

Most people I run into these days are very busy. We're always seem to be in a hurry. We walk fast, & talk fast, & eat fast. And after we eat, all too often, we stand up & say, "Excuse me. I've gotta run. So here we are, on the threshold of the year 2012. I wonder how we'll do this year? Will we be as busy? Will we make any better use of our time? In another 365 days, when 2012 is over, will we be looking back with joy, or with regret? Will we be looking at the future with anticipation, or with dread?

There is a passage of Scripture that I believe can be of help to us as we look forward to the year 2012 if we'll listen to it. The passage is Ephesians 5:15-17, & here is what it says, "Be very careful, then, how you live not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

First of all, we must be very careful how we live because our time on this earth is limited. The Psalmist wrote, "Show me, O Lord, my life's end & the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life" (39:4). And again, "The length of our days is 70 years or 80, if we have the strength...they quickly pass, & we fly away".

Now, I realize that for some of you younger folk, 70 or 80 years sounds like a long, long time. In fact, I can remember when I thought anyone over 40 was ancient. But no longer. It is all rather relative, isn't it? For example, for teenagers in love talking together in the car, an hour or two seems like a blink of an eye. But for mom & dad worrying about what's going on out in that car, an hour or two seems like an eternity.

The Psalmist also tells us to number our days so that we will develop a heart of wisdom. A few years ago People Magazine published an article entitled "Dead Ahead" telling about a new clock that keeps track of how much time you have left to live. It calculates an average life span of 75 years for men & 80 years for women. So you program your sex & age into the clock, & from then on it will tell you how much time you have left. It sold for \$99.95. I didn't buy one. But it is an intriguing idea. Isn't that what the Psalmist told us to do to number our days?

When I first heard about the clock I figured out that if I lived to be 75 years old that I had just about 7264 days left to live. That's all, just 7264 days left to live. But wait a minute. Neither you nor I have a guarantee of even one day more to live. In fact the Bible tells us not to count on tomorrow because tomorrow may not come for you or for me. All we have is right now. So our time on this earth is valuable because it is very limited.

Secondly, Paul tells us that we must make "the most of every opportunity." And he gives a reason, "because the days are evil." Jesus said that Satan is a robber & a thief, & one of the things he tries to rob from us is our time because time is a very precious possession. Think of the time all of us waste in different ways during the course of the day. It might be on surfing the internet, or watching TV, or piddling away time on some hobby that consumes us. It may be shuttling out kids from one activity to the next. Remember the story of Mary and Martha. How Martha was out in the kitchen, while Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. It is not that Martha was committing a sin by fixing a meal in the kitchen. No, of course not! But the problem was that she was so preoccupied with what she was doing that she didn't realize that God was in her living room. That's the same mistake you & I make almost every day. We get so caught up in the here & now that we fail to deal with the eternal, the things that will last forever & ever. Richard Swenson, a medical doctor, wrote a book in which he discusses one of the major maladies of our time anxiety & stress. He calls it "overload," & says that people are just plain overloaded.

1. We're overloaded with commitments. We've committed ourselves to go here & there, to take part in this activity & that social function. As a result we soon begin meeting ourselves coming & going because we have overloaded ourselves in the area of commitments. 2. We're also overloaded with possessions, he says. Our closets are full, & our garages are overflowing. We've gone into debt to pay for all of these things that we "simply must have." And now we're so afraid that someone will steal them. We are overloaded in the area of possessions. 3. Thirdly, we have an overload in the area of work. We get up early, fight traffic, & experience intolerable working conditions because we have to if we're going to pay for all those possessions that we've accumulated. Well, I could go on & on, but you get the picture. There are so many demands on our time, so many good things that need to be done. But there are just 8,760 hours in the year 2012. We do want to make the most of every opportunity, so what are we to do?

Well, to answer that, Paul tells us, "...do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." Now what do you think God's will is for you in this new year? Do you think He wants your mind so saturated with worries & anxieties that you can't think spiritual thoughts? Do you think He wants your calendar so crowded that you don't have time for the important things? What do you think God's will is for you this year? As we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we can see 4 goals that the Lord would like to see happening in our lives in 2012. In Luke 2:52 it tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and favor with man. Circle those four things. It says, He developed in wisdom – that's intellectual development. He developed in stature – that's physical development. He developed in favor with God – that's spiritual development. He developed in favor with man – that's service development.

First, Jesus developed intellectually. He grew in wisdom. Ask yourself, "Is my brain really being challenged these days? Remember the ad that said, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." God gave you your mind. It's a gift. It's like a muscle. If you use a muscle, it gets stronger. If you ignore a muscle, it atrophies. So grow in wisdom. How about increasing your wisdom in the Bible? Make it a goal to attend a couple of Bible classes in the next year. Further, read some books that increase your knowledge in other areas of life. Or maybe take a class over at the Delta or SVSU and develop a skill." Set some kind of intellectual goals that will challenge and stimulate you so that a year from today you're smarter than you are today, that you know more. God can use that in your life. It's good stewardship of the brain God gave you.

The second area is a physical goal. What will improve my health next year? Lose some weight? Go to bed earlier? Get on an exercise plan? Change my eating habits? Develop some kind of stress relief? Start walking everyday? The Bible is full of health tips. Proverbs 17 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine." For some of you, God's health tip for you is, "Lighten up!" Don't sweat the small stuff. Realize it's all small stuff in God's eyes. Lighten up. "Being cheerful keeps you healthy."

The third area is spiritual goals. He increased with favor with God. Worship on weekends is going to be a priority. I will schedule some definite time each day to pray & to read my Bible. I will pray for myself & for my family & for people at church, for people in my community and the world. I am going to write into my planner a Bible study at church or in a small group. My Lord wants me to Grow in the grace and knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and I am going to set that goal.

The fourth area is a service goal. Jesus grew in favor with men. What will be my ministry to others? God doesn't want me to just think of myself. God does not bless selfishness. 1 Peter 4 "God's given you some special abilities. Be sure to use them to..." Make a million

bucks in 2012? No, "*Be sure to use them to help each other.*" Yes, I am going to volunteer at church in 2012 doing this.....I am not going to stand on the sidelines, watching other people do the plays. I am going to use the gifts and talents God has given me to serve others.

Less than five percent of Americans will set goals for 2012. If you set goals, and understand what the will of God is for your life, you're in the top five-percent. Tape these to your refrigerator door or the mirror in your bathroom. Somewhere that you'll see it and remind yourself on a regular basis.

You're thinking, "I've tried this! I've gone the New Years Resolution route and it lasts two weeks. I've set goals but I just don't follow through. I have the greatest of intentions every year but I just don't stick with it. I can't seem to stay with it. I don't have the power to change. When you say, "I want to do what's right but I don't" -- welcome to the human race. That's called the war within you, the battle of your new self vs. your old sinful nature. That's what Jesus Christ came to die on the cross to deal with.

*"When Christ died, He died to defeat the power of sin. Now see yourselves as being dead to the power of sin and alive to God."* Even most Christians do not understand the power of the cross. Most Christians think that the power of the cross is simply the power to forgive my past and future sins. And that is true. But that's only part of the power of the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for three things: 1. He paid for the penalty of all your sins, present, past, future. That means I am forgiven and that's good news. And that would be enough if that's all there was. But Jesus also paid to break the power of sin in the present. That means He gives me the energy to break the habits, hurts and hang-ups that are messing me up. Third, He paid so that one day I will be released from the presence of sin forever. That's called heaven where there will be no sin. I'll be freed from not only the penalty and the power of it in my life, but the actual presence of sin in my life permanently.

That is the power of the cross. That's why when we talk about making New Year's goals and the power to change our lives, we begin the year with communion. The Lord's Supper not only provides us with the body and blood of Christ together with bread and wine to assure us of forgiveness, but also empowers us for Christian living. Yes, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I can set these goals and with Christ fulfill them. That means there's nothing I'm going to hit in the next 365 days, no problem, no situation, no circumstance, no hassle that I can't handle, that I can't manage, that I'm not competent to handle. So first of all, Set some goals for 2012.

And then, learn how to live today. The two greatest enemies of time are regrets for things we did in the past, & anxiety about what will happen to us in the future. Many of us are living either in the past or in the future. In fact, many of us are engaged in the little game of, "I wish it were." "I wish it were next week," or "I wish it were next month," or some such thing. Kids go to school & say, "Boy, I wish this day were over." Someone said, "Life is what happens to you while you're making plans to do something else."

True, isn't it? Another year has come & gone. A new year stretches before us. Help us Lord, to redeem the time. Lord, please help us to use the 8,760 hours of this year the wisest way we can for you, & for your glory. So have a happy new year.