

Faithful Stewardship of Our Time (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Well, I'm going to imagine that most of us in this room are going to gather together with our families for a Thanksgiving dinner sometime on Thursday.

If you're like me, you've been doing it all your life. But have you really thought about how those family gatherings have changed over the years?

We, in my family, we've lost some family members to death and divorce. But we've gained family members through marriages and births.

There was a day when I was one of the younger ones to gather at the table. But today, I know I don't look it, but I'm one of the older ones that's going to get together on Thursday.

Many of you have the same, have had the same experience. You've had the same kind of changes at your family Thanksgiving table.

[1 : 04] One way to describe all of this is time has passed. You know, as time passes, change happens.

Nothing stays the same because time never stops. Now, if you don't like change, the only way you can avoid it is to die.

Because every moment of every day, time is passing and life is changing. Now, time does pass at the same rate for everyone.

Although, the older we get, the more we say, time just flies. It seems like only yesterday. It was Thanksgiving last year. Well, it seems that way, but regardless of our age or situation, there's 24 hours in everyone's day, isn't there?

There are seven days in everyone's week. And there are 52 weeks in everyone's year. Time may really be the only thing in life that we all have the same exact amount of in terms of the hours of our day.

[2 : 16] That's what we're going to look at today. How we use our time. Or more precisely, how we steward or manage our time. What we're going to look at and be thinking about is we manage our time differently.

Even though we have the same amount, we manage it. We use it very differently. Now, we're involved in an actual series on stewardship.

We're looking at how God has entrusted to our care time, talents, treasures.

And He intends for us to wisely use it, manage it in a way that will please Him. In a way that will enable us to do His will for our lives.

We've already looked at our stewardship of money. And then we've also looked at the first of two studies on our stewardship of time.

[3 : 19] We interrupted the series last week. But two weeks ago, we looked at how we are managing our time in terms of the season of our life. I put it up on the screen how we can think of our lives in terms of the four quarters of a football game.

Some people, right now, you're in the first quarter of life. Some are in the second quarter. Some are in the third. Some are in the fourth. And there's some people in this room, you are in overtime in terms of the number of years that we live on this earth.

Well, today I want us to think about how we're using our time chronologically in terms of hours, our days, our weeks. We're going to begin looking at Ephesians chapter 5, two verses, verses 15 and 16.

I want you to look with me. I'm going to put it on the screen. Paul is writing to Christians. He has been describing the importance of growing as a Christian, developing Christ-like character, putting off some of the old sinful habits that we had, putting on new God-honoring character traits.

Here's what he says. Look carefully, then, how you walk. Or how you live. Not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

[4 : 51] He's talking about Christians living in a sinful world. That's what he's basically talking about in general there. The days being evil. We live in a world that is anything but the way God designed it to be.

And we need to be careful how we live and make the best of what God has given us in terms of our time as we live in this evil age.

I want us to emphasize, or I want to emphasize, two things about our stewardship of time from these verses. First, we need wisdom to make the best use of our time.

We all need God-given wisdom to make the best use of our time. Wisdom, it says in verse 15, requires that we live carefully.

He says, look carefully, then, how you walk. The NIV says, be very careful, then, how you live. The word carefully means to be accurate. To be precise.

[5 : 47] God wants us to pay attention to how we live. To how we use our time. How we manage the days that God gives us.

God wants us to be wise and seek to live our lives in a way that clearly says we belong to Him. That we're His children.

And we have a resemblance to our Heavenly Father. That's really what Paul's been writing about from chapter 4, verse 17 to this point.

That word, then, look carefully, then, in light of what he's been saying. He's talked about living an intentional Christian life.

Developing Christian character. Learning to control your tongue. Learning to be sexually pure.

Learning to love one another. Learning to forgive one another.

[6 : 46] Things of this nature. A good summary of what he's been talking about. We can put it together in verses 8 through 10. Look. He says, walk or live 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. The only way that we can live a life that truly pleases God is to conduct ourselves in a way.

Look on the screen there. In a way that is good. That's right. That is true. Ways that God would consider are good, right, and true.

Now, what I want us to understand is we're not called to live as Christians by just doing the best we can. The Christian life is not about just trying your hardest not to do bad things but to do good things.

Not to do what's wrong but to do what's right. Certainly we have a responsibility. But the Christian life is not a do the best you can life. When we become Christians, when God does a work to change us, to save us, he puts his spirit in us.

[8 : 07] If you're a Christian, the Holy Spirit lives within you. And he is the one who gives us the desire to please God. To do what is good and right and true.

And he is the one who will enable us to actually do it. Speak the right kind of words. Close our mouth and not say the wrong kind.

Treat one another the way we would want to be treated. The golden rule. Rather than treating people the way that they treat us. The spirit of God lives within us.

And if we will be sensitive to his presence, he will convict us about what is wrong. What is false.

Not to go there. Not to be that. Not to say those kind of words. But he's the one who will prompt us to do what is right. What is good. What is true.

[9 : 08] And we have a responsibility. Not just to be sensitive to his presence but obedient to his leadership. What I want us to see at the outset is Paul is saying more than just use your time wisely.

He is telling us to make sure you please God by living like a Christian. And then use your time wisely. Now, if we really want to use our time wisely, we've got to think of practical how-to ways to do that.

So here's the second point. Wisdom requires that we find practical ways to make the best use of our time. You can find some good how-to books, pamphlets, so forth, how to better manage your time.

Some Christians have, you know, written some good things that will help us better manage our time in a way that will please God. I put on the front page of this week's newsletter, the bulletin you have

in your hands, a little article by R.C. Sproul that I think can be helpful.

I hope you'll read it. Think about what he's saying about better managing your time. But I want to call attention to the first thing he says that will help us to get serious about the way we manage our time.

[10 : 31] Look at it. It'll be on the screen. First, Sproul says, I realize that all of my time is God's time, and all of my time is my time by his delegation.

God owns me and my time, yet he has given me a measure of time over which I am a steward, a manager, and for which I must give an account.

Now, when you leave here today, the rest of this day and this week, you're most likely going to follow your regular routine.

You're going to go to work. You're going to go to school. You're going to do these things that you do after school, at night, all these kind of things. You're going to follow your routine. Well, as you go through your routine this week, think about, in light of what Sproul is saying here, think about, am I really managing my time with the understanding that God has given it to me?

God has entrusted me with my life, my time, and this season of life, and am I managing it in a way that I'm going to be ready to stand before him on judgment day and explain to him what kind of manager I was?

[11 : 57] As you go through your routine this week, evaluate how you spend your time. And it may be, if you'll do that, you may even make some serious changes in your routine.

Because some of the things you may do every day or every week may be a total waste of time. May be involved in something that truly dishonors God because it is anything but right and good and true.

Another Christian leader, Eric Raymond, he offers us some, what I think is some very good, wise counsel to help us manage our time.

I read an article by him and he started off talking about how he has a real problem wisely managing his time. He talks about being easily distracted.

He talks about how just the least little thing gets his attention, takes him off track. One of the things he said that really distracted him was social media.

[13 : 09] But that wasn't the only thing. That wasn't his major emphasis even. But he said one of the things he has found helpful to help him to stay on task more is what he calls patrol your borders.

Other people write about this and talk about establishing boundaries. Listen to what he says. I'm going to put it on the screen. It's rather lengthy, but I've chopped it up. I want you to look at what he says. The problem, as I see it, is a life that does not have either well-defined or properly enforced boundaries.

However you may feel about illegal immigration, we need to properly secure the border of our life and responsibilities.

To do this, we need to identify what we are supposed to do and then do it. It sounds so simple, doesn't it? Well, why don't we do it?

I think it's because we are often lazy, undisciplined, and lack the priorities in the moment to govern us. It takes discipline to apprehend the impulse to check email or social media.

[14 : 25] When it is jumping over the wall into your family time. We're the ones who have to say, no, this is not the time. Nobody is going to protect our family time, rest, or specific work tasks for us.

A tool for me in this process was to do an in-depth diagnostic of my schedule. When you go through this process and see what you have to do, and when you have to do it, you become less likely to have porous borders.

He says, I can have a few hours per day with my kids. He said, I only have a few hours per day with my kids. Why would I be checking my email or allowing other mental intrusions?

Each week on the first day of the week, I spend about an hour looking at projects, tasks, and schedule. I try to reasonably plan for the week in order to get the most important things done.

Over time, I've learned that a major tool to help ensure that these things get done are clear and enforced borders. Do you have boundaries set up in your life?

[15 : 37] Do you have borders around certain blocks of time with your family? Do you have borders around when you are working and need to be focused and cannot, do not need to have distractions?

It may be that you need to ask God to give you the wisdom to find ways to focus.

Give the right people the right attention by helping you to set up the border. Set up the boundary. Say no to some people, to some new things. Keep in mind, like Sproul said, we are stewards. God has entrusted to us the time that we have in each season of life. And one day, keep in mind, we're going to give an account of how well we've managed what God's given us.

[16 : 51] Let's look at the second thing about the way we use our time. We need discipline to make the best use of our time. Or we need to learn to discipline ourselves to make the best use of our time.

That's really what verses 15 and 16 together are saying. He says, look then how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time.

You've got to, I've got to discipline ourselves. Wisdom requires it. Wisdom requires us, forces us. Discipline ourselves in order to wisely manage the time, the blocks of time for each thing in your life that you've got to do.

Or that you need to do. That's what Eric Raymond's talking about. Look at it one more time, this part. He says, to do this, we need to identify what we are supposed to do and then do it.

[17 : 58] It sounds so simple, does it? Well, why don't we do it? Look again. I think it's because we're often lazy. What he means lazy, he's not necessarily talking about somebody who just sits back and never does anything.

Some people are lazy. They work. They're active. But they have a hard time starting something. They have a hard time finishing something.

Some people are lazy. They're busy people. They're not just taking naps all the time. But they're busy doing things that are of little importance.

Way down on a priority list. I think it's because we're often lazy, undisciplined, and lack the priorities in the moment to govern ourselves.

You may have a great system mapped out. You may know all the right priorities and you say those are your priorities. But in the moment, when you're supposed to be giving your time and attention to your spouse, to your child, to your job, someone calls you, texts you.

[19 : 13] Something comes into your mind that will take you away. And you allow it. It takes discipline to apprehend the impulse to check email or social media when it is jumping over the wall into your family time or whatever time.

Another reason why it's so important to discipline ourselves is because we live in a world that is sort of like there's unlimited distractions.

The New Testament scholar Clinton Arnold describes it this way. Never before in history have so many potential distractions been offered to Christians. You think about how many distractions pop up throughout your day.

Most likely the number one distraction in most Americans' lives has something to do with a smartphone. People are addicted to their smartphone.

And some of you are saying, now he's going to jump on young people. No, I'm jumping on everybody of every age who's addicted to their smartphone. And I honestly, I know some people who are retired, one in particular in their 80s, who is absolutely addicted to the smartphones, social media, news, all this kind of stuff.

[20 : 44] I want to ask you, how many of your smartphone apps, do you have the notifications turned on? If I spent 15 minutes in a quiet place with you, just you and me, quiet, alone, in a 15 minute period of time, how many times would we be interrupted by a ding of some kind?

I've been around a lot of you and there's this quite often. I want you to listen.

I want you to think. Do you really need to know every time somebody adds a comment on Facebook? Do you really need to know every time somebody likes something stupid that you posted on your Facebook?

Do you really need to be interrupted by every breaking news story or update on Fox News?

What if you do get an update? What if you do get the breaking news? What in the world are you going to do about it? How does it affect your life, really?

[22 : 05] I want you to listen to this one closely. Did you really need to check your phone during this service?

You not only distracted yourself, but you distracted the people near you. And if the people near you don't have a phone and they don't normally do that, they like to shove it down your throat.

And I'm being serious. Now, I'm not in any way saying it's wrong to have a cell phone, smart phone.

I've got one. And I'll be honest with you. I probably need to delete my ESPN app. I'd be ashamed if it could be put on the screen how much time I spend on it, especially on Saturdays looking at football scores.

I've got my own smart phone demons. And if you've got a smart phone, you probably be too. Probably do too. I know that I do.

[23 : 11] Do you know that you do? And are you conscious of how much time it is taking away from things that truly matter, people who truly matter?

And are you aware of how much it is distracting you and keeping you from concentrating on your work, focusing on people who matter, people who want your eye contact, people who want you to listen, who want you to engage with them?

I hope and pray that Lisa outlives me. That's the most selfish thing that I pray is, I don't want to die first. But if the worst case scenario happened, and I was relatively young, which I am a real relatively young now, and I ever dated again, and I was with a woman at a table, and all she was doing was looking at that phone, I would say, excuse me, like I was going to the bathroom, and I would leave and go home.

And I would encourage you girls and guys who are single here, don't put up with such rudeness as to be with someone, but they're not with you.

Just tell them, if I'm so boring, let me just take you home now. Or if you're so boring, you take me home now. Do that kind of stuff, provided you don't have your face stuck in the phone yourself.

[24 : 58] We need to understand, time is precious. Time is passing. And we never get any of it back.

In many ways, time is more valuable than money. What use is money if you have no time to enjoy it?

An old Puritan writer, Richard Baxter, said this, place a high value upon your time. Be more careful of not losing it than you would of losing your money.

Be more careful to escape that person, action, or course of life that would rob you of your time than you would be to escape thieves and robbers.

There was no technology. He wrote that. Last thing in the world he was thinking about was something like a phone or TV or anything like that that distracts us today.

[25 : 57] Eric Redmond describes the value of time like this. Time is the quiet oxygen that allows us to breathe in the joys of life. We need it.

It's precious. Again, I want to remind us, the point of this passage in Ephesians is not that we just learn to manage our time better.

It's important to manage your time better, but that's really not the point of Ephesians. The point is that we make the best use of our time and the seasons of life that God has given us for the purpose of seeking to live a life that pleases God and prepares us to stand before Him on Judgment Day without fear and actually hear, well done, my good and faithful servant.

Some people will actually hear that by the grace of God. Are you headed in that direction in the way that you are using your time? If not, what needs to change?

Do you just simply need to draw closer to God? Do you simply just need to draw, take some time away from the busyness of life and any distractions and just draw close to God?

[27 : 25] Talk to Him. Listen to Him. Open His Word. Is your main problem today that you are separated from God if you're not a Christian?

That's what the case is. Or could it be that you are a Christian but you just don't feel close to God anymore because you're not? There's too many people, too many things, too many distractions in your life.

If that's the case, I want to encourage you to confess that to God. Change your mind. Turn from it. Draw close to Him. Spend some time with Him.

Just talk to Him. Explain what's going on in your life. Explain the business of life. Explain the distractions. Ask Him to give you the wisdom to know what to do to change things.

How to make your time more useful. How to develop a real relationship with Him. And if you don't know Christ as your Lord and Savior, that's what you need to do is to call upon Him to save you now.

[28 : 36] Could it be that part of your problem is you need to start focusing more on the people in your life than the things? And what I mean by that is giving the people who are important in your life

your attention.

It's not enough just to be in a room with them. But to give them you, your eye contact. Listen, talk, exchange, ideas, words.

You know, the seasons of life don't last forever. They change. If you've got children in your home, they're only there for a limited amount of time.

If you have little children, teenage children in your home, it's not going to seem long at all that they're going to be gone. So right now, this is the only season that you're going to have them close like you do right now.

If they are normal and you want them to be, they're going to grow up, they're going to move out, they're going to have their own family, their own job, they're going to have their own life. And I don't mean this to sound as bad as it actually sounds, but you're not going to be the major part of their life like you are right now if they're healthy.

[30 : 00] Because they're going to love their spouse. They're going to focus on their children. They'll still love you, have a good relationship, but it will be different. I want to say this, because I thought about this in the last month or so.

If you've got older people in your life right now, you've got parents, grandparents, spend some time with them while you can. I have thought, I've never really thought about it until very recently.

I told a Sunday school class this morning. For some reason, I've thought about, I would love to ask my parents or grandparents some things about my family from the past, but I can't because they've all died.

So I want to encourage you, if you've got not just younger people, but older people in your life, this season is going to pass. They're going to die.

It's just part of life. So enjoy them. In fact, this Thanksgiving, this, don't go off and just play with your phone.

[31 : 15] Don't just go off with the other children if you're young. Don't just go off with people just like you. Take some time to look at and listen to the older people who are there at Thanksgiving because one day they won't be.

Take some time to enjoy the younger people at Thanksgiving that might want to throw a ball with you, that might want to do something with you because the time will come. They won't.

They've moved on. Do you need to discipline yourself this morning? Do you need to get organized? Do you need to establish some borders, some boundaries?

You know, if your life is full and most people in this room, I know you'd say, my life's so full right now. That's another reason why you need to add these borders, these new walls.

Don't take new things into your life if your life's already full or if you do, if you take something new in, get rid of something else. It's good to change some things in your life.

[32 : 23] Let go of some things especially if you're going to do some new things. But it's also it's good to learn to tell people no. No, I can't do that today or I can't do that tomorrow.

I'm committed to so and so. You don't even have to tell them. Just say no. Learn to say no. Learn to accept people saying no because they may be protecting their family time.

They may be protecting their sanity by saying no. Ask God to give you wisdom. Be the best steward or manager of the time he has given you for a lot of reasons.

One, so that you won't look back at the previous seasons of your life with a whole lot of regrets.

You know, my boys are grown now. 30 something years old. And there's a lot of things I would do different. Some things I'd do different if I could. But I don't have a whole lot of regrets.

[33 : 25] Because I was there with them. I told people in the church a lot of times no. Because I was going to go to their games, coach their sports.

I have absolutely no regrets. You need to do stuff like that. Enjoy who you have while you can. during this season of life.

But another reason to ask for the wisdom and this is the bottom line. We are all going to stand before the Lord on judgment day. Thankfully, if we're Christians, the penalty for our sins have been paid.

But we are going to give an account of how we've lived. How we've used our time. God, we are, knows that we are sinful people so we're never going to be perfect, never going to be flawless.

But by His grace, we can be good stewards of our time. And we can stand before Him on judgment day without regrets, without guilt.

[34 : 34] because by His grace, we sought to do what we thought would please Him and best use the time and the season that He gave us.

Think about it. Let's pray together. Dear God, help us all right now to think we have now. We have this time that we are right here before You. Show us, dear God, if we are wise time managers.

Not just in terms of our schedules, but in terms of are we pleasing You?

Are we growing in a relationship with You? Are we growing in meaningful relationships with people that we should be growing in in our lives? Help us to thank you, God.

[35 : 47] Are we doing the work, the jobs that You've given us, that we're getting paid to do to the best of our ability? Are we wise managers of time there?

Are we just show us, dear God, what we need to do. If there's any changes we need to make, if there's anything we just need to keep on keeping on.

Show us, dear God, if there's any boundaries or walls, borders we need to put up and help us to want to do it and help us to take it step by step.

Help us to discipline ourselves to do it each day. And in an attitude of prayer, let's just do what God's telling us to do.

Make some new priorities. Call upon the Lord to save you if you're not a Christian. Draw back close to the Lord if you are distant.

[36 : 51] Just do what God's calling you to do. And I'd be happy to pray with you about it here at the front in these next few minutes if you would like. Let's listen and obey the Lord. Let's listen and obey the Lord.