

DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE

What On Earth Am I Here For?

"Be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do."

Ephesians 5:15-17 (NLT)

People often put signs in their homes that state what they believe is important. They describe how they want to live. Maybe you have a sign like this in your home. This one is popular. You will see it often in gift shops and boutiques. It says that a life well lived is one where you: **Live every moment. Love beyond words. Laugh every day.** That's not bad. Pretty good. Living every moment, Loving beyond words, and Laughing everyday is much better than Demanding Perfection, Dwelling on Past Bitterness, and Obsessing over Looks.

Here's another popular sign. Its very similar to the first, but more controversial. It says: **Family, Faith, Friends.** This one is more controversial because there are different versions that put FAITH first – as if you need spiritual fortitude to put up with your family. And versions of this sign put FRIENDS first and FAMILY last. That must be tough bunch of relatives and an uncomfortable Thanksgiving dinner.

I've seen another saying that probably fits me more. You've probably seen it too. It goes like this: "Life is uncertain, so eat desert first." That little saying is telling us that a life well lived is one where we make sure we enjoy desert (especially chocolate – dark chocolate).

Certainly eating desert first, and having a laugh everyday don't necessarily guarantee that your life is a success – that your life isn't wasted. But how DO you prevent wasting your life? Well, the Bible says this in Ephesians, 5:15-17...(Let's read it aloud together), ***"Be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do."***

Now notice, the word "careful". It says, "be careful how you live". Now the opposite of careful is what?...careless. It says, don't be careless. Literally it means "don't stumble through life; don't just drift through life". Think it through, know what you're here for, know your purpose and it says there, "make the most of every opportunity, be wise" and then it says, "try to understand what God wants you to do".

If I would ask you to be honest, how many of you would say, you really would like to know what God wants you to do with your life? How many would say it? I think most of us, if not all of us. Well, you're in luck...because starting in 2 weeks, we're going to look, intently, for 42 Days at what God wants you to do with your life. God says ***"Be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise."***

Today, we begin to prepare our hearts for this journey. I just want us to think about three important questions of life. They're there on your outline: What does God want? What does it take? And Why should I do it? Really, if you would have boiled your life down, those are the three important questions of life.

Question #1: What does God want from my life?

Well, when you read through the whole Bible, you can summarize it in a couple of words. You can write this in - He wants **my whole life**. He wants my entire life – starting with my HEART. There is not a single verse in the Bible, not one, that says you can be a Christian and live your life any old way you want to. It's just not there. God wants all of you. He doesn't want 10% of you, He doesn't want 50% of you, He doesn't want 99% of you – He wants all of you.

Look at what the Bible says in Romans 6:13, ***"Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God"***.

"Give yourselves COMPLETELY to God" means God wants ALL of you. C.S. Lewis once said, ***"The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important"***. If it's really true, then it deserves everything you've got. If it's not true, you shouldn't be here right now. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. It's either all, or nothing.

A problem is -- there's still a lot of people who say, "I don't know what God wants me to do". Well, look at the next verse: ***"What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul"***

Deuteronomy 10:12 (NIV) Here God tells us that His plan for our lives starts with loving, serving, and living for Him completely -- totally -- ***"with all your heart and with all your soul."***

The problem is -- a lot of people try to sit on the fence. They say, "I'll serve God in my spare time". It's like I have this pie -- I have my social life, and I have my career life, and I have my family life and over here my retirement life and over here I have my spiritual life - as if your spiritual life is one part of the pie. Wrong. God made you. God's the whole pie. He wants the whole pie to be under His control. He doesn't want to be pigeonholed and you say, "You know God, I'll give you 10% of my life". He wants it all. He wants your whole being.

Look at the next verse; let's read it aloud together, ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money"***. Cannot -- He doesn't say you "should not" serve God and money -- He says you "cannot" serve God and money. He says it's impossible. What's He talking about? He's saying it is impossible to have two number one priorities in your life. You're always going to have a No.1, and everything else is going to be 2,3,4 and 5. You can't have two number one priorities.

Now there are a lot of things besides money that can certainly push God out of First Place in your life. Work can push God out of First Place; Sports and hobbies can push God out of First Place, friends can push God out of First Place in your life, school can push God out of First Place in your life, dating can push God out of First Place in your life, even your own family can push God out of First Place in your life.

And He's saying you can't serve God and something else at the same time. So really the question here is "what's going to be First Place in you?" Is what's going to be the No. 1 goal in your life -- building your career? Is the No. 1 goal in your life raising your family? Is the No. 1 goal of your life going to be saving for retirement? Is the No. 1 goal of your life going to be maintaining your good health? Are these what you are here on earth for? You see, all of those things are good. In fact, God created them. And God approves of every one of those things, except NOT in First Place. God says, ***"You will have no other gods before me"***. And whatever is in First Place in your life is your god.

Any time you have something in your life that's No. 1 that's not God, that's called an idol. And God says, "that's wrong". In addition to having something other than God as #1 being wrong -- it's hurtful, devastating for you to have a wrong #1 priority in your life. If you have a wrong #1 priority, ALL OF YOUR LIFE will be out of focus. "Why am I wasting my life?" Because I've got the wrong aim, the wrong priority, I haven't given God ALL of my life.

You see, discovering what you're here on earth for, knowing the meaning and purpose -- or goal -- of your life, all begins with God. He loves you, He made you, He knows you, He has a purpose for you. So He desires the #1 spot in your life, to be your aim, your goal.

Now friends, the BLESSING God promises you is: When He's #1 in your life, EVERYTHING is going to be in right perspective. See, I'm letting you in on a little secret -- if God is first in your life, He'll take care of everything else.

Look at the next verse. The Bible promises in Proverbs 3:6 -- ***"In everything you do (that's everything), put God first, and he will direct you and (read it with me), crown your efforts with success."*** I don't know anybody who doesn't want to be a success. You want to be a success? The Bible tells you how, right there -- "in everything you do, put God first. In everything you do, put God first and he will crown your efforts with success".

Have you been trying to live as a part-time Christian life? The first question of life is - what does God want? He wants all of you. And any time you sit on the fence, you lose. What does God want? Well, He wants all of you.

Question #2 -- What does it take?

What does it take to not waste my life? What does it take to become all that God wants me to be? What does it take to develop myself to my fullest potential? Well, I'm going to say it in one word.

It's a word you're not going to like. It's a very unpopular word. We cringe when we hear this word. We really don't like this word. But it's the word **"discipline"**. [And a groan went out across the land.]

You cannot be a disciple without discipline. The two words go together - disciple and discipline. You can't be a disciple of Jesus without discipline.

Notice what the Bible says, 1 Timothy 4:7 ***"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness"***. Now, what in the world is discipline? Well, in two words – discipline is delayed gratification. That's all it is. Delayed gratification. Discipline is doing the difficult now, in order to enjoy the benefit later.

Ten years ago one of our nephews lived with us while he was going to college. He decided he wanted to run a marathon. So for months he would go out running. He would run Saturday mornings, week nights, and get up early mornings. First he ran a short distance. Then longer and longer until he could run all 26 miles.

You know for runners like that, the goal is the exhilaration of crossing the finish line. But to experience that one short moment takes months of practice. Hours and hours of working out to gain strength and speed. It takes discipline to get up early in the morning when you'd rather sleep in, to lace up the shoes for a run.

In anything important in life, it takes discipline, practice, dedication, sticking to it in order to improve. Some of you don't even need this definition, because you're incredibly disciplined. Some of you are very disciplined in your work, your career. Some of you are very disciplined in your physical workouts. You never miss a physical workout. It's in your routine, in your schedule. Some of you never miss a favorite T.V. show. I mean, you wouldn't think of missing it. And some of us never miss a meal. You're disciplined in some areas.

You know where YOU'RE disciplined? In the areas you want to be. The things that are important to you, you get done. What if you were as disciplined in having a daily quiet time as you are in never missing a meal? What if you were as disciplined in serving others as you are in getting up and going to work everyday? What if you were as disciplined in attending church as you are in watching that favorite T.V. show that you never miss?

The Living Bible paraphrases that same Bible passage, 1 Timothy 4:7 this way: *"Spend your time and energy in the exercise of keeping spiritually fit."* I think that's a helpful way to put it.

You know, there's another word for discipline – we like this one a little bit better. It's the word **"habits"**. Habits are, simply, disciplines and you are the sum total of your habits. Tell me what you do habitually, and I'll tell you what your character is. If you habitually tell the truth, you have integrity. If you are habitually faithful to your spouse, you are a faithful person. It's what you do over and over and over without even thinking. If it's a habit, it's a part of your life and your whole life is designed, shaped, controlled, developed by the habits. And if you want to change your life, all you have to do is change your habits. Now one of the major goals of "What On Earth Am I Here For", which we're beginning this week, is to help you develop some new spiritual habits.

Hebrews 12:1 – let's read this verse together. ***"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress"***. Those are two things that hold you back. There are two things that keep you from being all that God wants you to be. There are two things that limit your potential in life. There are two things that waste your life. And He says, "You've got to let go of these things".

One of them is "sins" and the other is "weights". Now, you know what sins are...breaking one of the commandments of God. But what's a "weight"? Well, a weight is something that's not necessarily wrong; it's just not necessary. Have you thought of that? There're some things in life that are not necessarily wrong; they're just not necessary. A weight can be all kinds of things. It could be a relationship, it could be an expectation, it could be an activity, it could be a club, it could be a memory that you refuse to let go of, it could be a fear, it could be a job. There are a thousand, or hundred thousand different kinds of weights. And the Bible says, ***"to grow, I must learn to say no"***. You can't say, "yes" to everything. You have to say "no" to some things. You have to say "no" often to good things in order to have time for the best things. You have to say "no" to things that are not bad. In fact,

they're quite good, but you say "no" to them because you cannot do it all and have it all. But if you are serious about fulfilling your purpose in life, you have to make space for God in your life. And if you're going to make space for God in your life, you're going to have to cut some stuff out. Some good stuff, not sin, just good stuff.


I want to be honest with you. As your pastor, I'm concerned about you. I'm concerned about the people in our church. You can't keep adding things to your schedule. And most of you who I know personally – I know your lives – are way too over crowded. You've got way too much going on in your life.

And in 42 Days – 6 weeks - we are going to focus on 4 habits in your schedule. (1st) Worship attendance EVERY WEEKEND, (2nd) A daily devotional reading of about 15 minutes a day, which will help you understand God's purposes of your life; (3rd) a weekly meeting in a small Group for six weeks that will help you understand God's purpose for your life; and (4th) a weekly verse to memorize that probably will take you about five minutes, which will help you understand What you're here on earth for.

I'm telling you right now as your Pastor who cares about you; you need to decide right now what you're going to CUT OUT in order to do – and get the most out of – these 6 weeks. You can put so many irons in the fire you put out the fire. If you burn the candles at both ends, you are not as bright as you think you are. Your life's already overcrowded, but not everything in your life is of equal value. So you need to ask, "What am I going to STOP doing?" Any time you take on a new activity in your calendar, you should say, "What am I not going to do?" at the same time. Any time you take on a new habit, a new skill, a new commitment you should say, "What am I not going to do?"

Maybe you're going to need to give up an hour a week of T.V. for 6 weeks. (That might kill somebody, I don't know.) You can go home and watch reruns of Friends, or you can go to a group and make friends. I don't know which one you'd rather do. If you say, "watch reruns of Friends" – you've got a problem.

Maybe you need to go to bed 15 minutes earlier during What On Earth Am I Here For, so you can get up 15 minutes earlier to do your daily reading in the book. You just can't keep just adding stuff on. There's always a cost of putting God first in your schedule, but the rewards are worth it.

Let me ask you, Do tasks on your to-do list distract you from focusing on God? Is your life so busy, you don't have time to stop, even for 6 weeks and focus on God?  **You will live an average of 25,550 days.** That's what the average person lives. Don't you think it would be smart to take 42 of those days to figure out what you should do with the rest of them? I think so. I think that's pretty wise.

I know what some of you are thinking...you say, "Pastor Paul, I know this. I'm just not a very disciplined person". Let's have a little true confession. How many of you would have the courage enough to admit, "I'm not really a disciplined person". I will lift my hand first. Anybody else want to join me? So, I'm not a disciplined person. Well, don't worry, God will help you.

Look at the next verse. Let's read it out loud – Philippians 2:13 **"God is always at work in you, to make you willing and able to obey His own purpose"**. Willing and able – He gives you the desire, and then He gives you the willpower. What am I saying? If you get serious and say "God, during these weeks of "What On Earth Am I Here For" there are some things I will cut out of my life in order to make time to develop some new habits so that I might grow closer to you, and that you might have all of me, not just part of me, but all of me."

What does God want? He wants all of you, every part of you. That's what he wants. What's it going to take to grow? It's going to take discipline. You can't be a disciple without discipline.

Question #3: Why should I do it?

Why should I make the effort to grow spiritually? Why should I let go of some things to make time for God in my life? Well, there are many benefits and we can spend the rest of the day just talking about those. Benefits today in your life right now, and benefits forever in eternity. But even if there were no benefits, to doing to what God tells us to do. Even if there were no benefits at all, right here on earth – I can tell you the reason why you ought to do it in two words – **the Cross**. Because of the

Cross. Jesus gave His life completely for you, and His great love motivates me to *WANT* to love Him by living for Him.

If you look on your message notes, at 2 Corinthians 5:15 : ***“He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again”***. He died for all. For every one of us. Jesus gave His life for every one of us in this room. Some of us have trusted Him and recognized that and enjoyed His forgiveness in our lives. Others of you, it may be the first time you’ve heard this – that Jesus died for you. He loved you enough to die for you. To offer you forgiveness. He died for us so that all of us with lives in this world – just normal, everyday lives, routine, struggles, problems, – that every one of US -- whatever you’re going through in your life right now -- so that we wouldn’t do it just for ourselves. We no longer live just for ourselves. We live our lives to the fullest. How do you live your life to the fullest? You live for Him, who died for us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. You live for Him, who died for us because He cares about you more than you can ever imagine. And in the depths of His love and care for you, He has a purpose for your life that cannot match anything you can ever dream of. You can never bring the kind of fulfillment to your life, or joy to your life that He can bring to your life. And so we serve Him.

We’re looking forward to celebrating “What On Earth Am I Here For.” We couldn’t celebrate one day of life here on earth, except for the fact that Jesus Christ chose to leave Heaven and come to earth and give His life for us. He didn’t have to do that. Just think about how amazing it is that God loves not only the world, but that He loves you, individually, right here, right now, He loves you. He suffered for you. He spilled His blood for you. Jesus died for you. Jesus was resurrected for you. He wants to give you forgiveness. He wants to give you purpose in your life. God is what your life on this earth is all about. He gave you life. He stands at the end of your life. And He fills every day with meaning. That’s what life on this earth is all about.

You ever wanted to be a part of a miracle? Well now’s your chance. This verse, Habakkuk 3:2, is the theme verse for 40 Days – *“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”*. The very first verse we read tonight was this “Make the most of every opportunity you get”. God has given you the opportunity of a lifetime in the next 40 Days...don’t let it pass by. Don’t sit on the fence. Don’t watch from the sideline.