Making the Most of Your Time

Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-17

2011 Time, Talent, Treasure Series

Pastor Mark Kremer

Video 1:

"My name is Brenda Henderson, and I help out at McPhee Elementary with three kindergarten classes. I was wanting to find an area to serve; the McPhee Elementary project seemed to be a perfect fit. First of all, when I get here, I go to the kindergarten classes and I gather up all the information for their Thursday folders and then whatever else the teachers might need—from helping kids with testing or helping them with their numbers or just even zipping up coats to go out to recess. I love helping these kids; I love being around these kids. We do *high-fives* all the time, hugs. A little boy the other day just says, "Brenda, I love you." In the very beginning I'd have to say my favorite moment was helping a little boy with his numbers. I started out helping with 0-5 and then two weeks later I came back and he counted to 100. And so just knowing that every little bit of help that you can give these kids makes a big difference in their life. I've also joined a team of 5-6 other women and we do an 8 key behavioral party once a month. There are several women that come and provide food for the parent-teacher conferences and I've heard in the teacher's lounge that they are so thankful for the Berean women that do this, because it wouldn't get done otherwise. I go home and my children ask me, "Mom, why are you going to a different school than our school?" and I explain to them that, "You know, guys, I've worked at your school and I've been there and helped and these kids don't get help from some of their parents, and you know, if I can make a difference and make a smile happen, you know, that's the best. I know the job that I'm doing for them is important, but these kids are reaching me more than I could ever expect."

Mark Kremer:

We are in for a real treat this morning. The story that you just saw—the partnership that we have with McPhee Elementary—one of the poorest, most diverse schools in the urban core of our city is the first of seven amazing stories you're going to hear this morning. This service is going to be very different from what we normally do here at Lincoln Berean. In the month of August every year we do a series on *Time, Talent and Treasure* and typically we would pick out a passage that speaks to that particular topic. This weekend we're on the topic of *Time* and how to use our time and how God wants us to think about time. And so typically, and we have over the last years, picked a passage and exposited that passage and taught on it and mixed in a little bit of worship. But this morning you're going to hear your fellow Bereans speak with their life. They're going to tell stories of how they are investing their time and these stories are going to inspire you and challenge you to join them in investing your time in the things that last forever. We are so excited to be able to share this with you. Now the challenge we had was a limited amount of time and we can only do about seven stories. But I have to tell you what's so cool and so amazing about our church is there are literally hundreds of stories that we could have recorded coming out of the seats of this auditorium—of what you are all involved in around this city and around the world and that's an amazing thing to be a part of. All of what you're going to hear is really these folks applying some truth that we know well and we've heard again and again here. But I want us to read these verses out loud together from Ephesians that form the foundation, the bedrock theology of everything you're going to hear this morning. Read with me as the Scripture appears on the screen, starting with Ephesians 2:10.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them. ...Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us... Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (*NASB, Ephesians 2:10; 5:1-2a, 15-17)

It all begins with that Ephesians 2:10. We are his masterpieces, created in Christ Jesus as new creations, but we are not masterpieces intended to be hung over a mantle and just admired. No, we are like finely crafted instruments that God has fashioned to be used in His hand. Imagine being an inventor and inventing a fine surgical instrument that could be life-saving in the operating room. And imagine if you crafted and made that instrument and then you just put it up in the lobby of the hospital for everybody to admire—this fine piece of work that someone had done. No, that was created to be in use in the operating room. It would be a waste any other way and that's what it is with us. We are **His workmanship, created to do good works.** I mean it describes what those works are—that we are to do the things that Jesus did. He's not only our Savior; He's our example. We are to imitate Him. We are to imitate the kinds of things He did. And what did He do? He gave His life up to the least, to the lonely, to the lost. Jesus gave Himself up for us and so *we* engage in the presence of the least and lost and lonely. We have to be present with them incarnationally—to demonstrate so they can see and experience the love of God. And that really comes down to those last verses. It's all about where we invest our time—where we give the days, the hours, the minutes of our life. You're going to hear these folks share the ways that God has led them to invest their time, their lives, in things that really matter.

Now there are two things that I want you to do as we go through this service this morning. It's going to be a mix of these stories and music. We're going to sing to each other; we're going to be challenged, so don't leave—right down to the last story—for the last song is going to tie it all together. You just don't want to miss this! But there are two things I want you to do. The first is I want us just to celebrate this morning the work that God's doing in this church and, through us, into the community and the world. That means when you hear these stories and you want to clap, you want to shout, you want to say, "Amen," by all means let's do it; let's celebrate what God's doing. And secondly I want us to open our eyes and our ears and, most importantly, our hearts and let God's Spirit speak to us and stir us to know to either re-up the call He has on our life or perhaps to clarify the call for the first time. And if your heart this morning is not moved and challenged and encouraged, then I would say you have a serious heart condition. You might want to see your spiritual cardiologist, the Great Physician. The Doctor is in the house this morning! (laughter) This is going to be powerful, so let's jump right in and hear what the folks of this church want to say to us about what really matters.

Video 2: Mike & Sheri Bossard

"We knew the Spauldings in Columbus; we met there at church. They started the International Student Ministry and we watched that from afar and we supported them for those years. So we were praying, "Boy, wouldn't that be a wonderful way to get involved in a ministry like that at UNL?" A year later the Spauldings had transferred from the University of Northern Colorado to Nebraska and they helped begin the ministry here." "We have these meetings every Friday night. We have what they call International Student Fellowship and so it's kind of a regular time with a dinner and a speaker on Friday nights." "We are able to invite the students that we meet at these large group meetings to the Berean church. At first we invited them just once-in-a-while to church,

but then in the last year we decided: Let's make this more intentional. Let's make this an every week experience for those who want it to be that." "At the beginning, we started actually just by inviting a couple and then they came and they loved it so much, they started inviting their friends, who invited their friends, and so now it turned out to be fifteen to twenty students every Sunday who want to come to church and then afterwards to dinner at our house." "We love to have one-on-one discipleship as we have opportunity, and this last year Sherri had, I think, five one-on-one discipleship meetings going with some girls and I had about five going with some boys and that's where you really develop relationship. Twenty-five hundred international students go to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and, when you think about that number, that would fill our sanctuary, every seat full plus overflow, so it's a huge mission field."

"You know the students that come here are students who, all their lives, have been competing and preparing for this opportunity. And when they get here they need to compete for internships, for tests and quizzes and then, if that's not enough, then even when they leave their classroom, they go out into the culture—which is a brand new culture to them—so they're under a lot of stress. So I just love to give them one day where they can come to church, come home with us, and just experience the grace-filled life—a life where we just love you. You don't have to be great; you don't have to know it all; there's no quiz or test here. It's just that we'd just love you to be part of our family. I'm a teacher; he works in the schools. We've never gone to Bible College; we're just ordinary people but we're just willing to open the door of our home to anybody who wants to come in."

"We have the opportunity this fall to pick up students at the airport. The neat thing is the University of Nebraska trusts ISI (International Students Incorporated) to pick up the students at the airport." "The thing is, at this point, we just actually need more helpers, more workers, because there are two hundred students to be picked up at the airport this year. We cannot do all of that but if anybody else wants to be part of the plan, there are these opportunities to go meet someone and just help them: to drive them back to the University and get settled and this is really such an awesome opportunity to help students." "The level of commitment is what you want it to be. You could just pick up students and help get them from the university to our big meetings. You could help bring food or, better yet, if you would like to invite them to your home and share the love of Christ, as a family, I think that would be a wonderful thing."

Video 3: John and Sally Hollingsworth

(Intro, children singing, "The B-I-B-L-E") "We came to Berean in 1981 and Sally immediately got involved in the children's ministry and started serving in the 2's & 3's at that time. And it wasn't until maybe seven years later that she asked me to help her. I was doing other things in the church and enjoying those things and really didn't think that the children's ministry was my thing but it's exciting to be involved and we're very blessed and very thankful that God has been able to use us."

"They say the cutest things and one Sunday a little guy came in and just went running up to John and said, 'Teacher John, are we doing God again?' and we said, 'Yup, Mac, we are, and next Sunday, too.' So it's very fun. Yes, over and over, it's what we do." "3-year-olds are so open and a lot of times the things I teach them they've never heard before and their eyes are just big. And I'll never forget one Sunday, when I was telling some great miracle that God did, one little kid right in front said, 'No way!' and I said, 'Yes!' That's exactly the response I wanted to get from those kids—amazement and astonishment because God is amazing and astonishing and it's a great privilege to teach God's word to those dear little kids." "To hear that little child say, 'I asked Jesus

to be my Savior,' or 'I asked Jesus into my heart' is so special to us and just to have the privilege to be a part of bringing a little child to that place is why we're here. It is!"

Mark Kremer:
Nobody can preach better about investing your life in things that matter than John and Sally Hollingsworth. Did you get that? Sally has done this for thirty years and John for twenty-three. Literally hundreds and hundreds of children and families have been impacted. I want to see the hands of everybody here whose child, grandchild, or you, yourself, were in their ministry in the 3's. Awesome! And you know what? We, Donna and I, kept having children just so we could have more kids in that class. I calculated that, just over the last twenty-three years, that's twelve hundred Sundays. They come on Saturday night to church; they spend all Sunday morning and hours during the week. They are passionate and skillful in doing what they do, in investing in the lives of these kids. One thing I really appreciate about John and Sally is I think they really listen to God. They try to follow His lead, His calling, and that's why they're so passionate about what they do. But recently they just let us know, you know, that God was calling them to step out of that role of a leader of that department and do some other ministry things in the church. And that really begs the question at this moment: Who will step into their shoes? Who will be another John and Sally Hollingsworth? Who will get a hold of a vision and a passion from God for the 2-year-olds, the 3-year-olds, some other department, some other of the least and lost and lonely? Are not John and Sally awesome in telling us that it's worth it to invest your life in the things that last forever? Nobody says it better.

Video 4: The Johnson Family
"Just handing out food can make a difference in people's lives and hopefully show the light of God." "A lot of these people come from different backgrounds; it's kind of interesting, really." "Many of these people—they've been out there before—they're homeless and near-homeless." "Just the basic needs of caring for people and giving them food. You know that's just a great way to let God's love just kind of flow through us." (Prayer before serving) "Father God, I thank you for what a privilege it is to serve You, because You remind us in the Scriptures that whenever we feed the least of these, we also feed You, so bless us today; watch over us; protect us; keep us warm; in Your precious name we pray, amen. Alright, let's go." "It's time we roll."

(To the people outside, while serving the meal line) "Well, you know, we love you." "Well, what's not to love?" "I know! Thanks a lot guys; I appreciate it." "You bet. Hey, have a good night. Stay warm."

"Abby just said this morning, 'I'm excited we get to go serve soup tonight,' so they like it too, they like it a lot." "It shows them that there's a huge need in the city, and a lot of times people think that they need to go, like across seas, to do something good and like spread the Word of God, but it shows that there's a big need right here in Lincoln." "First off I only did it because my parents were doing it, but now I want to do it because it's fun." "I just like doing it because it's fun." "I like the fact that we're actually meeting a need. There were one hundred fifty meals we served last time and I think the time before that, it was one hundred thirty meals, so there's obviously a need there and it's neat, as a family, we can team up and meet that need." "I, honestly, look forward to it." " I love it; I just love it."

Video 5: Kurt Sandquist and Car Care Ministry Team
"Car Care Ministry got started last year with some guys in the Empty Nest Ministry Leadership. They were hands-on guys that really wanted to do something for other people, particularly disadvantaged single moms." "I love cars. My passion is cars, so it's really enjoyable to come here and help out." "Not only do I get to see a tangible way to be God's hands and feet to these ladies, but the fellowship with the guys is just awesome." "I was always looking for some more volunteering that we can do and, especially, do it as a family." "We just both got really excited about it right off the bat and so it was just a blessing because we were looking, actually, for something that we'd be able to invest our time in and so it worked out perfectly." " We've got some really bad car history, too, so we knew that we wanted to be involved in something that meant this much to us—to see lives changed."

Woman: "The whole car thing is like; it's like this great big unknown that I don't know how to deal with. I don't know what's worth fixing on this one. I'm trying to save my money; I'm trying to not go into debt."

Man: "Being able to interact with the ladies who come, and we serve them, and they're just so appreciative and it's a wonderful feeling. It's pretty great." "It's more than just an oil change. We do air filters, spark plugs, fuel pumps, batteries; we've done tires; we've done mufflers; we've done power steering. We've done a lot of brakes and it's awesome to be able to say there's no charge."

Woman: "I've been having some trouble with some steering in my car. I just took it to a mechanic, thought I had it fixed, but it's been getting harder and harder to drive it and Car Care took a look at it and ended up doing way more than what I expected them to. They even vacuumed out the interior. Essentially I have a brand new car. Well, not really, but good enough. I know it's going to get me through another couple years and, thanks to these guys. I really appreciate that. I have a sense of ease or security when I'm driving now, because I know my car—I can depend on it."

Man: "Some of the things that the ministry could really use, donation-wise, are gift cards to Advanced Auto, any parts store, Sears for tools, Wal-Mart to get fluids, used tools." "We've gotten a couple of cars donated to the ministry. We've given one away already to a single mom within the church. We have another one that's going to be gone through and refurbished and really, what we're looking for, is an opportunity to just continue to let God grow this ministry and build it the way He wants. We're hoping that, in time, we would have a shop or a garage that is a permanent automotive type of repair shop. The potential for ministry is just incredible."

Video 6: Mike Anderson
"The name of our organization is Global Orphan Hope and the organization started in its current form a little over a year ago. It started from twelve members from the church taking a trip to Haiti and, when we went to the orphanages that we saw, the conditions were not acceptable in any way, shape, or form. A lady walked over to a big, wooden door that had a padlock on it this big. She took the key and she opened the padlock and out of a room maybe twenty by twenty, out rolled fifty toddlers, squinting because the sun was so bright. They were locked up all the time. And I went in the room and I saw, I think, maybe four beds, not a single toy. It upsets you and you want to do something about it. And when we got back from Haiti, everyone felt that there was a lot more that we could do."

"Our group is predominantly from Lincoln and from Lincoln Berean, and we're looking at building an orphanage in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, that would house fifty-five children. We've purchased our land; we have our prints being drawn right now and we're hoping to start construction in October/November. We're hoping to have it completed by March or April and then have our team move down May or June."

"I'm in my early 60's and I really want to take this season in my life and see if I can't do the very best that I can, at this point in time, to impact the world for Christ. And, you know, it's amazing: everybody has something that they can give and they have something that they can offer. We need prayer; we need support; we need a lot of volunteers to help us with construction. We need medical and dental people; we need educators; we need people that will just go down and spend time with the kids. The number one criteria is, is that you faithfully walk daily with the Lord. Once you have that, everything else is learnable; it's trainable and we're just looking for people with a servant's heart. The main reason that we're there is to reach these children and to bring them to Christ so that, as they grow older, and they stay in their culture, that these children can impact that country and start to make a change." (Children singing Jesus Love Me)

Mark Kremer:
Mike said what we absolutely believe with all our hearts, as a leadership of this church. Everybody has something to give. That was the impetus, some years ago—several years ago—when we started this whole Church Unleashed Movement within our church, because we believe that God has put passion and vision and skill in the hearts and minds of every single one of His followers. And the Church just needs to give permission to people to live out the calling that God's put on them and to cheer and equip and celebrate and get out of the way and watch God do what only God can do through His people, all over the city and around the world. And Global Orphan Hope is just one example.

I will never forget, just a couple of years ago, when several women who are empty-nesters, were sitting in the hallway for days, dreaming and planning on how they could change the orphan situation in the world, right here from Lincoln, Nebraska. That's the Church Unleashed! In addition to those movements that just come from you and the things that God puts on your heart to do, that we want to be supportive of and cheer on, we have also formed strategic partnerships locally, just like we're doing globally, with different organizations around this community, like the McPhee Elementary school that you saw at the very beginning. A brand new one that's just starting is a partnership between Lincoln Berean and Peoples' City Mission to reach the teenagers who are on the streets of Lincoln. You may have read about it in the newspaper, seen the little press conference we did on TV last week, but we're excited about the fact that we can do something. We can get personally involved in reaching out to kids who are in trouble, who are in need, who may be in danger and provide a *Safe Place* for them, but also we can come alongside and just be a listening ear and a help to them at our drop-in center—and that's all launching in just a couple of weeks.

Now on both levels this morning there are *Church Unleashed* booths where you can see and meet the people who are involved in some of these various things that are going on. Next weekend we're having a Service Expo, where all the ministries within the church, and many from out in the community, will be here. If you want to connect and learn more and find out about that, you can stop at those booths today or next week. The *Safe Place* ministry is also at the spotlight booth, right out here on the 100-level, if you want to get involved in reaching troubled youth in Lincoln.

Many of you are maybe just new to the faith. You're just taking your first steps with the Lord and you're thinking, "Gosh I'd love to get on mission; I just don't know what I don't know. I want to keep growing." And we have a great ministry of personal interaction with you called *Next Step*, and Pastor Ken is more-than-happy to sit down with you one-on-one and just walk through where you're at in your life and help you figure out the *next step* and he's out at the Spotlight booth this morning, too. You can stop and visit with him.

My son, Sam who is seven years old played on a soccer team this spring and, at the end of the season, we had a family get-together and a pool party at the house of one of the families here from Lincoln Berean. So the party got started and all these dads are sitting around the pool and the host dad says, "Hey, you see that basket that's at the end of the pool? And you see the diving board that's at the other end of the pool?" He says, "Very few guys have ever been able to put a basket in the basket while jumping off the diving board." You would have thought somebody was offering a new car. (laughter) I mean, instantaneously, all of these dads got up and went to the diving board and, for the next several hours, relentlessly pursued the objective of putting the basket in the hoop. One of those guys shot over one hundred times. I'm not naming his name because he's providing security for me this morning. (laughter) As the fifty-two-year-old dad, who stayed in my chair at the other end of the pool, while these thirty-three-year-old dads all got in the game, I observed this very carefully. My first observation was, "You know these guys are just too macho; they're just competing with one-another, you know, they're just trying to show they're still tough guys; they still got it." And then as I watched, I saw, "No, it was something different." And that is, "It is hard-wired into each and every one of us to love a challenge. We were made for challenge. We were made for adventure. We were made to tackle the things and do the thing that's never been done before, that we've never done. God wired that into us. That's wakes us up early in the morning, it's the challenge. It's why some people are workaholics, because in their business they find challenge. It's what keeps you up at night. It's what makes you go the extra mile. We thrive on challenge because that's being made in the image of God."

In 1924 D.H. Lawrence, the English novelist, bemoaned the fact of what was happening in the church, when he wrote, "The adventure has gone out of the Christian venture." And you know, I think he was right, as rightly observing what was going on around him, because in that particular day, as in many times in the church, unless you are one of those few who decided to give your life to go to some distant, dark, dangerous place for a lifetime as a missionary, the only message you got in the church was, "Just make sure you show up; serve on a committee you don't really want to serve on and do something you really don't want to do, just to keep the church going." There's no challenge in that. Even in the eighty years after that, many evangelical endeavors were started, but it was always started by the few and everybody else simply supported and gave and went on with their lives.

But God is doing a fresh new thing in our generation. There is a new moving of the Spirit that is happening today and that is to say, "No, the ministry—the work of God—is in the hands of all of His people." All of His people are to be engaged. Everyone is called. Everyone has skill and ability and talent and passion and time and everyone can make a difference. The days when somebody in the church—people in the pew—would say, "Somebody really ought to do something about that," are gone. Today is the day when men and women, children, youth, 20-somethings, retired people are standing up and saying, "I will do something about that. I can do something about that." And that's what's so exciting to be in our church—because this is happening! It is a movement of God that's happening. Right here, among us—hundreds and hundreds of people—and we're only telling the stories about how people are using their time outside of their work. But many have caught a

vision and the challenge of using their work, using that—"We're doing things, adventurous things around the world." I'm taking, in a couple of weeks, farmers from Lincoln, Nebraska, to go to the very ends—one of the most remote places of India and help these Indian pastors start to learn how to farm and to create a farming community, to support the village and the community as an opening for the gospel. These farmers would never have dreamed two years ago they were going to go on that kind of adventure.

I'm telling you, where we lose our children is when we say, "Just come to church; be good and stay out of trouble." Where is the challenge in that? It's trying to figure out how to get into trouble. (laughter) But it's time for us to say, "No! God's invited us on a great big challenge—a great big adventure—and, "Let's go and live it." That's what these people are telling us to do. That's what they're sharing with us.

Just like the host of that pool party basically said to the whole group of guys standing around that pool, "Hey, game on!" I think what you're hearing today from these folks is, "Game on!" Not a competition, but a call, "Step up to the plate; get in the game; get out of the stands; get out of the balcony; get off the sidelines; get in the action where God's going to show up and use you to do something that will last forever." Now don't leave us. We're going to sing a couple songs, one more awesome story, and then wrap it up in a way that's only fitting—so we walk out of here this morning, committed to being in the game, together, for the glory of God!

Video 7: The Penner Family

"Our family's passionate for the less fortunate comes from just wanting to live out our faith in a practical way—being able to demonstrate to our kids that the things about God and the things in the Bible are true and are life-changing." "Just involving them in some of the activities and taking items to the mission or letting them do care packages around Christmas for Operation Christmas Child." "We also have several child sponsorships, one with Tiny Hands and one with Compassion International. They get the letters back and they can read about how much of a difference our support has been in those kids' lives. I was just talking with someone from Lincoln Berean about how we could get involved and we'd like to do it as a family. He said, "Well, the sky's the limit. You know, whatever you can think of as a family to do." I came home and just shared that with my kids and asked them what they would like to do and...I'm like, "How can I help Tiny Hands," after my dad just came downstairs? And then I thought, "Bookmarks." First, we had to cut things; we had to measure them to get the right size for the bookmarks. We can't just, like, cut them in one straight line...and we thought how to decorate it, like punch a hole and put yarn through it, and we finally can actually draw on it. And then we get to laminate it and then we sell them to our neighbors and other people that we know." " Then our middle child, Lily, our 5-year-old, she quickly followed, so that was nice to see." "Josiah, on the other hand, was kind of not getting the thing yet; you know; he's very young." "It's very distressing to see their sad faces and you're like, "What if that was me? Would you rather be a person just waiting and waiting for somebody to rescue you, or would you rather actually help somebody? We really want to help and it felt so good to help out."

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