

- 1 **A Year of Opportunity**
Ephesians 5:15-17
- 2 **We often kick off the new year looking back at the old and thinking about what we'd like to change in the new.**
 - We look at habits – ones we'd like to break and maybe some good ones we'd like to start.
- 3 **Two older ladies were discussing their husbands.**
 - One said: "I do wish George would stop biting his nails. It's such a horrible habit."
 - Her friend said: "My Arnold used to do the same. But I eventually cured him of it."
 - "How did you do that?"
 - "I hid his teeth!"
- 4 **I'm sure you've noticed that each year almost all the major news magazines put out an issue with special pictorial sections recalling people and events that made news during the previous year.**
 - Some magazines also include articles by experts predicting what they expect to see happening in the years ahead.
 - Some even go so far as to make predictions covering 10, 20, or more years in the future.
 - In the past, a few of these predictions have proven amazingly accurate, while others couldn't have been more wrong.
- 5 **For example, back in 1967, experts predicted that by the turn of the century technology would have taken over so much of the work we do that the average American work week would be only 22 hours long, and that we would work only 27 weeks a year.**
 - As a result, they predicted one of our biggest problems

would be in deciding what to do with all our leisure time.

- Well, I don't know about you, but that prediction certainly missed the mark as far as my life was concerned!
- In fact, many people seem to be very busy. We're always in a hurry. We walk fast, and talk fast, and eat fast.
- And after we eat, all too often, we stand up and say, "Excuse me. I've gotta run."

6 **So here we are, at the first Sunday of 2014. I wonder how we'll do this year?**

- Will we be as busy? Will we make any better use of our time? Think about it - in 360 days, when this year is over, will we be looking back with joy, or with regret?
- Will we be looking at the future with anticipation, or with dread?

7 **There is a passage of Scripture that I believe can help us as we look forward to the rest of 2014 if we'll listen to it. The passage is Ephesians 5:15, 17, and here is what it says,**

8 **"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." Ephesians 5:15, 17**

9 **I think that in this passage the Apostle Paul presents some important lessons that we need to consider.**

10 **I. OUR TIME ON THIS EARTH IS LIMITED.**

11 **First of all, we must be very careful how we live because our time on this earth is limited. The**

Psalmist wrote,

- 12 **"Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life" (39:4).**
- 13 **And again, "The length of our days is 70 years or 80, if we have the strength...they quickly pass, and we fly away" (90:10).**
- 14 **Now, when you're younger, 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 and dad worrying about what's going on out in that car, an hour or two seems like an eternity.
- 15 **The Psalmist also tells us to number our days so that we will develop a heart of wisdom.**
- 16 **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 and 80 years for women. So you program your sex and age into the clock, and 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?
- 17 **When I heard about that clock I figured out that if I lived to be 75 years old that I had just about 7,300 days left to live. That's all, just 7,300 days**

left to live.

- But wait a minute. Actually, 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 precious because it is very limited.

18 **II. MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY**

19 **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 and a thief, and one of the things he tries to rob from us is our time because time is a very precious possession.
- Just think of the time wasted in sinning.
 - Think of the time wasted in destructive behaviors to ourselves and others.
 - Think of the time wasted in gossiping or spreading rumors.
 - Or think about all the time wasted worrying about the consequences of the sins we have committed. Satan is a thief and a robber!

20 **But it is not just bad things that make demands on our time. Sometimes even good things can make demands.**

- Jesus went to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. He sat down to teach, and Mary was sitting at His feet just soaking in every word.
- Meanwhile, Martha was out in the kitchen preparing dinner.
- Now, you know the story. It is found in Luke 10. Martha gets upset because Mary is not in the kitchen, too.

- So she complains to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

21 **"Martha, Martha," Jesus answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" [Luke 10:40 42].**

22 **Now was Martha committing a sin by fixing a meal in the kitchen? No, of course not! But here's the problem. 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 and I make almost every day. We get so caught up in the here and now that we fail to deal with the eternal, the things that will last forever and ever.

23 **Richard Swenson, a medical doctor, wrote a book in which he discusses one of the major maladies of our time - anxiety and stress.**

- He calls it "overload," and says that people are just plain overloaded.
 - We're overloaded with commitments. We've committed ourselves to go here and there, to take part in this activity and that social function.
 - As a result we soon begin meeting ourselves coming and going because we have overloaded ourselves in the area of commitments.
 - Second, we're also overloaded with possessions, he says.
 - Our closets are full, and 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.
- Thirdly, in our society we have an overload in the area of work.
 - We get up early, fight traffic, and experience intolerable working conditions because we have to if we're going to pay for all those possessions that we've accumulated.
- Fourth, there is also an information overload.
 - He said that as a doctor he has to read 220 articles a month just to keep up with all the changes in his profession.
 - With the internet there's an information superhighway. But the problem is that we can't possibly absorb it all. So we feel an overload in this area, too.

24 **Well, I could go on and 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 this year, and we've already used 120 of them.
- We want to make the most of every opportunity, so what are we to do?

25 **III. UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS**

26 **Well, to answer that, Paul tells us, "...do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."**

27 **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 and anxieties that you can't think spiritual thoughts?

- Do you think He wants your calendar so full that you don't have time for the important things?
- What do you think God's will is for you this year?

28 **Let me make a couple of suggestions for you to consider.**

29 **First of all, establish your priorities.**

30 **I'm assuming that since you're in church this morning that you believe God should be a part of your life.**

- But when you begin to establish priorities, you have to decide just where He stands in your life.
- So ask yourself, "Who or what is most important in my life?"
- And I'm hoping that your answer will be, "My relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, is most important to me."
- If so, then put that at the top of your list of priorities, and say, "This will affect my decisions, my scheduling, my relationship with others, and my whole outlook on life."
- "Therefore, when Sunday rolls around neither rain nor shine nor football kickoffs will interfere with my being in church, because He comes first in my life. I'll worship the Lord and nothing will interfere with that."

31 **How else can you make God a priority?**

- You also need to schedule some definite time each day to pray and to read His Word.
- Pray for yourself and for your family and for people around you.
- Pray for the church, and for our missionaries. Sometimes they feel so alone and so far away.
- I speak from first hand experience - you'll never know how much your prayers will mean to them. But you'll

be blessed as you grow in your faith and trust in the Lord through prayer and Bible reading!

32 **You must also spend time with your family. Every husband here ought to have a date night with his wife. I'm serious.**

- You ought to have a date night with your wife, a time when just the two of you get away and don't have anything else to interfere.
- No phone calls, no interruptions, and you can just talk. Maybe at a nice restaurant or maybe at home. Wherever it is, spend some time together.
- Spend time with your children, too. No matter what their age – time with them is precious. Don't let them get away. Make sure that you spend quality time with your children. Make sure that your family is very high on the list.

33 **So first of all, establish your priorities. And then, learn how to live your priorities today.**

34 **The two greatest enemies of time are regrets for things we did in the past, and 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 "I wish it were springtime," or some such thing.
 - Kids go to school and say, "Boy, I wish this day were over."

35 **Gary Freeman tells about a girl who went to college and just hated it. But she told herself, "If I can ever get out of college and get married and have children, I know I'll finally be able to enjoy**

life."

- So she stuck with it. She went to classes every day and finally graduated from college.
- Then she got married and had children, and discovered that children are a lot of work.
- So she told herself, "If I can just get these kids raised, then I'll be able to relax and really enjoy life."

36  **But about the time the kids were entering high school her husband said, "Guess what? We don't have enough money to send our kids to college. I guess you'll have to get a job."**

- Well, she didn't want to, but she knew he was right and they needed the money, so she went to work. And she hated it.
- But she told herself, "If I can just get these kids out of college, and get all of the bills paid, then I can quit work and really enjoy life."
- Finally, the last child graduated from college, and all the bills were paid. So she walked into her employer's office and said, "I quit."

37  **He said, "Oh, you don't want to quit now. If you stay with us just another 8 years you'll have a pension for the rest of your life."**

- She thought, "Well, I don't want to work another 8 years, but there's all that money there, and I really can't turn down the opportunity."
- So she worked for another 8 years. Finally, she and her husband retired at the same time. They sold their home and bought a little retirement cottage.
- Then they sat down on the swing on their front porch and looked at the family picture album and you know what they did? They dreamed about the good old days.

38  **Someone said, "Life is what happens to you while**

you're making plans to do something else."

- 39 **True, isn't it? Another year has come and gone. A new year stretches before us. Help us Lord, to redeem the time. So have a happy new year! And during the New Year may you have:**
- 40 **enough happiness to keep you sweet - enough trials to keep you strong,
enough sorrow to keep you human - enough hope to keep you happy,
enough failure to keep you humble - enough success to keep you eager,**
- 41 **enough friends to give you comfort - enough wealth to meet your needs,
enough enthusiasm to make you look forward to tomorrow,
and enough determination to make each day better than the day before.**
- 42 **Lord, please help us to use the 8,760 hours of this year the wisest way we can for you, and for your glory.**
- 43 **Romans 13:11 12 says, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."**
- 44 **Notes: This sermon has been adapted from a new year's message from Rev. Melvin Newland of Ridge Chapel, Oklahoma. Thanks to Pastor Newland for this fine message.**