

Sermon Series: Connected: My Life in the Church
To be used with: Session Five: Connected In Service
Sermon Title Possibilities:
 Don't Waste Your Church
 Every Moment Matters
Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-21

Connection To Unit Theme: *Connected: My Life in the Church* is a six session study from the book of Ephesians, based on *I Am A Church Member* by Thom Rainer. These theme-based sermon outlines will cover the same topics and Scripture passages as are being studied in the small groups. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about. Session 5 of *Connected* is called “Connected In Service” and The Point is, “Serving in the church is not about what I want.”

We are prone to waste our lives. Not only our individual lives but we are also prone to waste our gathered lives—as the body of Christ. We can gather together and make the church all about our own preferences and desires and miss what it’s all about.

Introduction:

Adoniram Judson, one of the first missionaries to Burma, once said this:

A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity...the same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever...each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny....How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness...! It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked¹.

Judson’s words can be applied to how we do life together in a local church. How many times do we come to a worship service, listen to the sermon, sing the songs, say “hello” to a few people, and then go back to our busy lives?

Awhile back I was struck by these words from a Puritan, “we will all, one day, hear our last sermon”. Judson is correct, once we attend that last worship service or go to that last small group meeting, what we did with those graces is irrevocable. Did we use our gatherings with local brothers and sisters for our own selfish ends or did we gather to be filled and to serve? In Ephesians 5:15-21 the apostle Paul encourages the Ephesians to not waste their lives. As we reflect on his words we see how much time matters.

I. Every moment matters (Ephesians 5:15-16)

Note the different uses of the word wisdom in Paul’s letter to Ephesians (1:8-9, 1:17-19, and 3:10). In each of these instances wisdom is equated to living in light of what God has done on our

¹ Adoniram Judson, in E. Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Anson, Randolph & Company, 1883), pp. 13-15

² P.T. O’Brien, *Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar Commentary page 392

³ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 45–6.

behalf. The wise person lives in such a way that reflects the gospel. The unwise person lives as one that has no clue, or even actively opposes, God's gracious saving purposes in the gospel. How do Christians make the best use of time in evil days? We do it by understanding and living out the truthfulness of the gospel. Such a perspective will keep us from killing time. A person that is gospel-saturated realizes that "killing time" is an offense to the Creator of time. Those that are ignorant of the Lord will spend time fooling around with temporary things and neglect the eternal. Assuming that life is all about ourselves, we'll flit away time on fulfilling our own personal comforts, securities, and dreams. Note here the difference between redeeming time and wasting time. Consider how much the mission of the local church suffers because of its members having wrong priorities.

A popular poem from years ago says, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last".

Application: What are ways that you can redeem the time? Are you living in light of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus or are you flitting away your time on the insignificant? What are the time-wasters in your life?

II. Every action matters (5:17)

Note the three different ways that we talk about the will of God (will of decree, will of desire, and will of direction). Many believe that Paul is talking about the will of direction in this text; as if God is telling us to discover the direction that He has set for our lives. In actuality it is the will of desire that Paul is encouraging us to discover. This is really only the active side of verse 15 and 16. Paul is urging the Ephesians to live out God's revealed will.

Essentially what Paul is saying is know the gospel and live it out. What does the fool do? The fool in the Bible is one that disregards God. He can stare truth in the face and go the other way. The fool lacks the wisdom and discernment to live practically. As Peter O'Brien rightly says, "The fool is the one that refuses to acknowledge dependence on God, and acts foolishly and presumptuously." The fool is not only gospel-stupid he is gospel-lazy. It's not a lack of information that makes him a fool. It's a lack of action that makes him a fool. The fool is the one that knows the gospel but doesn't live out the gospel. So, this is an encouragement to be gospel-active. Live out the realities of the gospel. If you are wondering how to "live out" the gospel look no further than Ephesians 4-6.

Application: Are you living out the truths that you know? Are you more passionate about discovering the will of the Lord revealed in His Word or trying to discover the mystery of God's will of direction?

III. Every expression matters (5:18-21)

If you have ever been around a truly drunk person you know it. They cannot and do not cover it up. That is what this text is saying about being filled with the Spirit. Rather than having a worldly expression (like drunkenness) have a Spirit-filled expression.

There is a decent amount of controversy around what it means to be “filled with the Spirit.” I like Peter O’Brien’s summary the best:

we conclude that the content with which believers have been (or are being) filled is the fullness of the triune God or of Christ...to be admonished, ‘Be filled by the Holy Spirit’, then, means that Paul’s readers are urged to let the Spirit change them more and more into the image of God and Christ...²”

There are four ways that this is fleshed out in this text: 1) Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (This is a reference to building one another up through corporate worship. 2) Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. (This is a reference to the vertical aspect of worship). 3) Giving thanks. 4) Submitting to those in authority over you out of reverence for Christ.

This passage is urging believers to joyously express the beauty of God in the way we sing, speak, give thanks, and live our lives.

Conclusion:

In his book, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, John Piper gives what has become an iconic illustration of a wasted life:

“I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider a story from the February 1998 edition of *Reader’s Digest*, which tells about a couple who “took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30 foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.”

At first, when I read it I thought it might be a joke. A spoof on the American Dream. But it wasn’t. Tragically, this was the dream: Come to the end of your life—your one and only precious, God-given life—and let the last great work of your life, before you give an account to your Creator, be this: playing softball and collecting shells.

Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment: ‘Look, Lord. See my shells.’ That is a tragedy. And people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. Over against that, I put my protest: Don’t buy it. Don’t waste your life.³”

I have to wonder whether or not local churches have their own seashells. Things that are present simply based on our own preferences. Perishable things that we’ve given our lives to and called them holy, but in reality they are only a monument to our own fleshly desires. What would happen in our churches if every member was committed to giving everything for the One that truly matters?

² P.T. O’Brien, *Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar Commentary page 392

³ John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 45–6.

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