

# Don't Waste Your Life

## *Series on Stewardship*

On 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1997 I conducted the funeral service of my sister in law. She was the mother of two children. She was good at her job. She loved music, and was a talented musician who could hold people spellbound when she played the piano. But hers was a wasted life. At thirteen years of age she made choices that had devastating consequences that eventually led to drugs, suicide attempts, failed marriages and many, many broken relationships with men. She once had a relationship with Christ, but as she made more and more bad choices, which resulted in more and more pain, she came to believe that God could never love her or forgive her. Just a few days before Christmas in December 1997, she drove out to a lonely place, and took her own life. It was one of the saddest funeral services I have ever conducted, because I couldn't help but think of all her talent and potential that was wasted. I'm sure many of you know stories of people like that, who have wasted the enormous talent and potential God has given them. Perhaps they didn't finish up in such despair that they took their own lives, but nevertheless, these people have never become all that God has intended that they should be.

The Bible says this, **"Be careful how you live, not as fools but as those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do."**(*Ephesians, 5:15-17 - New Living Translation*) In the original language it means "don't stumble through life - don't drift through life." Think it through, know what you're here for, know your purpose. Make the most of every opportunity. Be wise. Try to understand what God wants you to do. If I asked each person here if they would really would like to know what God wants them to do with their life, I think most of us would say "yes". This evening I want us to think about two of the most important questions of life.

### **Question #1: What does God want from my life?**

What does God want from you? What does he want from me? When you read through the whole Bible, we can summarize it in a couple of words. He wants **my whole life**. He wants my entire life. There is not a single verse in the Bible, not one, that says I can be a Christian and live my life any way I want to. It's just not there. God wants all of me. He doesn't want 10% of me, He doesn't want 50% of me, He doesn't want 99% of me - He wants all of me. Now God is very clear about this; there's no mystery in it. The Bible says, **"Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God"** (*Romans 6:13 - New Living Translation*). It's talking about "completely". It's talking about our "whole body". It has to be all of us. C.S. Lewis once said, **"Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."** If it's really true, then it deserves everything I've got. If it's not true, we shouldn't be here right now. The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. It's either all, or nothing. It's either true and that should determine the rest of our lives, or we should just chuck it away and go do whatever we want to do.

A lot of people try to sit on the fence. They say, "Well, I don't know what God wants me to do". All through the scriptures there are direct instructions from God about what he wants us to do. Here is one: **"This is what the Lord your God wants you to do: Respect the Lord and do what He has told you to do. Love Him. Serve the Lord your God with your whole being."** (*Deuteronomy 10:12 - New Century Version*) There's that word "whole being" again. People say "I'll serve God in my spare time". That's like seeing your life in segments. I have my social life, and I have my career life, and I have my sex life, I have my family life, my retirement life, and over here I have my spiritual life - as if our spiritual life is one segment of the whole. But the biblical understanding is that we are whole people, not segmented people, and God wants to fill the whole of us. He wants our whole being. Jesus put it this way. **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money"** (*Matthew 6:24 - New International Version*).

While Jesus was talking about money, he was actually stating an unbreakable principle. He's saying it is impossible to have two number one priorities in our lives. We are always going to have a No.1, and everything else is going to be number 2,3,4 and 5. We can't have two number one priorities. Jesus is saying we can't serve God and something else at the same time.

So really the question here is "What's going to be first place for you and me?" Is the No.1 goal in our life building our career? Is the No.1 goal in our life raising our family? Is the No.1 goal of our life going to be saving for retirement? Is the No.1 goal of our life going to be maintaining our good health? You see, all of those things are good. God approves of every one of those things, as long as they are not in first place. What is the first of the ten commandments? **"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3 NIV)**. Whatever is in first place in our life is our god. And any time we have something in our life that's No.1 that is not God, that's called an idol.

At one time Jesus said to a man, "Follow me" and the guy said, "Okay, I will follow you. But Lord, let me, first, go take care of some things I've got to take care of". Now, that little phrase – "Lord, let me first" is a contradiction. You can't say "Lord" and "me first" at the same time. If you're saying "me first", He's not your Lord. He's not in charge. He's not No. 1. So, you have to decide who's going to be Lord in your life – you, or God? We have all sorts of ways of saying "me first" in our lives. "God, I'll live for you, but let me first find somebody to marry. God, I'll live for you, but let me first finish school. God, I'll really serve you, but let me first get the kids out of the house. God, I'm really going to be on fire for you, I'm going to do it all, but let me first achieve financial independence. Let me first pay off my mortgage. Let me first build my career. Let me first finance my kid's university education". And God says, "If I'm not first, none of this is going to be in the right perspective".

Here's a promise from the Living Bible **"In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and, crown your efforts with success."** (Proverbs 3:6 TLB) Do you want to be a success? Put God first. So the answer to this question – "what does God want?" is the answer "He wants all of you".

### **Question #2 – What does it take?**

What does it take to not waste my life? One word **"discipline"**. Did you groan inside when you heard that? You cannot be a disciple without discipline. The two words go together - disciple and discipline. You can't be a disciple of Jesus without discipline.

Here's another scripture. **"Discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness".(1 Timothy 4:7 – New American Standard Bible)** Here's a simple definition of discipline. Discipline is delayed gratification. Discipline is doing the difficult now, in order to enjoy the benefit later. Some of you are already incredibly disciplined in your work, your career. You plan your day, you're always on time, you're conscientious in your work habits. Some of you are very disciplined in your physical exercise. You never miss your exercise routine. Some of you never miss a favorite T.V. show. And of course, many of us never miss a meal. Do you know the areas where we are disciplined? In the areas where we want to be. The things that are important to us, we get done. What if we were as disciplined in having a daily time with God as we are in never missing a meal? What if we were as disciplined in serving others as we are in getting up and going to work everyday? What if we were as disciplined in attending church as we are in watching that favorite T.V. show that we never miss?

You know, there's another word for discipline. It's the word "habits". We are the sum total of our habits. Tell me what you do habitually, and I'll tell you what your character is. If you habitually tell the truth, you have integrity. If you are habitually faithful to your spouse, you are a faithful person. It's what we do over and over and over without even thinking. Our whole life is designed, shaped, controlled, and developed by our habits. If we want to change our lives, all we have to do is change our habits. And the way we change our lives spiritually is when we develop some spiritual habits. Let me illustrate a point here.

## **DRAMA (BLANK SLIDE)**

**Filling a person's arms with things (Sports gear, work tools, computers, play station, TV, etc etc and no hands free to pick up the Bible)**

### **The discipline of shedding weight**

You can't keep adding things to your life without letting go of something else. The writer to the Hebrews says this; ***"Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress". (Hebrews 12:1 – New Living Translation)*** There are two key words in that verse – the word "weight" and the word "sin". Those are the two things that hold us back from establishing Godly habits in our lives. Weights and sins limit our potential in life. They are two things that waste our lives. We have got to let go of these things. Most of us know what sins are...breaking the commandments of God. But what's a "weight"? Well, a weight is something that's not necessarily wrong; it's just not necessary. It's something that slows us down. A weight can be all kinds of things. It could be a relationship, it could be an expectation, it could be an activity, it could be a club, it could be a memory that you refuse to let go of, it could be a fear, it could be a job. There are a thousand, or hundred thousand different kinds of weights. If you and I are going to grow, we must learn to say no. We can't say, "yes" to everything. We have to say "no" to some things. We have to say "no", often to good things in order to have time for the best things. We have to say "no" to things that are not bad. In fact, they're quite good, but we say "no" to them because we cannot do it all and have it all.

If we are serious about fulfilling the purposes God has for our lives, we are going to have to make space. And if we are going to make space for God in our lives, we're going to have to cut some stuff out. Some of it may be sin, but most of it is just weight. And the weights in our lives are just killing some of us. Some of us have got way too much going on in our lives. There is just no room for Godly disciplines because our schedules are stuffed full of everything else. You can only put so many irons in the fire before you put out the fire. If you burn the candles at both ends, you are not as bright as you think you are. Not everything in your life is of equal value. So you need to ask, "What am I going to stop doing?" Any time you take on a new activity in your life you need to ask yourself, "What am I not going to do?" at the same time. Any time you take on a new habit, a new skill, a new commitment you should say, "What am I not going to do?"

Here's an example. Perhaps you know that you really need to spend more time being still with God. Quiet time reading his word, praying for your family, listening to his Spirit for direction for the day - just hanging out with God the way you would hang out with a friend. Now if you are a Type A personality, you will immediately be thinking "OK, instead of getting up at 6.30 in the morning, I need to get up at 5.30". But that might not be the answer. Maybe you need to stop watching re-runs of "Friends" on TV so you can have time to become friends with God. Maybe you need to go to bed 30 minutes earlier, so you can get up 30 minutes earlier to spend time with God. Maybe you need to cut back on your physical exercise so you have time to work on your spiritual exercise. There's always a cost of putting God first in your schedule, but the rewards are worth it.

Together as a church we have begun these studies called "Managing Our Finances Gods' Way". Sure, we are talking about financial management, but there is a much bigger principle behind it all. If you just talk about financial management when you discuss these things in your groups, you are missing the point. These studies are not just about managing my finances. It's about managing "me", because the "me" in my life keeps getting in the way of what God wants to do. As I said last week, it's about learning to be content in every situation. And the week before that I talked about it all going back in the box. Those possessions are not ours, they are only for us to use for a while before they are handed on to someone else. These exercises we are doing in our groups are not just about examining our budget. They are about examining our priorities. They are about examining what comes first in our lives. Don't waste your life.

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