

Pastor's Annual Report for the year 2017

(adapted from the "State of the Church Address" delivered Sunday morning, January 28, 2018, Pastor Brad Brandt)

"Making the Most of Every Opportunity"

Ephesians 5:16

Today is the State of the Church Address, as we've done on a yearly basis for three decades. I want us to look first at a text of Scripture, and then let that text help us assess what's happening in the church as we head into a new year.

Paul exhorts the church in Ephesians 5:15-17, "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."

We are called to imitate God by being very intentional in how we live. 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 the purpose clause, "to the praise of His glory" (1:6, 12, 14).

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

So how are we 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.

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." And the ESV, "Making the best use of time."

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."

The other Greek term is *kairos*, which is more qualitative in nature than quantitative. *Kairos* refers to "an occasion, a period of time, an era, an opportunity, a season." 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*.

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.

This isn't just about time management. Paul isn't talking here primarily about keeping track of your minutes and hours on a weekly time chart, although that may be helpful for those who are prone to squander the precious gift of time 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 days (our *chronos*), but what we're doing with the *opportunities* God is sending our way.

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 in 2012. "*Kairos* is a window of opportunity that is here now and soon will pass."

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.

I'll talk to you about some 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 let our priorities slide.

Let's be honest. It's pretty easy to watch television, or play a video game, or read a novel, or do whatever you do for entertainment, because entertainment is about *you*. But we are called to use our time for the glory of God and the eternal good of others, and that's not natural. It takes wisdom to do this, 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)?"

Actually, if you do what Ephesians 5:16 is saying, you will not be a workaholic because redeeming the time is more than just being busy. You can be working eighty hour weeks 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 trophies and straight As on their grade cards, and it's no guarantee that you are redeeming the time.

So how can you tell if we'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, but that doesn't guarantee I'm redeeming the time.

Here's why. I'm not the one who determines whether I'm redeeming the time. It's not my call to make. Notice the charge in verse 17, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

C. Living intentionally requires that we determine to know and do God's will (17). The Lord's will is the objective of the person who is redeeming the time. 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 His will by His grace.

"So how can I know what God's will is?" you ask.

It's not complicated. Paul gives us three indicators right here in the text. First, the will of God is always in line with *the wisdom of God*. Verse 15 again, "Be very careful then how you live—not as unwise but as *wise*."

Second, 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." These two truths are synonymous. If you want the Spirit to fill and control you, don't wait on hunches and impulses when you're trying to make decisions. Fill your mind with His Word. Search the Scriptures, for the will of God is always in line with the Word of God.

Third, the will of God always honors *the Son of God*. You'll notice that Paul wraps up this section in verse 20 highlighting the person he's been featuring 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 there's what the text says. Now let's talk about four implications.

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. "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 opportunity to live this life. And here's something that's equally true.

2. *We have only one opportunity to live the seasons of this life.* I think of myself as a young man at times, but then I look in the mirror and am reminded that window has been raised and closed.

The same goes for all of us. The windows of opportunity don't stay open forever. God opens them, puts them in front of us, and then He closes them.

I'm not just talking about age either. A window of opportunity could be a neighbor. A few years ago a new family moved in near us. It was a window of kingdom opportunity. Five years later 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 will now be spending a lot of time hanging out with some other parents you might not otherwise know.

Perhaps your child gets cut from the ball team. Another window of opportunity. What will people learn about Jesus from your response to the disappointment?

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. And then the opportunity passes.

3. *We are each receiving right now tailor-made, God-sent opportunities to know Christ better and to make Christ 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, this is our calling.

Let me talk to you about some windows I see God opening in our church. Some of you have chronic health challenges. It's such a blessing to be around those of you who are determined to bring honor to your Savior in and through your suffering. You know this season won't last forever, and you are seeking to make the most of it.

Some of you are caring for aging parents. Many in our society look at this as a burden to be avoided. What a blessing to be around those who see it as a season, a heaven-sent window of opportunity, designed to put the sufficiency of our God on display.

The same could be said for others who are raising or helping raise grandchildren. And others who find themselves in frustrating job situations. And still others who recently experienced the heartache of losing a loved one. None of you enlisted for these situations, but you're in them. You could become bitter and complain, like the natural man does. But 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 this window of opportunity.

We all have windows. Our Father puts us in the middle of gospel opportunities all the time.

4. *We are prone to miss these opportunities.* It's just reality. Sin, by definition, means *going our own way* (Isaiah 53:6). Which means right now most of us have God-sent opportunities right in front of us that we are not seeing. It's so easy to miss them. Why? A lot of reasons.

One reason is that we are moving too fast through life (and you miss all kinds of things when you're going too fast). Another reason is that 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. A third is that we're just flat out distracted, and not necessarily by bad things either.

Do you remember what Jesus said about people with crowded hearts 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."

We are all prone to miss gospel opportunities. So let me help you see what you may not be seeing. Allow me to address some specific groups in our church, not to embarrass anyone, but to edify. Like Paul did when he instructed Titus to tailor his message to the older men, the older women, the younger men, the younger women, and the slaves. The apostle John did something similar in 1 John when he addressed the children, the fathers, and the young men (in 1 John 2:12ff).

The truth is, there are different seasons, different windows of opportunity that God opens to you when you enter various phases of your life.

First, let me talk to our young men and women. You are 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. Why, you could be anywhere in the world in a day or so. Your grandparents could never have imagined that. Even your parents didn't have these opportunities.

But you do. Yet this window won't stay open for long. In a few years you will see it start closing as you assume work and perhaps family responsibilities.

So here's the challenge. Don't waste what you have right now. Don't wish you had all the stuff older people have. God hasn't given you stuff yet. But He has given you health, and energy, and time, and an opportunity for His kingdom.

So don't waste it. Use the 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. The kids are gone, and so are the tuition bills. So you've got a little extra income for the first time in a while. What are you going to do with this window?

Once in a while I'll hear someone say, "Hey, I put in my time, now let somebody else do it," referring to things like serving in the nursery, or VBS, or working with the youth. But what better time to invest in younger parents than when your own kids are out on their own and you have some resources and decent health? Think about it. You now have a home with some space that your kids vacated. Why not invite some younger families over and make the most of this kingdom building opportunity?

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. The world has such an ingrown view of retirement. "It's your life, now you can do what you have always wanted to do!"

But that's not who we are. We are Christ-followers. And we don't stop being Christ-followers when we turn 65. Many people today are living well into their 80s with a measure of health. What a window of opportunity for advancing the gospel! You've been walking with Christ for decades, you have skills you learned from working a job, you have the experience of raising a family, and now you have time and perhaps some extra resources. Do you see the window of opportunity God has opened for you? Those are things that are in great need in the church of Jesus Christ!

Friends, we all have them. And we all need to stop from time to time and reflect on how we're doing with the windows of opportunity.

This is why each year we take time for the State of the Church Address. We look back at the opportunities God placed before us, and give Him the glory He deserves for what He accomplished. We also look ahead and anticipate some of the opportunities we can see on the horizon, and resolve to make the most of them.

So let's look back for a few moments. And then let's look ahead.

What did God accomplish at WBC this past year?

To begin, let me remind you where we began last year. Twelve months ago in the *2017 State of the Church address*, we identified the following windows of opportunities.

1. As always, the preaching and teaching of God's Word
2. Developing more preachers of the gospel; I'll share more about these first two in a moment.

3. Memorizing a passage of Scripture together every month¹
4. Looking for new ways to look beyond ourselves in order to share why we're doing it, which the gospel. I gave our five deacon care groups a \$50 bill with the assignment, "Do something with it to show someone in our community that we care for them at WBC." As a result, one group blessed a waitress with a very generous tip, another encouraged the Shawnee State ladies basketball team with a pizza, another group fed some of our township workers, etc.
5. Using new video/live-stream technology to minister the Word beyond these four walls
6. Keep growing in our ability to exalt and enjoy God in our congregational singing. Our goal at WBC is to *see the church singing Christ-centered, theologically sound songs that are sung joyfully with united participation by all.* We embraced the diversity of gifts the Lord has given us at WBC, purposed to use a variety of worship teams, and began to meet with the song leaders, instrumentalists, and support staff, on the final Wednesday of each month to coordinate our efforts.

The Opportunities for Preaching and Teaching God's Word

The pulpit ministry at WBC is the ministry of the church. It's why we are here. It's why the pulpit is the central piece of furniture in the central room in our facility. And for the preaching of God's Word to occur, there are a host of other ministry opportunities that must take place. And they do.

Our ushers make sure the building is open, the lights on, and people are welcomed to this place where they can hear and learn God's Word.

Our trustees make sure people have a place to park, chairs to sit in, and many other things that make this place conducive to learning.

Our janitor cleans this room. Our treasurer pays the light and heating bills.

Our nursery team cares for the little ones so their parents can hear God's Word.

Our children's church team provides an opportunity for children age kindergarten and younger to learn the Scriptures while their parents are hearing biblical exposition.

Our worship teams help us prepare our hearts to receive God's Word.

Our technology team works behind the scenes so we can hear the preaching of God's Word and even go back to it again later online.

A team of prayer partners gather weekly at 8:15 to intercede for the church and the ministry of the Word.

A team of Sunday school teachers provide lessons that supplement and build on what's heard from the pulpit.

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." We seek to preach the whole counsel of God at WBC.

On **Sunday mornings** we began the year with a series on priorities from the book of Haggai. Next we moved into a study of the life of Joseph in Genesis 37-50.

Throughout the summer months we investigated Jesus' I AM claims in John's gospel. In the fall, we considered the five Solas of Salvation in conjunction with the 500th

¹ We used music to learn the following: January—Psalm 86:11-12, February—Psalm 17:15, March—Nahum 1:7, April—1 Peter 2:24; May—Galatians 6:14, June—Psalm 94:18-19; July—Psalm 90:12, August—Revelation 15:3-4, September—Psalm 13:5-6, October—Psalm 70:4, November—Jonah 2:8-9, December—Psalm 9:10

anniversary of the reformation. In November, we explored the book of Jonah, then finished the year in with a Christmas series, “Why Did He Come?”

On **Sunday evenings**, we continued to do a variety of things designed to strengthen the church family to fulfill our mission in the world. We began the year with a mini-series called “The Glory Road,” ended the year by launching a series called “Getting Ready to Reach Out: Learning from Titus,” and throughout the year explored “The Parables of Jesus in Luke.”

We love missions at WBC and throughout the year we heard from various servants of God, including Erin Wawro (Brazil), Jim & Rachel Chambers (Zambia), Gary Storm (ACCG in Slovakia), and Nate & Lauren Bell (South Africa). Our missions conference took place in October with Randy and Cindy Richner (Brazil), and Eric and Cheryl Elmer (Bibles International), and five brothers from Albania.

Additionally, Bethany Wilson shared about her ministry trip to Honduras, and Fox Etta Hunt reported on her time in Haiti.

Also on Sunday evenings, we were edified by the movies *Pilgrim’s Progress* in January and *The Insanity of God* in July. We also enjoyed the Scioto Hills summer staff presentation and participated in the opening service of Scioto Hills Family camp. We kicked off VBS on Sunday evening July 30, went to the DeCamp’s pavilion for a Labor Day weekend outdoor service, had a church family Christmas celebration on December 17, followed by a special Christmas eve candlelight service the following Sunday.

The Lord did something else quite significant in 2017. He raised up a ministry we called, “Preachers in Training.” In February I began to meet weekly with about twelve men who expressed interest in learning how to preach expository sermons. We read and discussed Jay Adams’ book, *Preaching With Purpose*. We also worked on the exegetical and homiletical components of preaching.

Eventually, this “band of brothers” fed the congregation by preaching two series of messages, first “Seeing Christ in Colossians” in the spring and summer, and then “Learning from 1 Peter about Living for Christ in a Hostile World” in the fall.

On **Wednesday evenings** we did two discussion-oriented, inductive Bible studies, going through the books of Philippians and Jude. Furthermore, Matt Wilson did a Theology Survey series that resulted in a series of doctrinal position statements that will be helpful in the ordination process.

The Opportunities Reflected by the Numbers

We have 172 members currently at WBC (6 watchcare). Our weekly average attendance in 2017 was 109 on Sunday morning, 58 on Sunday evening, and 44 on Wednesday evening (in 2016 the numbers were 120 on Sunday morning, 55 on Sunday evening, and 47 on Wednesday evening).

We are obviously seeing our attendance decrease. Since the 2015 directory the Lord has relocated about thirty of our members to other locations and churches.²

In one sense, it’s a subtraction, for we have lost some brothers and sisters we care about deeply. In another sense, however, it’s a multiplication for the Lord is spreading our influence to many other places.

² For instance, the Jeremiah family moved to Florida; Bud and Connie Lindley to Columbus; Logan Collins to West Virginia; the O’Rourke’s to Tennessee; Jason Willis to Texas; the Kibbeys have found a church closer to home in Kentucky; and there are others.

And here are two more significant numbers. \$234,425 and \$234,050. The first is last year's general income, the second our expenses. So though we have less people, the Lord continues to provide for all our needs. In fact, income last year was \$28,000 more than five years ago and more than \$40,000 more than ten years ago.³

On top of this, we enter 2018 with a Capitol Improvement balance of \$33,732.90, a healthy General fund balance around \$35,000, and debt-free facilities.

What does all this mean? We have *people* and *income*. Put those together and it means that a lot of ministries took place, by God's grace. It means we were able to teach (and feed) children in Kids Club on Wednesdays, and teens on Sunday evenings, and all ages in Sunday School.

It means we were able to demonstrate practical care through the Community Center which had 196 events last year. There was the Spring Fling for seasoned saints, a community pancake breakfast, an appreciation luncheon for the employees from Hickie's Restaurant, and more. And donations from those who used our Community Center exceeded \$3500.

It means we were able to provide more than 150 sessions of free biblical counseling for people facing marriage, family, and personal challenges.

It means we were able to support our pregnancy care center ministry, CRADLE.

It means we had a part in the great things God is doing at Scioto Hills Camp and Retreat Center, a ministry that's been part of our DNA since it began in 1965.

It means we were privileged to partner with fourteen missionaries to take the message of Christ to places like Zambia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Slovakia.

And there's more. In 2017 Douglas Goncalves began a pastoral internship that continues and has been expanded in 2018.

Our safety team set in place procedures to provide a safe environment for our services, which included installing new doors in the back of our building.

Then, of course, in November we celebrated our thirty years together by inviting those who have served with us in the past to return for a special Bible conference.

So again I say, the numbers reflect something rather curious about the windows of opportunity in 2017. God has used fewer people to provide more resources for a host of gospel-advancing ministries.

To which I offer three responses. One, to God be the glory! Two, thank you church family for faithfully exalting Christ through your giving and serving! And three, let's make the most of new gospel opportunities facing us in 2018!

Some of the gospel opportunities that we see on the horizon for God's glory in 2018

³ For comparison purposes, here are some giving and attendance averages from previous years:

2017 - \$234,425 (weekly \$4434) – (attendance AM 109, PM 58, Wed PM 44)

2016 - \$247,509 (weekly \$4828) – (120, 55, 47)

2015 - \$239,625 (weekly 4609) – (127, 60, 59)

2014 - \$228,253 (weekly 4367) – (124, 64, 78)

2013 - 226,507 (weekly 4355) –

2012 - 206,588 (weekly 3973) – (136, 73, 86)

2011 - 199,633 (weekly 3839) – (129, 69, 89)

2010 - 197,900 (weekly 3717) – (121, 61, 70)

2007 – 189,347 (weekly ?) – (129, 61, 74)

As we move into the new year, I think it's important to reaffirm some distinctives God has worked into the fabric of this local church. Every church has its distinctives. From my perspective, these are ours.

⇒**Our Passion:** We are committed to the expository preaching and teaching of God's Word in our services.

⇒**Our Theology:** We are committed to a reformed view of salvation, with a baptistic approach to church polity.

⇒**Our Approach to Methodology:** We seek to use ministries that are God-centered rather than man-centered, ministries that are biblically-based rather than pragmatic. Specifically, our goal is to make disciples, not simply get a crowd.

⇒**Our Involvement in Strategic Area-wide Ministries:** This includes being a Biblical Counseling Training Center in the Tri-State region. It also includes strategic involvement with two other regional ministries, Scioto Hills Camp and CRADLE pregnancy care center.

⇒**Our Commitment to BEING a church and not just GOING to church:** That's why we have everything from deacon care groups to fellowship dinners to men's retreats. We're seeking to do life together, for we know that church is far more than gathering to listen to a sermon once a week.

Now, with these distinctives in mind, let's talk about some windows of opportunity God seems to be opening in 2018.

Actually, the first is not a window, but a door. Acts 14:27 says, "They gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how *he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*"

Our first opportunity this year is to see something happen that we cannot do. We need to see God open the door of faith to lost people in this community. We cannot open this door. Only God can open the door of faith.

But there is something we can do. Pray, and I mean pray a specific prayer. Colossians 4:3 says, "And pray for us that God may open a door for our message."

Our mission is not to get Christians to leave other churches and join us. Our mission is to make Christ known to lost people, to ask God to open the door of their hearts to the Savior, and then add them to this local church so we can disciple them, and then together with them, make Christ known to still others who are presently lost.

We also need to prepare ourselves for some changes. When the Lord adds baby Christians to this assembly, they will bring what babies always bring to families—smiles, and laughter, and sleepless nights, and likely a few messes. The joys of parenting!

Are you ready? Are you ready to get to know some new brothers and sisters? Are you ready to let them sit in your seat, and invite them over to your home, and teach them how to do a ministry for the One we love?

So let's pray that God will open doors, and open our mouths, and open their hearts.

Related to this, we're seeing some other opportunities. One is a revision of our by-laws, which is already in process. Not to change what we believe, but to make sure we have language in our by-laws most conducive to fulfilling our mission in 2018.

Let's talk about two significant open doors. Sports. And kids. Our community is crazy about their sports and about their kids. And it just so happens that we have a gymnasium, and classrooms, and a parking lot, and a community center. We also have a

reputation. Historically, WBC has been known for its love for the kids and families in this community. So let's make the most of today's opportunity.

I'm grateful that on Tuesday evenings some of you are using soccer to build relationships with young people and teach them about Jesus. And for what's happening with Kids Club on Wednesdays, and Sunday School, and VBS, all ways to connect with young people in order to present them and the rest of their family members complete in Christ.

We're hoping to improve our signage this year so people know better who we are and what we're doing.

We're also exploring ways to increase our fellowship and body life, which goes hand in hand with outreach. When we reach people, we must incorporate them into the life of the church family. We've used home fellowships before, and we're looking to do even more connecting with small groups meeting in our homes. We also hope to do another church directory this year since the last was done in 2015.

Then there's Preachers in Training, a window of opportunity to keep equipping men to know and proclaim God's truth.

And many, many more.

I want to finish by going back to where we started. Listen again to Ephesians 5:15-17, "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."

Brothers and sisters, God is opening windows. Let's make the most of them.