Dec. 30/31, 2023

Time

Re-Think Series

Ephesians 5:15-16; Psalm 90:12

Pastor Matt Meyer

Within the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus first begins to preach, the first recorded words that we have from Him are these, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**." Now repentance is a word that we tend to think means to change direction, to turn around, to go one hundred and eighty degrees. But the word in Greek is actually metanoeo, which means to change the way that you think, the idea being that if you change the way that you think, it will result in a change in the way that you live. So, in other words, Jesus is essentially saying, "Hey, there's a better way to live. You can live in the kingdom of God right now, but it starts with changing the way you think about life and God and pretty much everything else." And to those that were listening at that time, who had open hearts and open minds, that thought began to pierce into their thinking, and a whole new way of life took off for those people. And that's available to us as well.

That's where the idea, where this series "Re-Think" comes from. Repentance—or repent—can sometimes be a word that carries some religious baggage for people. So the idea of "Re-think" is an effort to avoid that, to help us think differently about different aspects of our lives. So this is a series that, as a church, we will return to over and over again, to think about these different aspects together, to rethink about them. But today, this morning, we want to focus on one thing, one aspect, and that is, "How we spend our time." Now with a new year getting ready to start tomorrow, many people are already thinking about changing habits, starting fresh, and what does this new year hold for me? And I think for all of us in the room, the new year holds a lot of opportunities that will probably come your way and mine: opportunities for each of us to spend more time with family, opportunities perhaps to start a business this year, opportunities to maybe purchase your first home, opportunities to go on vacation with your family, to go on a business trip, to go on maybe a school trip for those of you students that are in the room, opportunities to learn a new skill, opportunities to start a family for some of you, opportunities to grow in your career, to spend more time with your neighbors, to serve those in need. And the list could just go on and on with the opportunities that are going to come our way. So the question I want us to think about is this: "How do we navigate all of those opportunities? How do we figure out which ones to take advantage of and which ones to just let pass by? How can I get the most out of my life?" Because if you're like me, you don't want to miss out on anything. So, how do I get the most out of all the opportunities that I've been given? What would God have to say to me about that? What advice would He give to us in terms of stewarding our time well, rethinking how we use our time?

We're going to spend a few minutes in a couple of different passages this morning. I'm going to invite you, if you have your Bible, to open to Ephesians, Chapter 5. We're looking at a couple of verses there, and then we're going to jump over to the Old Testament a little bit. But in Ephesians chapter 5, this is a letter that Paul, the Apostle Paul, has written to the followers of Jesus who live in the city of Ephesus. And in the first half of the letter, he lays out his theology of what Jesus has done for us in His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and what that means for us as

people who follow Him. But then in the second half of the letter, chapters 4 through 6, he gets very, very practical in a lot of different ways. He says over and over again, "Walk this way…walk this way…walk this way." And he tells us what it looks like to live in the kingdom of God on a daily basis. We're just going to look at two verses in chapter 5, verses 15 and 16, because I think these verses are a direct answer to the question I posed, "What do you do with the opportunities that come your way? How do you handle them? What would it look like to steward them well?"

> **Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men** (and women) **but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.** (*NASB, Ephesians 5:15-16)

So Paul says, "**Be careful how you walk**." The Greek word means to regulate or conduct one's life. So literally he's saying, "Be careful how you live." The **walk** is *life*. We all walk. Paul doesn't say, "*If* you walk", he says "**Be careful *how* you walk**." Be careful how you live your life. Live in a wise way. Be wise about it. Make the most of your time. Now in the Greek language, there are two words for **time**. There's the word *chronos*, and there's the word *kairos*. Chronos is where we get our term *chronological*. It's the succession of hours, and days and weeks and years and decades. It's the movement of time during your life. It's the time you live here on the earth. The word *chronos* is not found in this passage, but it's similar to the idea that we all live, we all walk through chronological time. The other word, kairos, refers to specific moments, specific points in time within the chronos, within the hours and the days in the years. Kairos is the word Paul uses when he says, "***Make the most of your time,*** (Make the most of your kairos.)" If you have an NIV Bible this morning, it says, "***Make the most of your opportunities****."* Literally, the words "***make the most of***" mean *to redeem, to buy up, to buy back, to take advantage of.* So Paul is saying there are going to be specific opportunities in your life, perhaps this next year there are going to be defining moments, specific opportunities that are going to come your way. And Paul is saying, "Take advantage of them, use them wisely, because they're going to come your way. And then they'll be gone, **because the days are evil**, which just means the days will be full of annoyances and hardships and labors, because that's the nature of being humans and walking on earth through chronological time. That's just the nature of what it means to be a human in a fallen world.

Now the people in Ephesus, I think, probably had a particular picture in their minds when they had this read to them. I think they might have been thinking of a statue, a very strange looking statue. Statues were everywhere in the ancient world. One person wrote that, "At one point in Greece, there were more statues than people," so there's a lot of statues! But there was one statue called Opportunity, or Kairos, and it was very strange looking. It looked something like this. (Picture on the screen) A little strange, right? I want you to notice a couple of things about this image. First, I want you to notice all the hair that's hanging off in the front, and then that it's bald in the back. It's a little strange looking, but it's a great picture of the way opportunity works in our lives. First you have to grab a hold of it when it's coming towards you, because once it's passed, you can't get it back. You can't get a hold of it. You've got to grab it by the hair, both hands. Now notice also, there are wings on his back; there are wings on his feet, and he's on his tiptoes, again illustrating the fleeting nature of opportunity and how it works in our lives. So Paul says, "Grab ahold of that hair with both hands; grab the opportunity, but do it wisely."

So what would that look like? How can I be wise about the opportunities that are coming my way because there's obviously no way I could grab every opportunity and take advantage of it? Nor will every opportunity appeal to me. But for most of us, I think we will have more opportunities come our way than we can fit into our lives and our schedules at any given point in time. So, what does wisdom look like when it comes to my time and my schedule and all the opportunities that come my way?

I'm going to invite you to flip over to the Old Testament with me to the Book of Psalms. We're going to look at Psalms, Chapter 90. This is a psalm of Moses we're told at the beginning, so Moses is the writer of this psalm. We've spent a lot of time looking at stuff Moses has written over this last semester, and we're going to look at one verse here too. Psalm 90, Verse 12:

> **So teach us to number our days,**
> **That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.**

There's our word. We're looking for **wisdom**. Now the NIV says, **"That we might gain a heart of wisdom**." The New Living Translation says it this way. "**Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we can grow in wisdom**." So the psalmist is saying that if you want to be wise, it starts with learning to number your days, or realizing your days are numbered. That means I only get to live today, one time. You only get these years in your 20's, your 30's, your 40's, or whatever the decade is for you, once, so take advantage of them. You only get these years while your kids are in high school or middle school or preschool one time, so don't miss out on them!

Wisdom starts with realizing I have limits; there are limits to my time. Now you could sit here this morning and say, "You know what? I think I know that. I don't even need to write that down." I would say, "Well, if you're like me, you probably should write it down, because many of us live as if there are no limits on our time." We just keep adding things to our schedules. We rarely stop to ask the question, "Now do I need to take something out of my schedule over here so I can add this thing that I really want to do into my schedule over there?" We just rationalize and we say, "Well, this is important, and I really want to do it, so I'll make time for it." Or, "I'll save time to do it later." Here's the problem with that. You can't save time. You don't get rollover minutes like they used to offer on the AT&T and T-Mobile plans. You can't pull out a box at the end of the day and have three hours saved in here to get to the things that are important. Time doesn't work that way. There are limits. And you can't carry over minutes into the next day. But sometimes we forget that; we forget to number our days. We forget that our days are numbered, and so remembering that our days are numbered would be the first key to living wisely. And figuring out a way to remember that would be really important…is really important!

So here's how one man did that. When he turned 50, he was thinking about how much time he had left in his life, and he figured, just estimating, he had about 30 years left. And so he thought about it in terms of Saturdays, and he estimated that over 30 years, there were about 1500 Saturdays. So he got a really big jar. He got 1500 marbles, put them in the jar, and every Saturday night, when the day was over, he would take a marble out of the jar and throw it away. This is a true story! His wife thought that this jar was a little bit morbid, but he said it did wonders for his perspective. It helped him recognize that his days are numbered and that his time is limited. He did not want to waste it.

So maybe you want to do something like that this year, maybe not exactly that. But this carafe right here (on a table) has 366 marbles in it, one for every day of 2024. There's leap year next year. And this isn't quite as morbid as counting down the days till you think you're going to die, but it can bring perspective, right? If you were to look at this jar, this carafe, and see, "This is what my life looks like in terms of days for the next year. It looks like a lot right now; it's filled to the brim. But as you begin to take these marbles out each day, as you work your way through the year, it would begin to bring into perspective how many days you have left in the year to accomplish the things that you wanted to accomplish in 2024. Now, here's another way of thinking about this, at least for me. I could add 138 more marbles, get a different jar because they wouldn't fit, for a total of 504. That would be how many days I have left until my son Tobin, who's a junior, graduates from high school. Or I could add 1236 marbles to it for a total of 1602 marbles, which would tell me how many days I have left until my son, Micah, graduates from high school in four years. It brings perspective. I don't want to waste those days while my kids are still under my roof, while I still get to see them every day. It's realizing and understanding our days are limited. Our time is limited. Wisdom starts with realizing I have limits. Being wise about the opportunities that I have means realizing I have limits. I can't do everything. I can't take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way. I only have one life.

I don't have unlimited time, so I've got to learn to number my days. When we live as if we have unlimited time, do you know what happens in our lives? All of the margin gets squeezed out of our lives. Margin is a good thing. Margin is the extra; it's the buffer. It's the amount available beyond what you actually need. When you open a book, you like the fact that there is space on the edges of the book, even between the columns, right? If this Bible was printed from edge to edge with these little words like this, you'd get tired of reading it. My eyes would get tired really fast, and when I would look up to talk to you, and then look back, I could not find my place because there's no reference point. Margin is a good thing in a book.

When you're driving on the highway, going 50 or 60 mph, however fast you drive, you're happy that the lane is not exactly as wide as your car. You'd like some margin there, and you liked the fact that there is a shoulder over here with some extra space. It's why you get nervous when all of a sudden there's a construction zone, and it's narrowed to one lane, and it feels like those cones keep moving over into your lane as you're driving, right? You like margin in that situation. Or in your personal space. Somebody walks up to you and they're standing right here—right here in your face talking—you're like, "Whoa, give me a little space; give me some buffer," right? We like margin. In those scenarios, it is easy to see we want the extra space, but for some reason, when it comes to our schedules, we think we can live without any margin.

Here's another way to think about margin. It's the space between what I'm currently doing and my limits. And one of the reasons I think we struggle so much with this, is we live in a culture that says, "Take it to the limit," "Push those boundaries; get everything you can;" "Don't miss out on anything," "Get a credit card; max it out; live beyond your limits!" It's what the culture says to us all the time. This idea of limits and pushing the limits—why we like to watch the Olympics—is because we're watching people push themselves to their limit athletically, sometimes beyond their limit. But here's what we need to remember about that. Athletes don't train or live at the limit all the time. A marathon runner does not train for a marathon by running 26.2 miles every day because that's the limit. They know they need a buffer in their training. Or you're watching qualifying

rounds in the sprinters, in the Olympics. Some of those runners do not run their fastest in the quarterfinals and the semi-finals. They do just enough to get to the finals. They live just at a certain point in a buffer, and then at a specific opportunity they take it to the limit. But they don't live at the limit all the time. The reality is, we all do. We all will live within certain limits, limits that we allow the culture to push us to, if we allow it. Limits that maybe our friends might push us to, limits that our body might mandate to us, limits that our schedule would dictate because of how many things we put into it.

Or we could live within the limits that our heavenly Father would lead us to. And here's the deal with the limits that the heavenly Father would lead us to: He will always, always lead us to a life, to a schedule, to limits that includes margin. Always! Way back when God gave His law to Israel, He mandated margin in multiple ways. He said to them, "You're going to live on 80% of your income, not 100%, because you're going to give 10% to the temple." And then they were supposed to give the other 10% to the poor, to the people who were in need, to the people who didn't have as much margin. Then He said, "I want you to work for six days of the week, but on the seventh day, you're not going to work. You're going to rest because you need some space. You need a buffer; you can't just go forever." I think God built that into the culture of the nation of Israel, because He knows what happens when we live at or beyond our limits. He knows what happens when the margin gets squeezed out of our lives. Three more things can happen.

First, when margin decreases, stress increases. This is why you feel nervous when you're driving in the construction zone—narrow lane—right? You know what this feels like when you're on your way to an appointment. It's at nine o'clock. Maybe it's a haircut, maybe it's a meeting you have to be at, maybe it's a class, or school. You left, and you thought there's plenty of time, but there was an accident on your route, and now you're stuck in traffic. As you watch the clock inch a little bit closer to nine o'clock, you get a little more nervous, a little bit more stressed. You're looking at the clock, and then looking at the traffic, and it's not moving. You look back at the clock. Another minute ticks away. You're a little bit more anxious, a little more stressed. When margins decrease in our lives, stress increases.

Number two: When margins decrease in our lives, the important gets put behind the urgent. The important things get squeezed out of our lives right along with the margin, and we start living according to what the schedule dictates—what's right in front of me—maybe not what's important, but what's urgent. It's why we need to learn to number our days.

But here's what I think is the most important thing. When the margin decreases in our lives, our relationships suffer. My relationship with God suffers. My relationships with others—my family, my friends, my co-workers. My relationships with others suffer because we're stressed, because there's no margin. Because we're running around trying to keep up with our schedule, we don't have time for relationships. I think that's the biggest reason why God will always lead us to a life that includes margin, a life that's not always pushing the limits, because God is a God of relationship. It's why He created you. It's why He created me to be in relationship with Him. He didn't create you to be a machine that just gets lots of stuff done, no matter how good it feels to check all that stuff off your list, or to achieve all those things. He created you primarily for relationship, and relationships happen in the margin, in the extra time.

So I just want to challenge us today, as we head into 2024, to do two things that will allow us to rethink how we are using our time. The first one is this: Begin experimenting with a Prayer of Review at the end of each day. Just four simple steps; we are going to put them on the screen for you if you want to write them down. It's very simple: 5-to-10-minute time of prayer at the end of your day:

Prayer of Review

1. Thank God for the day you just had.

2. Think back through the hours of your day & bring them before God. (People, place, tasks, meetings, etc.) Think through the people that you've interacted with, the meetings you had, the things you did, the places you went, whatever your day was made up of. Think through that with the Lord and, as you do that:

3. Thank God for the things that brought you joy, and (then if you need to,) say you're sorry to God for ways you messed up. And then finally,

4. Ask God for strength for the things you will face tomorrow.

It's a very personal interactive way. It's 5 to 10 minutes. You can do this with your kids. You can modify it for them. At bedtime, you can say something like, "What was the best part of your day?" "Let's thank God for that." "What was the hardest part of your day today?" "Let's pray about that. Let's pray about tomorrow."

Now notice, I did not say, "Commit to doing this every single night." Hey, if you want to do that, go for it. But when we begin to add a practice or a discipline or a habit to our lives, it can be challenging. And I don't want this to just be another thing that now you've got to add into your schedule and then you feel guilty that you're not doing it. The idea is to experiment. Do it a couple of times a week and see if it's helpful to you. Give it a couple of weeks to catch on to see how it works. But I think it will help you recognize how you're spending your time, and it will help you connect with how you're connecting with God in the midst of it. And so if it's helpful to you, then add it in to more days of the week.

So, number one: Begin experimenting with a prayer review at the end of the day.

Number two: I'm going to invite us all to turn our schedules over to God. Ask Him to lead you to His limits for you. Wouldn't that make sense? He knows what your limits are, and He's the only One who knows how much time you actually have left.

Now, that doesn't mean that if you turn your schedule over to God, you don't have to make decisions about your time. You still have to make decisions, and many of us make decisions about our time like this: Monday night: Someone asked me if I can do something Monday night? "Sure, I'll check my schedule. I don't have anything going on. I can do that." Tuesday night? "It's open. I'll be there." Wednesday night? Wednesday afternoon? "I've got three hours free. That'd be a yes." Thursday night? "Yes!" Friday night? "Yes…Yes…Yes…Yes. Add…Add…Add.

Here's what that looks like. I want you to pretend with me for a moment that this balloon is my schedule. Okay? (Matt holds a balloon, blowing air into it) Now as I keep adding things into my schedule, I'm going to add air to this balloon. So Monday night, one of my kids has soccer practice. I'm the coach. Tuesday and Thursday nights we have family dinner together. I notice we're not judging what things we're putting into the schedule, right? Wednesday night, I've got Life Group. (You had to know if I was going to be on stage as the Life Group pastor, I'm going to talk about Life Groups…at least mention it. Okay? *(laughter*)

Now if I keep adding air to this balloon, keep adding things to my schedule, there's only three ways this can end, right? The first way would be I just keep adding air and keep adding air till it goes beyond the limit and the balloon explodes. It would be like my life exploding. Not a good thing, right? Nervous breakdown. Maybe everything's wrecked. My relationships are wrecked. That's not how we want our life to go. That would not be being a good steward of our time.

The second way that this could end is not an explosion. It looks a little bit more like this. (He lets go of the balloon as it circles to the ground as the air comes out.) This would mean what happens when I get too many things into my schedule, and I'm not in control anymore. My schedule is, and I'm running around trying to keep everything up like crazy, like that balloon trying to keep up. Some of you know what that feels like. You have a schedule so full you can't enjoy anything, because you're running around, getting to the next place, getting the next thing done. You can't enjoy your relationships. Now, the only good way to end this is we've got to get ourselves back to where we were. (Matt blows the balloon up again). The only good way to end this would be I have two choices now. When I add something to my schedule, and I add some air in there, I realize I have to remove something. (removes air from balloon, and it squeals). That's how it feels right when you're removing something out of your life that you really liked. Or I could tie it off and realize I have limits. But that's not always an easy thing to do.

In our take-it-to-the-limit, push-push-push the boundaries culture, turning my schedule over to God starts with learning to number our days, like we talked about earlier. That's how we begin to gain wisdom. But we need to apply wisdom every day. So, to help you with that, I want to give you a single question. But a single question to ask when opportunities come your way is, I think is this question that comes out of Ephesians 5 where it talks about living wisely. So, as you're thinking about that, and as you're turning your schedule over to God, and making decisions about what am I going to commit my time to and put into my schedule, I want you to ask this question about each thing: "What's the wise thing to do?" Don't ask, "Is it going to be fun?" "Will everybody else be there?" "Do I really want to do this?" "Will it meet a need?" Those are all good questions. But that's not what we're talking about right now. Ask, in 2024, when a new opportunity comes your way, and you're deciding, "Do I have time for this? Can I put this into my schedule?" Ask yourself, "In light of my past experience, in light of my schedule, in light of what's important to me, what's the wise thing to do?" "In light of my relationships, in light of what's going on in my life right now, in light of what might be coming up down the road, is it wise to commit to doing this?" "Is it wise to say I'll be there? Is it wise to sign up for this commitment? In light of the fact that my days are limited, that I've only got 52 Saturdays in 2024, in light of the wisdom I've gained from that, is it wise to add this opportunity to my life, to my schedule?" See, I believe that if you will slow down and ask that question and just stop and think for a moment—give the Holy Spirit time to speak to you—you'll know the answer. You'll know whether it's wise

or not. You might not like the answer, but you will know the answer, and it will make a difference in your life, your relationships, and in how you manage your time.

So, I'm going to invite you to pray with me and we're going to ask God to help us in this, because we need Him to help us, and He wants to. He is willing to lead us to limits that include margin, that leave room for relationships. So, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, this is a really challenging thing for us, for some of us. It's hard because we don't want to miss out on anything. It's challenging because we have so many opportunities, and we don't like turning our schedule over to You because I think it feels like we're giving up control, the control we think we have. But we recognize this morning that You want to give us full life, rich lives, and lives rich in relationships. You want to lead us to lives that include margin, because You want a relationship with us, and You want us to have relationships with others. So, God, would You help us to remember that our days are numbered? Then help us to number our days. I pray for some people here this morning and You are speaking to them right now. You're telling them to remove something from their schedule, to let a little air out of the balloon. Lord, I pray You would give them the courage and the boldness to talk to whoever they need to talk to, to do what they need to do, to release a commitment, to remove something from their life that will allow for some margin. And, God, many of us are going to have so many opportunities come our way this next year, and so we ask You, God, would help us to be wise about the things that we put into our schedules. Remind us to ask, "What's the wise thing to do as each opportunity presents itself?" We pray this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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