

If I Only Had One Month To Live

Ephesians 5:15-17

Josh Hunt has written about meeting a friend for breakfast one morning. During the course of their meal, Josh learned that his friend Randy had cancer, and the prognosis was not good. In fact, Randy said, he had been given only six months to live. On his website, Josh wrote that he had a question for his friend Randy: “How does the thought of dying in six months affect your day to day life?” Randy replied, “I am going to just try to help as many people as I can as much as I can for as long as I can. What else can I do?”

Then Josh wrote, “What would I do with my life if I only had 6 months, 182 days, to live?” He went on to describe several different things that would change in his life. He mentioned that he wouldn’t worry about his diet anymore, that he could eat whatever he wanted. He felt his family life was in good shape already, so there wouldn’t be any repair work to be done there. He thought he would like to take a vacation, but mostly he said that he would like to just live life, that he would like to have some normal days mixed in with all the special things he would want to do.

But then he wrote:

If I only had 182 days left, I would want to make each one of those 182 days a masterpiece. I would want to live each day free of grumpiness and boredom and anxiety. I would want each day marked by love, joy, peace, zeal, compassion, faith and hope.

If I had only 182 days left I would savor the texture of the oatmeal, I would appreciate the blueness of the sky, I would enjoy the smell and taste of morning coffee. I would think about God more and problems less. I would sing more and worry less.

If I had only 182 days left I would want to make each moment a masterpiece and squeeze all the life out of every moment I have left. (<http://www.joshhunt.com/mail116.htm>, accessed April 17, 2008.)

That’s really something to think about, isn’t it? But let’s narrow it down a bit. What if you knew your life was going to end in *thirty* days? Kerry and Chris Shook have written a book which quickly become a *New York Times* bestseller. It’s entitled, *One Month to Live*, and the opening words of their book are “If you only had one month to live, what would you change?”

What would I change? What would I do differently? I would write letters to my wife and family members, expressing my love for them, so they would have those words to read after I am gone. I would write about my faith in Christ, how I came to know Him, how I have followed Him and sometimes failed Him, and how I know that He is faithful from everlasting to everlasting. I would throw out or give away a lot of “stuff” that I’ve been keeping “just in case.” Sometimes I

would sleep late, and sometimes I would get up to see the dawning of the day. There might be a night or two when I would set the alarm to go off in the middle of the night, just so I could go outside and look at the stars. I would listen to my favorite music. I would clean off my desk! I would spend at least three of those days at the beach with my family, and at least once I would walk barefooted just in the edge of the surf at night until the sun came up the next morning.

I would write and rewrite and rewrite my last sermon, making sure that it said exactly what I wanted. I would grill a great, big tender steak, and then savor each bite as though it was the only taste I would have of that steak. Then I would eat all the ice cream I wanted. I would call some old friends, and thank them for being a part of my life. I would get in touch with some of my schoolteachers, and make sure they understood what a remarkable influence they were on me.

I would find a place where I could take long walks through woods and fields, simply for the pure enjoyment of seeing what God is doing in nature. I might try to see Niagara Falls, or the Grand Canyon, and relish each moment of the beauty and magnificence of this world, knowing that the wonders which await me cause these to fade away in insignificance.

But most of all, regardless of where I was, and whom I was with, I know that I would pray more, and read my Bible more, and use the time to sweeten my relationship with Jesus in preparation for when I would finally get to see Him face to face! And I would take advantage of whatever opportunity came along to encourage others to surrender their lives to Christ—while they still had time. What would you do differently?

Or narrow it down even further. What if that 182 days, which became 30 days, now is only *one* day? How would you spend what you knew was going to be your last day on earth? If this sermon were to be my last, what kinds of things would I want to leave with you? What if this conversation I'm having was going to be my last—are the things I am saying right now how I want to be remembered? My behavior in this day—is this how I want people to remember me? Would my last letter be written differently? Would my last email be more loving and kind? Would I value the moments as they slipped away? Would I hear the birds singing, or really watch the children laughing? Would I get around to spending time with those I love? Or would I rush through that day as I have too many others, too busy for family and friends, and too preoccupied to spend any time soaking my spirit in the Bible, or to fellowship with the God before Whom I would soon stand?

Some would say, “That’s morbid. I don’t want to think about it.” Listen! It’s not morbid at all. It just helps us to refocus our priorities and realize that every one of us has a limited amount of time on the earth. And most of us would make some adjustments, even if very small ones, if we knew we had only a short time left here. Another question the Shooks asked in their book is

“What keeps us from living this way now?” If those are the changes I *would* make, what keeps me from doing those kinds of things right now?

As we look at the past year, or last month, or yesterday, or even just this morning while the day was still young and fresh, what can we say that we have done to improve our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, or to fortify the condition of our souls? What evidence could we offer that we took advantage of the time we had to nurture our relationship with the Lord Jesus?

In Ephesians 5:15-17, Paul has just reminded the Christians there that their lives used to be quite different. Christ had replaced their bitterness and anger with the true love that comes from God. He had brought light into their darkness, so they in turn could be light in the darkness that still surrounded them on all sides. Wisdom had replaced foolishness. But now he tells them—and us—that we are to live our lives *“making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”* He was saying to them, “You’ve wasted enough time living like that. Don’t waste any more! Buy back the time you have left.” Then he tells us, *“Understand what the Lord’s will is.”*

Scientific studies have shown that ten out of ten people eventually die. In fact, more than one hundred fifty thousand people die every day. And none of us knows when that day will be for us. Whether we are young or old, none of us knows when the time will come for us to step over to the Other Side of Eternity. Every second that passes is one that is gone forever.

There was an ancient statue called “Kairos,” which is the Greek word for “time” in the sense of “opportunity.” It’s also the word Paul used in Ephesians 5:16. The statue was of a rather handsome young man with wings on his feet. The back of his head was bald, but the hair on the front of his head was long and fell down across his eyes. That sounds rather strange, until you consider the significance. The wings on the feet suggest swiftness, that opportunity comes quickly and passes us by unless we grab hold of it. That he has a lock of hair on the front of his head and is bald on the back indicated that while he is easy to catch as he approaches, yet when he passes and the moment of opportunity has gone, he cannot be caught. Once the moment of opportunity has come we must reach out and grab it, because when it is gone, it is gone forever.

So before too many more days go by, before Kairos runs past, let’s take a good look at how we can redeem the time, or buy it up, while it is still available to us.

1 Apply Biblical principles of wisdom, vv. 15-16

We covered verse fifteen in detail last week, but look at it again in light of verse sixteen. They are actually one sentence in the original, so we need to read them that way. *“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every*

opportunity, because the days are evil.” The Bible makes a direct connection between wisdom, and how we spend our time. For example, Psalm 90:12 reads, “*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*”

Adoniram Judson was a missionary years and years ago. He once wrote, “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 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 marked.”

Or we could put it another way. Each day is like a blank sheet of paper. As we pass through it, we are making marks on that page. When the day is over, we tear that page off and send it into eternity. What the day is at that point, it always will be. But we cannot do this on our own. Unless we apply Biblical principles of wisdom, we will find at the end that we have merely been spinning our wheels, that we have been chasing after the wind, as we read in Ecclesiastes. To paraphrase Paul here, we could say that it takes Godly wisdom to make the most of every opportunity.

2 Look around for opportunities to do good, v. 16

Imagine that you pick up today’s newspaper, and as you are turning the pages, your eyes fall on an advertisement from your favorite store. Not only is the ad from your favorite store, but you also discover that they are running a special on an item that you have been looking for and needing for a long time. And not only that, but the price they are asking is by far the lowest price you have ever seen advertised for that item. Then you see the fine print: “Quantities are limited.”

You know this is not going to last, so you make every effort you can to get to the store and purchase that item. You want to make the most of this opportunity to “buy up” that item. That is what is behind the idea Paul uses here in verse sixteen when he tells us to “*make the most of every opportunity.*” The King James reads, “*Redeeming the time.*” The word Paul used for “redeem” or “make the most of” was used of someone going to the slave market and buying a slave for the purpose of setting him free. That’s where the idea of redemption comes from.

William Shakespeare, in his play, *Julius Caesar*, compared our lives to a ship waiting for high tide before it can sail out of the harbor. He wrote,

There is a tide in the affairs of men,

*Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.*

(4.3.217)

In other words, if the opportunity is not seized when once it is presented, it may never come again, and the ship will be consigned to stay in the harbor. There are many people who are stuck in the shallows of their lives because they do not take advantage of doing good. They do not redeem the time as it is presented to them. When high tide comes, they are unprepared.

When I was in high school I was introduced to an old quote from a Quaker missionary from France to the United States in the 19th century, by the name of Stephen Grellet. He said:

"I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again."

Look at the word "time" or "opportunity." One Greek scholar (E. C. White, *Kaironomia*, p. 13) says that this is not the word for clock time, but refers instead to a season, "a passing instant when an opening appears which must be driven through with force if success is to be achieved." Here is a story which will help us see how important this can be. In 1967, the Green Bay Packers were playing the Dallas Cowboys in Green Bay for the right to represent the National Football League in only the second Super Bowl to be played. The weather conditions through the game were so severe that the game has come to be known as "The Ice Bowl." When the game began, it was 15 below with a minus-49 wind chill. The teams battled back and forth, somehow managing to push each other up and down the field. As the game was nearing the end, the temperature had dropped to 17 below and a minus-57 wind chill.

But that game became famous not just because of the cold. The Green Bay Packers' right guard, Jerry Kramer, had been studying films of the Dallas Cowboys games, and he had noticed that the man he would be facing on the other side of the ball tended to be off-balance when he first rose up from his position.

With only sixteen seconds left in the game, Dallas was leading 17-14, but the Packers were threatening to score. Now was the opportunity for Kramer to use what he knew about the opposing lineman. When the play was called, Kramer pushed that opponent aside, wedging an opening for Bart Starr to sneak into the end zone for a touchdown. Jerry Kramer took advantage of his opportunity, and Bart Starr took advantage of his opportunity, and the Green Bay Packers won 21-17.

How many times through our lives does the opportunity open up in front of us like that? And they are so much more important than a football game! How many times in a single day do you

and I have for doing something good, to encourage someone, to represent Christ, to speak to others of their eternal destiny? The idea behind these words is that every time we can do something good, we should. But recognizing the opportunities with godly wisdom requires that we look for them. They are not always going to just fall into our laps. If we are going to buy up the time we have remaining, we should be looking for opportunities to serve God and serve others. Our church should see every occasion as a perfect opportunity to serve His Kingdom. We as individual believers should be looking for opportunities. And it's not just so we can take advantage of them. It is primarily so we can be obedient to Scripture, and present our lives as living sacrifices to the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Recognize that the days are evil, v. 16

Paul says in verse sixteen, *“Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”* Paul has already described the darkness of evil that surrounded them. He says the days are evil, and *that* is why you must take advantage of every opportunity. The word for “evil” means “to waste away.” That sure describes what happens to much of our time, doesn't it? But it especially applies to opportunities we have that we don't take advantage of.

Paul is showing us something we often overlook: the evil days present us with opportunities! The darkness around us make people want to see the Light! The emptiness of evil only points out how full we can be in Christ! The bad times, the difficult times, the dark seasons in our lives present us with a unique set of opportunities to do something good for Christ and for others. For the believer, the sluggish economy becomes an opportunity to help others and do good. For the follower of Christ, an illness becomes an opportunity to reflect the glory of Christ. For one who knows Jesus as personal Savior, a time of struggle and grief and heartache becomes an opportunity to push through to victory on the other side. These adversities do not come into our lives to hurt us or to push us back, but to advance us. These “evil times” are the things which create the opportunities in the first place.

Realizing the days are evil helps me to redeem the time because I won't waste it by grumbling or complaining about the challenges that face me. I am able to look life in the face and say, “Yes, that's evil. Yes, that situation is less than ideal, but through Jesus I'm going to redeem this situation. Through Jesus I am going to see this as the opportunity it is.”

4 Become aware of what God wants in any particular situation, v. 17

The days are “wasting away,” the windows are closing, the doors are swinging shut. Paul says that we need to understand this, and wisely use the time we have. He tells us in verse seventeen that we should *“not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”*

We might read the words, “understand what the Lord’s will is,” and we might automatically think about our own lives and our own futures. Where is God leading? What does He want me to do with my life? Should I do this, or go there? But this verse is not talking just about that. It’s talking about the fact that God, as the Creator of the season that we will be here, is sovereign over us as well. So then, if we are to be faithful, and “*find out what pleases the Lord,*” as we read back in verse ten, then we are to work to become aware of what God wants, regardless of the situation or set of circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The key to *understanding* this verse is the word “*understand.*” It means “to put the facts together in order to reach a conclusion.” So the Scriptures are telling us that we are to take everything we know about loving and imitating God and serving Christ and be kind to others, etc.—to take all of that and put it together so we can reach a conclusion about what God wants us to do. It means to take the circumstances as we can see them, put them together with what we already know about the Scriptures and about the character of God, and reach a conclusion about our next course of action. It means that we don’t jump out there on our own and do whatever we feel like doing, or saying whatever we feel like saying, without first consulting our Heavenly Father about it. And if He says, “No, that behavior or that decision or that choice is inconsistent with what I expect from you,” then we don’t do it. We sure have a long way to go, don’t we?

Understanding what God desires helps me to redeem the time, because I don’t waste it on frivolous things that have nothing to do with my relationship to Him.

So, what would you do if you found that you only had six months to live? What about only one month? Or what about only one day? Make a list of those things, even if only mentally. Then ask yourself, “If that is what I would do then, what prevents me from doing those things now?” Apply the Biblical principles of wisdom. Look for the opportunities God gives us for doing good. Recognize that evil times and times of adversity create unique opportunities we could have no other way. Become aware of what God wants in any particular situation.

“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.”