

***Save Us from Worthless Things***

April 10, 2014

Cha-ching, cha-ching, cha-ching the register chimes and our change is counted out, after we've handed over hard-earned money for what? How long will it last? What is its value when we exit the store, tomorrow and beyond? Last fall we had a lesson titled, *The Mirage of More*, about our money and the wise use of it. At least money and possessions can be regained and recycled somewhere in the exchange mix, but time cannot. **Time spent is time gone forever!**

So even worse than misspent money, would be the realization that a whole day or week has passed and we have accomplished very little with our time that will last—that will count for eternity. The clock ticks on and we lose more of our lives as seconds pass; we'll have fewer moments left in our lives on this earth as we finish this sentence. Today's lesson is about how we spend our time and the resources which God has entrusted to us. And since how we spend our time will dictate what resources we use up, we will concentrate on the use of our time—how very much or very little of it we have left.

Psalm 90:12 *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* Do we have a plan for spending our time; or do we tend to do what comes next, what we want, or what others want? We have trusted Christ Jesus as Savior and...what? Lord? Lord means master—ruler...or maybe we have not done this yet. The most valuable, worthwhile and important thing we will ever do is to **accept** Jesus Christ's payment for our sins on the cross; **believe** he is God's Son, that he took on flesh, lived, died and rose again to pay for our sins, and then **confess** our faith in him. Matthew 10:27-28 *“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One (God) who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

◆**WORTHY**: Paul tells us that to know Christ has inestimable value, because all other things he counts as loss and rubbish in comparison. Philippians 3:7-11 *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, **becoming like him in his death,** 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”*

Paul wants **to know** 1) Christ, 2) the power of His resurrection 3) the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, so to become like Him in death and gain 'life'!

“Is there any reason why our lives should be feeble and stagnant and worthless? Is there any reason why we should not overcome temptation and endure trial, and work the works of God in the world, and come at last to the height of his abode in heaven?” asks Henry van Dyke. “Only one—that we do not know him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.”

● **WORTHLESS:** Jonah 2:8 *“Those who cling to **worthless** idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”* In Acts 14:15—our memory verse—Paul and Barnabas are refuting the Gentiles who are calling them gods: Barnabas they called Jupiter and Paul, Mercury. *“We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God.**”* The worthless things are idols—the sin of idolatry—that so characterized and permeated their culture. We are bringing you the good news that there is only one God. Don’t add us to the list of gods that we came to tell you are worthless.

Matthew Henry comments: “God’s service needs not the service of man’s lie. Paul and Barnabas say, ‘We are mere men and therefore you wrong yourselves if you expect that from us which is to be had in God only; and you wrong God if you give that honor to us or to any other men, which is to be given to God only. We are subject to the same infirmities and liable to the same calamities.’”

Keep in mind—front and center—that idolatry is anything placed in front of, or ahead of God. We’re to love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul, and **if we love someone or something more than we love God, we are in idolatry.** That thing or that one that takes God’s place in our mind or heart has become an idol, and we put the thing or one in jeopardy and we offend the Most High God. In a recent George Barna report, 8 of 10 people in America call themselves Christian. But 60% of those qualify as casual Christians: not listening to the Spirit’s direction, and too busy to follow Christ personally. They are not captive to Christ, but casual, distracted ‘Christians’ wanting sermon-ettes for Christian-ettes and only conveniently Christian at all. What must our Lord think?

God has plans for believers to love Him, to worship Him, to serve Him and to represent Him to those lost-in-their-sins. Do we try in the least to follow the plans God has laid out for us, or do we go with our lesser plans? We’ve talked so much about the plans that God has for us, and how that they are good plans: *“plans to give us a hope and a future”* Jeremiah 29:11. We need to long to know God’s plans and perspective for us on any day, that we might not waste our time and efforts on things that will not count—on insignificant, worthless, valueless and fruitless things.

In 2009, the brochures and posters advertising our North American Missions and Annie Armstrong giving headlined: LIVE WITH URGENCY! Why is that? In 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, Paul says: “*What I mean, brothers, is that **the time is short.** From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none. <sup>30</sup>those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; <sup>31</sup>those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. **For this world in its present form is passing away.**” Paul wrote this letter just 55 years after Jesus’ death and resurrection. If “the time [was] short” then, and “this world in its present form [was] passing away” then, what does that say about today—2000 years later? The time is shorter now than it has ever been before! Our time to trust and obey our Lord and Master and serve others is shorter now than it has ever been before! Our time left on this earth is near the end, and decreases with every passing moment! It is a good thing to marry, mourn, be happy, buy something useful, and use the things of the world. But to be engrossed in any of it or to put it in a place of importance ahead of service and worship to God, prayer or reading Scripture is idolatry.*

Back to 1 Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul again: “*I would like you to be free from concern. **An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.** <sup>33</sup>But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—<sup>34</sup>and **his interests are divided.** **An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.** But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup>I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may **live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**” There is no-way, no-how that Paul is saying that marriage is wrong! Knowing Christ and being married to a believer are wonderful things—knowing Christ is better! Paul is using an example that the hearing would understand immediately—they could identify with fully. We can see how, as married women, our devotion to God may have no limits, but our usefulness and service to Him may, because we have responsibilities to our husband, our children, our grandchildren. Do we get rid of these responsibilities? Absolutely not, but we’re to put God first!*

We understand that these vital, relational responsibilities are necessary but, with that understanding, know that then **we must make every effort to cut away the frivolous, the worthless, the insignificant and the fruitless pastimes that would unduly rob us from serving our Lord, our Master.** That action is equivalent to “redeeming the time” KJV and “making the most” in the NIV. In Ephesians 5:8-17, Paul exhorts: “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live as children of light** <sup>9</sup>(for **the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth**) <sup>10</sup>and **find out what pleases the Lord.** <sup>11</sup>Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. <sup>12</sup>For it is*

*shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said:*

*‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’*

*15“**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,** 16making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17Therefore **do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.**”*

There is much that is valuable and that can be valued in the Christian life. So, what are the worthless things? It is imperative that they be identified and dispatched, because they will eat away at the valuable. **Worthless things are not content to exist and take up some of our time and energy; they will invariably nag for more and more.** As women, wives and particularly as mothers, we’re often the gatekeepers for keeping the worthless things at bay.

To identify “worthless” things in our lives, we need to have the Spirit’s discernment. What is worthwhile? What is not? What does Scripture say about what has worth, and the activities that are worthwhile under the sun? In a sermon titled *Don’t Get Left Behind* in March 14, 2010, our pastor said, “Don’t be busy wasting time,” and in another sermon one week later with reference to the 225 million in North America without Christ said, “What do we need to stop doing in order to start sharing?” To examine our lives and identify the things to curtail or do away with is the job of the Holy Spirit—no One does it better—and He loves to be invited to do it. We should daily reflect on how much God has given us to serve Him, and that tally would cause us to examine how faithful and responsible we’ve been (ref: Matthew 25:14-30).

♥In my life I have had to cut out an awful lot of TV watching and time-passing activities that only accomplish just that—pass time with nothing to show for the kingdom of God. It is a choice I have to make: to choose what God has for me over what I may think I have for me, but may actually be a time-waster offered to me by the Deceiver. Example: I love to read, but have found that some reading, though interesting and certainly not wrong, has no value.

In his *Book of Totally Useless Information*, author Don Voorhees claims never to have lost a game of *Trivial Pursuit*, and he has included more than two hundred explanations for the not-so-important questions of life. There is absolutely no crime in writing or reading such a book. But the question that comes into play for a Christ follower in these urgent days is: Should we spend the hours of our few remaining days in God’s Word and God’s work, which will make a difference for us and for others for eternity, or not?

See, life in relationship with God has meaning, because he keeps our lives from going to waste. Speaking of the LORD, David says in Psalm 103:4-5, “...*who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*”

Charles Spurgeon puts his finger on the subject: “Questionable literature is read on all hands, frivolous pastimes are now indulged, and a general laxity threatens to deprive the Lord’s peculiar people of those sacred singularities which separate them from sinners. Unless we follow Christ, and make our God the great object of life, we only differ in appearance from the most frivolous.”

As *peculiar* people, we are not to operate in the least the way that the world around us does. Proverbs 3:5-6 “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*” My job is to trust and acknowledge God and then He will make my paths straight. He will give me the direction that I need for living. Then verses 7-8 wrap it up: “*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*”

Some would say my bones have enough nourishment—but the bones of my soul can never have enough! We **are not to** “be wise in our own eyes,” and we **are to** “fear the LORD and shun evil.” The words “Well done, good and faithful servant” will cost us a close editing of our time and resources! This statement was in our *Life-Way* material for youth recently: “We may need to go through our schedule of activities to see what we need to eliminate to allow us to slow down so we can focus on what God wants rather than what we want.”

God has saved our souls and now we ask him to save us from worthless things—things that don’t count for him—idolatry. This lesson is basically about loving God most, or, tragically, loving other things more. Beth Moore: “Remember we don’t have to love something for it to become a god to us. All we have to do is devote our most valuable mental attention to it. **In its most basic essence, worship is simple focus, voluntary preoccupation.**”

“Who do you know who says he loves God but disobeys his command to separate:

- from worldly preoccupation that leaves no time for thoughts of God;
- from worldly priorities that leave no time for service to God;
- from worldly pleasures that leave no emotion for God, and
- for a worldly pace that keeps one so busy there is no time for quiet, meditative prayer and Bible reading?” Anne Graham Lotz.

**Our prayer today is, “Lord, save us from worthless things!”**

♪SONG of Commitment:

Is there anything I can do for you? Is there anything I can do?  
For all the things you've done for me, Is there anything I can do?

Is there anything I can be for you? Is there anything I can be?  
For all the things you've been for me, Is there anything I can be?

Is there anything I can say for you? Is there anything I can say?  
For all the things you've said for me, Is there anything I can say?

Is there anywhere I can go for you? Is there anywhere I can go?  
For all the places you've been for me, Is there anywhere I can go?