our Time

Luke 10, Ephesians 5-6

Introduction:

A. Refreshing our current series

Good morning friends. I'm excited for us to continue our series on time and money. So many homes feel *Stretched Thin* in these areas of life, so we're looking to God's Word for help, inviting God to lead us in using our time and money in His life-giving ways.

Now in our busy culture, it is not easy to rest well. So last Sunday we looked to Jesus for guidance. We saw that Jesus modeled and taught that physical and spiritual rest are essential. Then we considered some practical ways to simplify our lives to receive more of God's gift of rest. And finally, we saw how Jesus' death on the cross provides the deep soul rest we need. So if you weren't here last Sunday and you're weary physically, emotionally, or spiritually, I invite you to go on the church website, nwchurch.org, and listen to that message.

B. How do we make the most of our time (Eph 5:15-17)

Today, as we continue with the theme of time, we'll consider a vital question from the Bible book of Ephesians. So if you've got a Bible, I invite you to turn to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5. As you're turning, let me share a quote from Christian pastor and author John Piper. Now I'd like to say I found this quote while prayerfully reading a deep book on God, but actually, I found it on Facebook. And ironically, I found it as I worked on last week's sermon, the one in which I encouraged us to consider if too much screen time was keeping us from needed rest. But regardless of source, the quote orients us well to our subject this morning. The quote? "I am astonished at people who say they believe in God but live as if happiness is found by giving him 2% of their attention."¹

Now please follow along as I read Ephesians chapter 5, starting in verse 15, where the author Paul instructs churches, "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."

¹ Came across quote in February 2017 on *The Gospel Coalition's* Facebook feed.

Look back at verse 15 with me. Here God's Word calls us to "look carefully", to pay close attention to how we invest our time. For it is easy to be unwise with it. To make foolish choices that harm ourselves and those we love. Or to just get so busy keeping so many balls in the air that we don't even see the important things slipping away.

We don't want to be among the foolish, squandering our precious life, God only getting 2%. We want to be wise, as verse 17 says it, those who understand what the will of the Lord is. Do we understand it? We want to be the kind of church that takes full advantage of our God given opportunities to live lives of lasting meaning. So this morning we're going to answer the question, how do we make the most of our time? And we're helpless to do this on our own, so let's pray now and ask God for help.

I. Forsake evil (Eph 5:18a)

A. Brief explanation of Ephesians

Now to better understand what God is saying about making the most of our time here in Ephesians 5, we need to summarize the book. Ephesians was a letter written by the apostle Paul to some early Christian churches a few decades after Jesus rose from the dead. Chapters 1-3 share that all who believe in Jesus are united as one body, the church. And we the church enjoy incredible blessings in Jesus, now and forever. Then starting in chapter 4, the author Paul explains how the church is to walk in light of God's blessing and purpose in our lives. As Christian brothers and sisters we are to walk in love for each other, seek unity with each other, use our gifts to build each other up in maturity in Jesus, live moral lives, and now, as verse 15-17 have shown, walk wisely by making the most of our time.

B. Evil displeases God, enslaves us, and wastes time

As this subject of making the most of our time continues in verse 18, the first thing to highlight is that we must forsake evil. Please follow along with me as I read verse 18, which says, ¹⁸ "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Earlier in chapter 5 Paul instructs the church against other forms of evil, things like sexual immorality, impurity, coveting, ungodly speech, and idolatry. And we must forsake them all. In verse 18 we are specifically instructed to not get to drunk, which is described as "debauchery."

Now "debauchery" is not part of my regular vocabulary, so I looked up the term in Greek, the language Ephesians was originally written in. As you would expect, the term includes

the idea of reckless, sinful living. And interestingly, it also includes the idea of wastefulness, which makes sense.² For whenever we give our time to sin, we waste it. And once that time is squandered, we can never get it back.

Now I think Paul chose the sin of drunkenness here in verse 18 because it is easy to see how it can destroy and enslave and waste our precious time. So if you're struggling with substance abuse, seek help today, before it destroys any further.

And that destructive nature is present in all sin. We must forsake it all, even the sins that don't seem like a big deal at first. One sin I sometimes minimize that Paul mentioned earlier in Ephesians 5 is idolatry. Now idolatry is when we put something in God's place, making something besides God the most important thing in our life. It could be a bad thing, like abusing alcohol, or a good thing, like a loving family.

C. A personal example of how sin enslaves and wastes

One idol for me is that I sometimes care more about how other people are viewing me than about God's loving acceptance of me; I'm looking to how other people view me rather than how God views me to determine my worth. It may not sound like that big of a deal, but it too can enslave.

To give an example, in my first semester at seminary, as I prepared to become a pastor, I took a World Missions class. The class was great, but had one source of frustration. There were a ton of assignments, and honestly, I felt like some were busy work. And as a first semester student, clearly I was the person most qualified to make this determination ☺

Nevertheless, one assignment first semester Jeff deemed "worthy" was that each class period, one student shared about an overseas mission trip. I'd been on a few mission trips and could have shared. However, I might have allowed my attitude to be affected just a bit by those other assignments I thought were busy work. And so, as the mission presentation signup sheet was passed, I looked around and realized there were more students than days to present. So when the signup made it to me, I immediately passed it on to the next student.

Later in the semester, a student shares about his mission trip to Japan. I didn't know him well, but thought he did a good job and wanted to encourage him. So after class I shared about

² ἄσωτία entry in *BDAG*.

how I enjoyed his presentation, which he seemed to really appreciate. And as we're talking, he asks me about what mission trip I'm going to present.

So what do you think this assignment skipper who cared too much about the opinion of others said? Without a pause, as I sat in class studying to be a pastor, in a conversation about missions, while wanting to encourage this brother, who I didn't know that well and wasn't trying to become good friends with, I lied to face. I told him the signup sheet was full when it reached me. Now there was no couple of seconds of internal turmoil deciding whether to lie. No, the lie was instantaneous, a reflex built on the sinful habit of concerning myself more with what others thought of me than what God did.

Now some might be thinking, "That's really messed up, pastor" and others might be thinking, "Doesn't sound like that big a deal to me. It was just a little white lie, give yourself a break." But where do you think a life that idolizes the approval of others will lead? Perhaps a gnawing anxiety as you worry what others think; a constant pressure to perform at school or work that leads to compromises; a feeling of despair when people don't accept you, and even when they accept you, wondering if they'd accept you if you weren't performing so much, and an unhealthy need to protect yourself that is so strong, that even when you're trying to encourage a brother, you can't help but lie to his face.

A self-protection that will hurt the honesty and health of every relationship and lead to you sinning against others since the relationship is about managing your image and getting others to give you what you need. Sin, whether obvious like drunkenness, or subtle, like idolatry, it's all destructive and enslaving. Every minute in sin is time wasted, time we can never get back. None of us want our time stolen by sin, so we must forsake evil.

II. Enjoy God's fullness together (Eph 5:18-6:4; Luke 10:38-42)

A. Help each other praise God

Now it's not easy to stop a pattern of sin, which is why Ephesians says making the most of our time requires enjoying God's fullness together. Please follow along with me as I read, starting in verse 18, where God's Word instructs us, "¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

As verse 18 says, we are to be filled by God's Spirit. That's the main idea here; as too much wine is a constant influence on the drunk person, so God's Spirit is to consistently influence us. Then what follows in verses 19-21, the addressing, singing, giving thanks, submitting are evidences that we're influenced by God's Spirit and choices we can make to invite God's Spirit to influence us.

Look back at verses 19 and 20. Notice they're about helping each other to praise God. As we come together on Sunday mornings, we have the amazing opportunity to help each other know God, sharing spiritual truth with each other, singing praises to God together, praying with thanksgiving, and on and on.

And we can only enjoy the fullness of this if everyone is engaged in helping us praise God. Some months ago, I heard the president of Barna Group, the Christian research company, share his great concern about their most recent polling data on church attendance. After removing from the data those who only attend church a few times a year, like those who just come at Christmas and Easter for example, they found that on average the engaged people are only attending church 20 weeks a year, less than 2 times a month.³

Now I realize I'm talking to the people at church, not those who aren't. And I don't have specific stats for our church, but many attend sporadically. Now if you're just checking this church thing out and aren't a believer, I'm so glad you're here, you're so welcome however often you want to come. But if you're a Jesus follower, you should know that at Northwest we're here to pursue life changing, discipleship relationships with God, each other, and our world. And we can't fully live out that mission if many of us come less than half the time, it's just not enough points of contact to really experience the blessings of enjoying God's fullness together.

Just like in a small group or on a sports team, if less than half the group shows up for a meeting, practice, or game, it affects things. It's the same here on Sunday morning. We need you engaged as much as you can. If you're not, we're missing out, and you're missing out on God's fullness.

And if you're not sure where to start in getting more engaged, I invite you to talk with Pam Jenness about serving in our Children's Ministry. Investing in the next generation on Sunday mornings is a great way to make the most of your time. For you would share in the

³ Average is 1.7 per month. From interview of David Kinnaman on the Carey Nieuwhof podcast. Kinnaman noted this is not enough points of contact to create a countercultural way of life and confront the idols of our age.

inheritance of what God is doing in the lives of these kids. Kids that Jesus loves so much that He says that when you welcome a child in His name, you welcome Jesus Himself. And it's an area of need as well for our church family, we need more substitute teachers and teaching assistants.

And if you are among those already engaged in helping us to experience some of God's fullness on Sunday mornings, thank you so much. Your service is profoundly encouraging, and it is needed, so please keep it up, and may your tribe increase.

For imagine what God might do among us as more get engaged in helping each other praise God on Sundays. All these people with God's Spirit present, and we're sharing spiritual truth with each other, singing praises to God together, praying with thanksgiving; enjoying God's fullness together, and its propelling us outward in mission, wanting others to experience what we have in Jesus. Living lives of relational intimacy and impact, lives that make the most of our time.

B. Submissive relationships

Look back at verse 21 with me, where we see that one way we experience God's fullness is by submitting to one another. To enjoy God's fullness we need everyone engaged on Sundays, but it can't stop there. Life changing relationships will extend beyond Sunday, relationships where we consider each other more important than ourselves.

Now we live in an individualistic culture where some say that the best life is one lived exactly as you want without others inconveniencing or challenging you. So you might not think that spiritual friendships are that important, preferring to live your life just how you want to live it without the discipline of belonging to a discipleship community.

If that's where you're at this morning, look back at verses 19-21, and consider how your spiritual life compares to the fullness there. To give just one example, verse 20 calls us to a state of thankfulness so great we give thanks to God always and for everything.

As theologian and author J.I. Packer says it, "We must learn to measure ourselves, not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts. Many of us, I suspect, have no idea how impoverished we are at this level. Let us ask the Lord to show us."⁴

Brothers and sisters, we need discipleship relationships to enjoy God's fullness. At times it'll be hard, you won't have great chemistry with everyone, and sometimes someone else's need

⁴ Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*, 32.

for you will come at a very inconvenient time, and sometimes you'll hurt someone, or they'll hurt you. It's hard, but God can use those disappointments and challenges to help grow you into a more loving, powerful person.

And God wants us to enjoy the blessings that come with life changing relationships. That as we're reading His Word together, praying for each other's needs, joining hands in serving God inside and outside the walls of this building, encouraging each other to keep going when we're down, worshipping together, confessing our sins to one another and seeking help, celebrating the blessings in our lives, caring for each other in times of crisis.

And when we feel guilty because we're not living up to these things, our brothers and sisters can remind us that Jesus took the penalty for all our sins on the cross. And so when God looks down on us, He doesn't see our sin and failures, He sees Jesus' perfect righteousness. But sometimes we lose sight of this, we need someone to encourage us that every day is a new chance to enjoy God's forgiveness and make the most of our time. We need each other, it's why we invite everyone to get engaged in a care group, or Adult Bible Fellowship, or women's Bible study, or age specific small group.

I loved hearing Ken and Denise share this morning. I've been blessed enormously by the Cases over the past few years as we've been in a care group and served in Children's Ministry and done a few outreaches together. Enriched by their hunger to know and serve God, by their insights as we've studied God's Word together, by the faith filled prayers they've prayed for me, by their fun personalities, by their differing backgrounds and perspectives, and so much more. If I wasn't engaged in our care group, or Children's Ministry, I would have missed out on becoming good friends with the Cases, I would have robbed myself.

And it works the other way too. The Cases have three young kids and enough going on that they could have easily filled all their time with other good things. Like working extra hours to advance in their careers, kids' practices, games, recitals, and birthday parties, weekend trips to Austin, half marathons, house remodeling, out of town trips to visit family, hobbies, homework, and family days, that they decided they were just too busy to worship much on Sunday mornings, or serve in Children's Ministry, or be in a care group.

And if the Cases had chosen that path, filling their time with so much good that they lost sight of the best, I would have lost out too; missing out on how God has grown my relationship with Him through my relationship with the Cases, my kids would have missed out on the Cases

greeting them here in a way that makes them feel loved and teaching them to worship God in Sunday School. Brothers and sisters, let's not rob each other of what God wants to do among us by filling our time with too many other things. It is so easy to get distracted by less important things, even as a pastor, to forget that fullness of life can't be found when giving God only 2% of our attention.

C. Build faith at home

And this temptation towards distraction can also cause us to miss out on God's fullness in our homes. As we continue in Ephesians, Paul talks about our home relationships from verse 22 all the way through chapter 6, verse 4. It's because God designed the home as an important place of spiritual growth. It's why we do a Building Faith at Home sermon series each February, selecting topics relevant to our homes. For we want all our homes to be healthy, loving Jesus-centered homes where faith is nurtured.

Now last February I gave three messages on how homes with singles, homes with marriages, and homes with kids can build faith. So if you'd like more detail, listen to those sermons on the church website.

For this morning we'll just note that in this passage on home relationships, spiritual growth is prioritized. For example, verses 25 through 28 show that spouses are to care deeply about each other's spiritual growth, and chapter 6 verse 4 calls parents to bring up their kids not just in any old discipline and instruction, but in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Now each of our homes has a different set of circumstances and challenges and gifts and responsibilities, so building faith at home won't look the same. And some of us are in homes where not everyone is interested in building faith, and that's tough. And even if everyone in your home wants to see faith built, it'll still be difficult at times. There's no guarantees your walk with God will spur others in your home to greater faith. But you can't pass on what you don't possess, so you've got to walk with God to spiritually encourage your home. And it's so important to do your best to guard space in your schedule so your home can engage in the church's community and mission.

And kids and teens, you can already start impacting your home as you walk with God. If you believe in Jesus, you've got the same Holy Spirit at work in your lives, there's no smaller kids sized Holy Spirit. You can make a difference at home, in the church, and in the world now. Please don't make the mistake of wasting your youth pursuing things that won't last, make the

most of your time now, get in a rhythm of godly habits that will bless you for a lifetime. For your time will fly by.

And parents, nearly all of you here with older kids have told me at some point how fast they'll grow up. How they'll start off holding you tightly, and you'll hold them too. And then they'll get a little older and start wandering off a bit, but they'll always come back and listen to pretty much everything you say. And then at some point they'll start teasing you and letting go of you at times, as you're trying to feel your way through when to give guidance and when to let them learn from their mistakes and when to hold on and when to let go. And then one day, most of them will leave your home, forever. In the meantime, how will you build faith at home?

D. A word for the busy

Now as we've talked this morning about making the most of our time, if you're not sure where to start, consider a story from the gospel of Luke, chapter 10. If you've got a Bible you can turn there. Luke is one of the books in the Bible about Jesus' life on earth, and in chapter 10 there's a story about Jesus visiting Mary and Martha. Mary is listening to Jesus' teaching, while Martha is distracted with much serving. So eventually Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." And Jesus said, "Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Look at verse 42 with me. There Jesus reminds Martha that one thing is necessary, knowing God is our good portion. So if you want to make the most of your time, start by taking time each day to get to know God better, enjoying His fullness. Read the Bible on your own and pray, or get together with a friend or small group or your home for spiritual conversation and prayer, on Sundays engage here at church.

Every day make the choice to get to know God. It's your good portion, there's no better way to spend your time. And as you make that daily choice, God can grow you from there in making the most of your time, it's an ongoing process for all of us.

Last Sunday we talked about a helpful book entitled *Crazy Busy*. In it pastor and author Kevin DeYoung describes what might change if our one non-negotiable was to get to know God every day, saying, "You'd probably decide you need to get to bed earlier so you have time in the morning to read and pray (or so that you don't fall asleep later in the day). And because you want to get to bed earlier, you'll be more careful about what you eat late at night. And you

would think twice before watching a show you had no intention of watching or rummaging around the internet for thirty minutes for nothing in particular. And maybe you'd feel less stressed about leaving the house a little bit disheveled because you knew you were choosing the better part by sitting at the feet of Jesus. And maybe you'd allow yourself to ignore those after work emails, or simply put the screens away altogether. Who knows how many little distractions you might set aside in an effort to be more Mary than Martha."⁵

Conclusion:

A. Make the most of our time by forsaking evil and enjoying God's fullness together

This morning we've seen that we make the most of our time by forsaking evil and enjoying God's fullness together, on Sunday mornings, throughout the week, and at home.

B. Please don't make a tragic trade

As I've been thinking this week about making the most of our time, the tragic story of Judas has come to mind. Judas, one of Jesus' followers, betrays Him for 30 pieces of silver. Then later Judas returns the money, seized with remorse. Can you imagine the level of regret Judas felt, as he realizes he traded Jesus for 30 pieces of silver? The regret is so great that he kills himself.

If you're not sure about this Jesus thing, please don't keep yourself from coming to Jesus because you don't want Him telling you to stop sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, please don't get so focused on climbing the corporate ladder that you fail to prioritize taking time to explore whether Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead.

For if you do, when you breathe your last, you'll feel an overwhelming remorse as you realize what a tragic trade you've made. Before that day, before it's too late, put it aside. As Jesus said, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

And for those of us who already know Jesus, our salvation is not at stake when we waste time. But as the Bible book of 1 Corinthians tells us, we will stand before Jesus, and our works will be reviewed. And some will see that their time was wasted, as its burned up to nothing. And as one of your pastors, I don't want any of us to be seized with remorse as we see that we've allowed a porn addiction, or overcommitted schedules, or substance abuse, or careerism, or way

⁵ DeYoung, Kevin, *Crazy Busy*, 115-16.

too much screen time, or worrying too much about what others think, to have led to a wasted life. Don't make that tragic trade.

I don't want you to see on that day that, had you made more of your time, you would have enjoyed a far deeper intimacy with God and His people, that there were people God wanted you lead to Christ, that there were ways God wanted you to help develop your children's faith, that God wanted to gift you with a powerfully loving life that created an enormous ripple effect in those around you that changed things for eternity. Rather, on that day, may we be among those who receive enormous praise and reward from our gracious God for the ways we invested our time.

Whatever has happened to this point, Jesus has taken the penalty for your sins, and this week is a new week to make the most of our time.

Most of us forget most of the details of a sermon pretty quickly. So if God's at work now, act on it today. If it's time to join a small group, come talk with me about it now. If it is time to serve kids, talk with Pam about Children's Ministry before you leave today. Tell your spouse now if you need to make some changes to your schedule to leave time for more of God's fullness. Confess your pattern of sin to someone and start seeking help, before it's too late.

Let's pray...

Dismissal – Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.