



## New Years

### NOW IS THE HOUR!

Ephesians 5:15-17

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#### DRAGGED THROUGH LIFE

We live in a very tense, uptight, and fast-paced world filled with hurry.

A Tacoma, Washington newspaper carried the story of Tattoo the basset hound a while back. Tattoo didn't intend to go for an evening run, but when his owner shut the dog's leash in the car door and took off for a drive – with Tattoo still outside the vehicle, he had no choice. Motorcycle officer Terry Filbert notice a passing vehicle with something dragging behind it. He commented that the poor basset hound was, "picking them up and putting them down as fast as he could." He chased the car to a stop, and Tattoo was rescued. But not before the dog had reached a top speed of 25 miles per hour, falling down and rolling over several times.

Too many of us are living our lives like Tattoo, picking them up and putting them down as fast as we can – rolling around & feeling dragged through life.

**A.** 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 & events that made news during the previous year. And, of course, this year the events & heroes of 9-11 & the resulting war in Afghanistan and Iraq dominated the news reviews of 2001, 2002, 2003 & 2004.

Many of the 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.

**ILL.** 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, & that we would work only 27 weeks a year. As a result, 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, most of us seem to be very busy people. We're always 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."

**B.** So here we are, at the beginning of 2005 in a couple of days. I wonder how we'll do this year? Will we be as busy? Will we make any better use of our time? In 365 days, when the 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?

There is a passage of Scripture that I believe can be of help to us as we

look forward to the rest of 2005 - 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."**

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

### **1. OUR TIME ON THIS EARTH IS LIMITED**

**A. 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" [Psalm 39:4].** And then again, **"The length of our days is 70 years - or 80, if we have the strength...they quickly pass, & we fly away" [Psalm 90:10].**

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?

**ILL. 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.**

**B. The Psalmist also tells us to number our days so that we will develop a heart of wisdom.**

**ILL. 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. In fact, that's what the Psalmist told us to do - to number our days.

So if I live to be 75 years old, I have about 8,395 days left to live. That's all, just 8,395 days left to live. But wait a minute. *I don't 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.

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

Secondly, Paul tells us that we must make **"the most of every opportunity"** and he gives a reason, **"because the days are evil."**

**A. 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.**

Just think of the time wasted in sinning. Think of the time wasted in bars or in gambling casinos or in shallow affairs. 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 & a robber!

**B. But it is not just sin that makes demands on our time. Sometimes even good things can make demands.**

***Jesus went to the home of Mary & Martha & Lazarus. He sat down to teach, & 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. 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!" [Luke 10:40]***

***"Martha, Martha," Jesus answered, "You are worried & upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, & it will not be taken away from her" [Luke 10:41-42].***

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.

**APPL.** That's the same mistake that you & I make 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.

**ILL. 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.

**4. 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. And now 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.

**SUM.** 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 this year, & we've already used 48 of them. We do want to make the most of every opportunity, so what are we to do?

### III. UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS

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?

**A. Let me make a couple of suggestions for you to consider. First of all, establish your priorities.**

**1. 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, & say, "This will affect my decisions, my scheduling, my relationship with others, & 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 & nothing will interfere with that."***

**2. You also need to schedule some definite time each day to pray & to read His Word.** Pray for yourself & for your family & for people around you. Pray for the church, & for the missionaries. Sometimes they feel so alone & so far away. You'll never know how much your prayers will mean to them. But you'll be blessed as you grow in your faith & trust in the Lord!

**3. 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 & don't have anything else to interfere. No beepers, no telephones, no interruptions, & 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. They're growing up ever so fast. These are precious moments. 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.

**4. Now most of us have to work.** And I think Christians ought to be good workers. When someone hires a Christian they ought to know they're getting someone who will give them an honest days work, & not cheat them. Because we're Christians we have a responsibility to the Lord to honor Him even in the marketplace.

**SUM. So first of all, establish your priorities.**

**B. 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 "something." Kids go to school & say, "Boy, I wish this day were over."

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

So she stuck with it. She went to classes every day & finally graduated from college. Then she got married & had children, & 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 & really enjoy life."

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 & 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, & get all of the bills paid,



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then I can quit work & really enjoy life."

**Finally**, the last child graduated from college, & all the bills were paid. So she walked into her employer's office & said, "I quit." 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, & I really can't turn down the opportunity." So she worked for another 8 years. Finally, she & her husband retired at the same time. They sold their home & bought a little retirement cottage.

Then they sat down on the swing on their front porch & looked at the family picture album & dreamed about the good old days.

**ILL. 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. So have a happy new year!

**And during the New Year may you have 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
- enough friends to give you comfort
- enough wealth to meet your needs
- enough enthusiasm to make you look forward to tomorrow
- & enough determination to make each day better than the day before.

Lord, please help us to use the 8,760 hours of this year the wisest way we can for you, & for your glory.

**CONCL. 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 & put on the armor of light."**