

Ephesians 5:15-17 “Some Post-Sabbatical Reflections about Making the Most of Gospel Opportunities”**

Main Idea: We have a calling, and we must live like it. That’s the message of the book of Ephesians. I want to challenge us in this message to be intentional in the way we live, to make the most of gospel opportunities in light of our calling.

- I. Let’s talk in big picture terms about our calling (the message of Ephesians).
 - A. If we are in Christ, God is our Father (chapters 1-3).
 - B. If we are God’s children, we’re called to live like it (chapters 4-6).
 1. We imitate God by living a life of love (5:1-7).
 2. We imitate God by living as children of light (5:8-14).
 3. We imitate God by being very intentional in how we live (5:15-17).
 4. We imitate God by valuing the ministry of the Holy Spirit (5:18-21).
 5. We imitate God by joyfully fulfilling our roles at home (5:22-6:4).
 6. We imitate God by joyfully fulfilling our roles at work (6:5-9).
- II. Let’s talk in specifics about our calling (the charge in 5:15-17).
 - A. Living intentionally requires wisdom (15).
 - B. Living intentionally requires that we redeem the time (16).
 1. This isn’t just about time management.
 2. This is a call to see the seasons we’re in as God-sent gospel opportunities.
 - C. Living intentionally requires that we determine to know and do God’s will (17).
 1. The will of God is always in line with the wisdom of God.
 2. The will of God is always in line with the Word of God.
 3. The will of God always honors the Son of God.

Make It Personal: Let’s talk about some implications...

1. We have only one opportunity to live this life.
2. We have only one opportunity to live the seasons of this life.
3. We are each receiving right now tailor-made, God-sent opportunities to know Christ better and to make Him better known to others.
4. We are prone to miss these opportunities.
5. We need continual reminders of who we are and why we are here.

I’ve been thinking a lot about Paul this summer, and especially his relationship with the church in Ephesus. It was a moving experience for me when Sherry and I had the privilege to visit Ephesus in July and retrace the steps of this servant of God. We’re going to spend time together with the Ephesians in our Bibles this morning.

I’ve been sharing some *post-sabbatical* reflections with you this month. Two weeks ago I entitled my sermon, “A Message to a Special Church from a Grateful Pastor,” and I surveyed the book of Philippians with you to find a God-given structure for saying an appropriate *thank you* to a very generous church. Last Sunday morning I shared some post-sabbatical reflections about pain and took you to a passage that God used to help me in some very difficult days, Psalm 13, to equip you for the days of pain you will inevitably face. Last Sunday evening I shared some reflections from Hebrews 5:7 about Jesus offering up prayers “with loud cries and tears” and how He was heard because of His “reverent submission.”

None of these messages were on my preaching schedule at the start of the year. Frankly, they weren’t even on the radar. They weren’t planned. They’re just reflections, hence I’m calling these messages *post-sabbatical reflections*. They came out of thoughts or passages that the Lord used to edify my heart during the summer, and I felt that sharing them could bring edification to you, my church family.

You know me. Some of you have been under my preaching ministry for 25 years. We’re usually in a book study, plugging along verse by verse. And I love it. But right

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now we're just taking some time to ask the question, "What did the Lord teach me during my time away, and specifically, what did He teach me that would be of benefit to my brothers and sisters?" You've invested in me. I want to be faithful in sharing the fruit of that investment with you.

The seed thoughts for today's sermon came from two sources; a) from a message I heard Randy Patten preach at a men's retreat in late August and what he pointed out about the Greek word *kairos* in Ephesians 5:16 there, and b) from my own reflections on Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. I've entitled this morning's message, "*Some Post-Sabbatical Reflections about Making the Most of Gospel Opportunities.*"

Let me tell you right up front where this is going. In a sentence...*we have a calling, and it changes everything about the way we live.* That's the message that Paul wanted to burn right into the very DNA of the church at Ephesus. It's why he wrote the letter we call Ephesians. And it's the message we need burned into our DNA. It's why the Holy Spirit preserved this letter for us as a church and as individuals.

I want to challenge us in this message to be intentional in the way we live, to live in light of our calling, and specifically, to make the most of gospel opportunities. I have two points in my message, and I take them from the structure of the book of Ephesians. I want us to talk, first, about the big picture of our calling. And then I want us to talk in specifics about our calling, as Paul does in Ephesians 5:15-17. And then, to wrap things up, I want to talk in practical terms about some implications for us individually and as a church.

I. Let's talk in big picture terms about our calling (the message of Ephesians).

The apostle Paul spent nearly three years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (see Acts 19). He had daily teaching sessions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus that produced so much fruit that Acts 19:10 says, "This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

That was around AD 54-56. It's now around AD 60 and Paul is in prison in Rome, and his dear friends in Ephesus are on his heart. So guided by the Holy Spirit, He takes pen in hand and writes them a letter. What did he tell them? In essence, he makes two points in the letter.

A. If we are in Christ, God is our Father (chapters 1-3). Paul begins the letter, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ...he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ... (1:3, 5)."

Last week I told you about a dog that I found stranded in a ditch by my house. Remember? I kept my distance from that creature when I saw its dirty matted hair. But then I met its master who was searching the neighborhood looking for his dog that had run away, and I saw his great concern, his *unfailing love* for that creature (remember our definition from last week? "devotion based on a prior relationship"). I'd been wondering what ever happened to that lost dog, so I called the man this week, and he told me, "I've got my dog back! He went back to that same hole, and another neighbor saw him, and called the fire department, who got him out, and he was taken to the dog pound. But I found out, and I went and brought him home. And now he's with me, and he's just fine!"

I think that's a great story. That man wouldn't give up on his lost dog because he loved him with an unfailing love. Well, here's a story that blows our minds away. The Almighty God came looking for us.

As incredible as it sounds, it's true. God chose us, and sent His Son to rescue us, and then sent His Spirit to pursue us and bring us back, and didn't stop until He gave us a

secure place in His family. That means, my friend, today, if we know Christ, then God is our Father, and that means we are His children. We used to be objects of His wrath, Paul reminds us in chapter 2, but because of God's grace, we are now in His family.

That's what Ephesians 1-3 is all about. God did something incredible for us. If we are in Christ, then God is our Father. We're connected to Him (chapter 1), and therefore connected to each other (chapters 2 & 3).

So what's the appropriate response to what God has done for us? That's what Ephesians 4-6 is all about. Paul's point #2... In simple terms...

B. If we are God's children, we're called to live like it (chapters 4-6). As Paul says in 4:1, we're to live a life worthy of our Father's calling, and in the final three chapters we see in very practical terms how to do that. Paul begins chapter 5 with a very unusual command. "Be imitators of God as dearly loved children." Little kids love to imitate their parents, and our God is pleased when His children imitate Him.

But how can we as finite beings imitate the Infinite Creator God? We've never seen Him, so how can we imitate Him? Paul explains how in chapter 5 and even into chapter 6. As God's children, we imitate our heavenly Father when we do the kinds of things that He does, or things that reflect well of Him. Like what? Like the following six responses...

For the sake of time, we won't develop these points in detail. I'll just give you the skeleton. You can put the meat on later in your own study. I want us to see the big picture context as we in a moment focus on the third response.

1. *We imitate God by living a life of love (5:1-7).* Notice 5:1-2, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love..." See the connection between imitating God and loving. Makes sense, doesn't it? We're just being called to do what He did, as Paul explains, "just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Paul gets pretty specific in verses 3-7 when he starts talking about sex. No sexual immorality. No using people for sexual gain. No sexual fantasizing. No jokes about sex. Why not? Is Paul anti-sex? No way! He's pro-love, and sex before and outside of marriage is not love. It's selfish in orientation. Put on thanksgiving, he says in verse 4. In other words, if you're married, express your thanks to God and to your spouse for the beautiful intimacy God privileges you to enjoy. If you're single, express your thanks to Him for the kingdom opportunities your singleness affords, or for spouse he may privilege you to love and serve.

But the point is, we're called to live a life, not of self-gratification, but that's focused on meeting the needs of others, a life of love. And when we do that, we're imitating our Father who is the ultimate loving giver.

2. *We imitate God by living as children of light (5:8-14).* Listen to verses 8-10, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord." Again, see the connection? God is light, so we are called to live like children of the light. What's that mean? It means we, verse 11, "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness." It means we don't do some things that "the disobedient do in secret" (12). We stay out of dark places because by walking in the light we reveal who our Father is.

3. *We imitate God by being very intentional in how we live (5:15-17).* "Be very careful, then, how you live." We'll come back to this in a moment.

4. *We imitate God by valuing the ministry of the Holy Spirit (5:18-21).* "Do not get drunk on wine... Instead, be filled with the Spirit." How can you tell if a

person is filled with the Spirit? The Holy Spirit affects his speech—verse 19; his attitude—verse 20, he gives thanks for everything; and his relationships—verse 21, he submits to his brothers and sisters in the church rather than demanding his own way.

You see, the Lord didn't call us to do our own thing in life. He called us to live a life in total dependence upon His Spirit. And when we value the ministry of His Spirit, we're imitating our Father for He values the Blessed Holy Spirit.

Then Paul gets even more practical...

5. *We imitate God by joyfully fulfilling our roles at home (5:22-6:4).* Paul talks to wives first in 5:22-24, then to husbands in 5:25-33, then to children in 6:1-3, and then to fathers in 6:4 about their unique roles. Friends, our society doesn't understand the subject of family roles. It sees roles as a bad thing, a restricting thing, and wants everybody to have the same function. And so husbands and wives and kids, they're all the same, no one's the leader, so no one's the follower, and the result is a pseudo-peace at best, or worse, chaos.

But roles are a wonderful thing! Why should we joyfully fulfill family roles? Because in fulfilling family rolls, we are imitating our God. How so? God has roles. Yes. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are equal in person and worth, but they have different functions. The Son submits to the Father, joyfully so, as does the Spirit. That's why the Son died on the cross for us, because it was His Father's will.

The point is, when we learn our roles as family members, and embrace them, not only can our families function to their maximum, the way the Creator always intended, but we're actually imitating Him. And that's our calling.

6. *We imitate God by joyfully fulfilling our roles at work (6:5-9).* In 6:4 Paul says, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear..." Some have used verses like this to say the Bible condones slavery. That misses the point. Sure, there's a place to work towards pursuing justice for the oppressed in society, and many Bible texts address that. But what about in the mean time? What do you do if you're a Christian slave living in a bad situation? Does your bad situation justify stealing from your ungrateful master? No. Why not? Because you're not living to please that master. Verse 7, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men."

The point again is, we have a calling and it affects everything about everything. God called us to be His children, and our calling is to imitate Him in everything we do, from the way we treat sex, to the kind of entertainment we choose, to the way we view our roles at home, and how we respond to a tough boss at work. We've got an agenda in all we do, a calling. It's not a grind. It's a privilege to imitate our Daddy, the One who came looking for us when we were heading for eternal hell and adopted us into His forever family.

Now, there's one very specific way we can imitate our Father that I want to explore further. It's number 3 in Paul's list. So let's go back...

II. Let's talk in specifics about our calling (the charge in 5:15-17).

Paul said in verses 15-17, "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."

Here's the specific charge. We imitate God by being very intentional in how we live. How so? Think about it. Our Father is intentional. He doesn't sit around waiting for things to happen. He operates with an agenda, a plan. Even when He rests, as on Day 7, He has the agenda in mind. The agenda is to glorify Himself (Rom 11:36).

The reason He created us and then redeemed us is so we could join Him in fulfilling this agenda, so we could bring glory to His worthy name. Three times in Ephesians 1 Paul repeats this purpose clause, “to the praise of His glory” (1:6, 12, 14) after mentioning the unique contribution of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit towards the work of our redemption.

The point is this. God is intentional, and if we’re His children, we’re called to live the same way, intentionally. It’s a sin to just coast through life as though all that mattered was my own little world. This is my Father’s world, and I’ve been created and redeemed to live for His glory!

So how am I going to do that? Living intentionally, according to our text, takes three things.

A. Living intentionally requires wisdom (15). “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.” Don’t miss that. It takes wisdom to live intentionally. Unwise people don’t do it. Unwise people just do what they want, or what everybody else is doing. But intentional living and wisdom go hand in hand.

Listen to the psalmist’s prayer in Psalm 90:12, “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Have you ever numbered your days? It’s a good practice. I was born on Wednesday, May 17, 1961. Today is Sunday, September 16, 2012. That means I have now lived 18,750 days. The psalmist said that if we would stop and number our days (which means, in essence, if we would stop and realize how brief our lives really are and how quickly they pass), then we would gain a heart of wisdom.

Friends, we get into trouble when we stop doing the math, when we live like there’s no end to the number of our days.

B. Living intentionally requires that we redeem the time (16). That’s the way the KJV translates verse 16, “Redeeming the time because the days are evil.”

We need a little Greek lesson to appreciate what Paul’s saying. The Greeks had two basic terms for time. There was *chronos*, which is essentially quantitative, and has to do with minutes and hours and days. It refers to precise time (we get “chronology” from this word), as in Matthew 2:7, “Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them *the exact time* the star had appeared.” We see *chronos* in Luke 1:57 as well, “When it was *time* for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.”

The other Greek term is *kairos*, which is more qualitative in nature than quantitative. I looked up the word *kairos* in several Greek lexicons, and here’s what they said. *Kairos* refers to “an occasion, a period of time, an era, an opportunity, a season.” Here’s a biblical example of the term. In Mark 11:13 Jesus went up to a fig tree but found no figs but only leaves because “it was not the *season* for figs.” That’s *kairos*. I thought this was interesting. Little Kittel says the term can have the sense of a “decisive moment...the chance that must be boldly grasped.”¹

Now here’s what’s important for our consideration. It’s this second word that Paul used here in Ephesians 5:16. He didn’t say, “Redeem your *chronos*, your minutes and hours and days.” He said, “Redeem your *kairos*, the occasions, the seasons of life in which you find yourself.”

Is the distinction significant? I think it is.

1. *This isn’t just about time management.* Paul isn’t talking here primarily about keeping track of your minutes and hours on your time chart each day or

¹ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (389). Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

week, although that may be implied and even very helpful for those of us who are prone to squander the precious gift of time each day on trivial pursuits, and we're all prone to do that. Paul seems to have something else in mind. By using the term *kairos*, he's challenging us to do some evaluation of how we are investing, not just our minutes and hours and and days (our *chronos*), but what we're doing with the *seasons* we're in, and how we're handling the *opportunities* God is sending our way.

2. *This is a call to see the seasons we're in as God-sent gospel opportunities.* My friend Randy Patten made this very helpful observation as he addressed me and about 400 other men at a retreat in Iowa, "*Kairos* is a window of opportunity that is here now and soon will pass."

I've been chewing on that phrase *window of opportunity*. God is sending things into our lives all the time that we have for a season. They're here now, and then they will be gone. The sabbatical was an obvious example to me. What a wonderful window of opportunity God opened up, to grow closer to Him, to my wife, and to be refreshed for His kingdom purposes, to allow the church to be stretched and blessed by different gifts. The window opened, and then it closed, and hopefully we made the most of it while it was open.

God is doing that in all of our lives all of the time, and I'll talk to you about more windows of opportunity momentarily, but first a question. When they come, what are we supposed to do with them? In verse 16 Paul says to *redeem* them. The Greek word is *exagorazo*, to buy up, to make good use of, to exchange what you have for what you want. That's what you do when you redeem a coupon for a piece of merchandise. You turn in something you have that has some value for something you want that has even greater value.

Friends, the Lord wants us to make the most of the things He sends into our lives. That's why this command is here. We're prone to get distracted, to be passive, to get our priorities out of whack.

Let's be honest. It's easy to watch tv for hours, or play a video games, or read recreational books, or do whatever you do for entertainment, because entertainment is about *you*. But living an intentional life is a call to use your time and live for the glory of God and the eternal good of others, and that's not natural. It takes wisdom to do that, and a determination, by the grace of God, to make the most of every God-sent opportunity.

You say, "Wait a minute. If I'm redeeming the time as this verse says I need to be doing, won't I end up being a workaholic (or in Christian circles, a Christian-service-aholic)?"

That's a valid question, but the answer is, *no*. If you do what Ephesians 5:16 is saying, you will not be a workaholic. I say that because redeeming the time is more than just being busy. You can be working an eighty hour week and getting all kinds of accolades at the job and *not* be redeeming the time. And you can be running your kids to every extra-curricular on the school schedule, and they can be bringing home the trophies and even the straight As on their grade cards, and it's no guarantee that you are redeeming the time.

How can you tell if you're redeeming the time? Be careful. This is a slippery question to answer because I may think my life is in pretty good balance since I'm *not* working 80 hours a week and *not* running like crazy to school events like my out of control neighbor, and I may even be feeling pretty good about my life and my family, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'm redeeming the time. Why not? Because I'm not the one who determines whether I'm redeeming the time. Who is? Verse 17 gives us the answer...

C. Living intentionally requires that we determine to know and do God's will (17). "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

This is the fundamental mark of the Christian. He says, as did his Savior, "Not my will, but Your will be done." He doesn't live his life doing his own thing. He lives to do the will of the One who saved him. In every situation he finds out what God's will is, and then seeks to do that will by God's help.

You say, "How can I know what God's will is?" It's not complicated. Paul gives us three indicators right here in the text.

1. *The will of God is always in line with the wisdom of God.* Notice the contrast. Right after telling us to make the most of every opportunity he says, "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." It's foolish not to do the will of God. On the other hand, the will of God is always in line with the wisdom of God. That's why studying the book of Proverbs is so helpful when you're facing a decision.

2. *The will of God is always in line with the Word of God.* In the very next verse Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit." In the parallel account of Colossians 3:16 he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Those two truths are synonymous. If you want the Spirit to fill and control you, then fill your mind with the Word. Don't wait on hunches and impulses and feelings when you're trying to make decisions. Search the Scriptures, for the will of God is always in line with the Word of God.

3. *The will of God always honors the Son of God.* Paul wraps up this section in verse 20 highlighting the person he's been highlighting throughout the letter, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." It's all about Jesus Christ. The will of God always honors the Son of God.

So if we're doing the will of God, then we're going to be doing that which is in line with the wisdom of God and the Word of God and brings honor to the Son of God. And if we do that, we can be sure we will be making the most out of the windows of opportunity the Lord is sending into our lives.

Dear friends, it boils down to this. *We have a calling, and it changes everything about the way we live.*

Make It Personal: Let's talk about some implications...

I want to be very personal and practical at this point. Let's talk about five implications of the charge in Ephesians 5:16.

1. *We have only one opportunity to live this life.* There's a great prayer in Psalm 39:4-5. I pray it regularly, and I invite you to join me. Actually, I wrote a little song and regularly sing it to the Lord. "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath."

Friends, we only have one shot at this life. Here's something that's equally true.

2. *We have only one opportunity to live the seasons of this life.* I still think of myself as a young man at times, or belonging to the homebuilder class. But that window is closed. I'm not raising my children any longer. That window has been raised and closed.

The same thing is true for you. The windows of opportunity don't stay open forever. God opens them, puts them in front of you, and then He closes them.

I'm not just talking about age either. A window of opportunity could be a neighbor. About five years ago a new family moved in near us. It was a window of kingdom opportunity. Last month they moved out of state. The window closed.

Gospel windows come in all shapes and sizes. God puts you in a classroom seated right next to a person no one else likes because he smells. He won't be sitting there forever, nor will you. It's a window, and you have only one shot at it.

Your child makes the ball team. A window of opportunity as you now spend a lot of time hanging out with other parents.

Your child gets cut from the ball team. Another window of opportunity. What will people learn about Jesus from the way you respond?

This is how these windows work, dear friends. Our Sovereign Lord opens them up, and we have a season, just a short season, to do something in that window for Him.

3. We are each receiving right now tailor-made, God-sent opportunities to know Christ better and to make Him better known to others.

I underscore the word *each*. God is doing this for *each* of us. He is opening up tailor-made opportunities for us to know Him better and help others come to know Him. Remember? That's our calling.

Let me talk to you about some windows I see...

I've talked with you about my migraines. I've spent a lot of time in the past asking God to remove them, and I wouldn't complain if He did. But recently I've begun to think of them as a window of opportunity. I'm realizing that while He could remove the cause of my pain if He desired, apparently He opened the window to teach me and others some things about Himself.

Some of you have health challenges. It's such a blessing to be around those of you who realize this truth, who are determined to bring honor to your Savior in and through your suffering, knowing this season won't last forever.

Some of you are caring for aging parents. Many people in society would approach that as a necessary duty, or worse, a burden to be avoided. What a blessing to be around those who realize it's actually a season, a heaven-sent window of opportunity, designed to put Him on display.

The same could be said for some who are raising or helping raise grandchildren. Or those of you who are working in dead end job situations, and or can't find a good job even though you've been doing everything you can to find one. You wouldn't have enlisted for these situations, but you're in them. So what will you do? You could become bitter and complain, like the natural man does. But you're not the natural man. You're a child of the Living God who is sovereign, and you know that things don't just happen in life. So you're determined to joyfully make the most of every gospel opportunity.

Yes, we all have windows. Gospel opportunities are all around us.

4. We are prone to miss these opportunities. It's just reality. Right now we probably all have God-sent things right in front of us that we are not seeing. It's so easy to miss the windows of opportunity God is sending our way. Why? A lot of reasons.

One, we are moving too fast through life (you miss all kinds of things when you're going too fast). Two, we are looking for other things. We're so focused on what we *can't* do that we're missing what God intends for us to be doing. Three, we're just flat out distracted, and not necessarily by bad things either. Do you remember what Jesus said about people with crowded hearts and the reason they don't bear fruit? Hear the Master in Matthew 13:22, "The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."

So since we're so prone to miss gospel opportunities, let me help you see what you may not be seeing. I want to address some specific groups of people in the church,

not to embarrass anyone, but to edify, sort of like Paul did in the book of Titus where he instructed Titus to tailor his message to the older men, the older women, the younger men, the younger women, and the slaves. John did the same sort of thing in 1 John when he addressed the children, the fathers, and the young men, as individual groups (in 1 John 2:12ff). There are different seasons, different windows of opportunity that God opens to you when you enter different phases of your life. So let me take this occasion to remind you about some unique windows right in front of you...

First, let me talk to our young people and young adults. You are in living in a very unique time in world history. You have more opportunities than any other generation in the history of the world, opportunities to learn, to travel, to get involved in very significant ways serving people, even around the world! Your parents didn't have those opportunities, but you do! Yet this window won't stay open for long. In a few years it will close when you assume family and work responsibilities. Here's the challenge. Don't waste what you have right now. You can waste it by worshipping the technology rather than using for God. Or by wishing you had all the stuff older people have (things that took them years to save for that you want right now). God hasn't given you stuff yet, but He's given you health, and energy, and time, and opportunity. Don't waste it. Use that window! Because in just a few years...it will close.

Young families, those of you with children still in the nest, I just used words that do not describe your life. Energy and time. You are worn out! You are at a phase in life right now where your job is demanding, and your kids have lots of needs, and the bills are high, and the extra income is low. And you wonder if you'll ever have a nice quiet vacation again, and money to fix the house the way you want. Know this. This window won't stay open very long, but you must make the most of it. Please, don't waste it longing for another window. Raise those kids for God! You've only got one shot at it, and then that window will close.

Empty-nesters, it's quiet around your house. You've got a little extra income for the first time in awhile—no kids tuition bills to pay. What are you going to do with that window? It's easy to become very greedy, even around church. I've heard people say things like, "I put in my time, now let somebody else do the work up in the nursery." What better time to invest in younger parents than when you have more time, still have your health, and a home with some empty rooms. Why not invite some younger families over and make the most of this kingdom building opportunity? Because the truth is, this window won't stay open long either.

Some of you are retired. This is another unique phase, largely unknown in the world until the modern era in the western world. The world seems to think the reason you retire is so you can really become self-absorbed. "It's your life, now you can do what you have always wanted to do!" But that's not who we are. We have a calling, and it doesn't end when we turn 65. Many people are living well into their 80s with decent health these days. What a window of opportunity for advancing the gospel! You have years of skill from working a job, and you have years of experience from raising a family, and now you have time and perhaps some extra resources, those are things that are in great need in the church of Jesus Christ!

5. *We need continual reminders of who we are and why we are here.* The stories of faithful people help me, like the one I'm going to share with you. Songs help me, too, and I'm going to share one that's helped me greatly.

Robert Murray McCheyne was a very godly pastor in Scotland in the 1800s. He was a man of great prayer and actually developed a Bible reading plan that's still used today. He had a very intimate relationship with Christ and wrote the following poem as

he contemplated the brevity of life and what it will be like when we enter eternity. I've put my own tune to his lyrics and sing them regularly to the Lord as a reminder of who I am and why I'm here, and I'd like to share it with you...

*When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon glaring sun,
When we stand with Christ in glory,
Looking o'er life's finished story,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I hear the wicked call,
On the rocks and hills to fall,
When I see them start and shrink
On the fiery deluge brink,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When I stand before the throne,
Dressed in beauty not my own,
When I see Thee as Thou art,
Love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*When the praise of Heav'n I hear,
Loud as thunders to the ear,
Loud as many waters' noise,
Sweet as harp's melodious voice,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.*

*Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Savior's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe.*

You might be interested in knowing that Robert Murray McCheyne was only 23 years old when he penned those words.² And just six years later, while engaged to be married, he was only 29 years old when he died during an epidemic of typhus. By the grace of God, McCheyne made the most of his windows of opportunity. Let's walk in his steps!

²These words appeared in the Scottish *Christian Herald*, May 20, 1837, in a poem titled "I Am Debtor."
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/w/t/wtpwidon.htm>