

Ephesians 5:15-16

Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Life is filled with tasks we don't want to do but have to do anyway. By virtue of being an student or parent, we're obligated to certain actions. Diapers changes aren't likely at the top of anyone's list of "Things I'd Like to Do at 4 am," but there are times when we don't have any choice. You may not want to stay up late studying or go to practice or rehearsal, but you are obligated to do it. Then there are those actions we do control. The projects we can either take or reject, the volunteer opportunity that presents itself, or the way we spend a random Saturday in January. There's no shortage of opportunities, but there is a shortage of time. You and I can only do so much, so how do we determine how to invest the discretionary time that we have? Here are a few helpful questions to consider.

1. Does It Matter?

This question is the foundation for wise decisions. All actions aren't equal. Playing video games, working in my garage, isn't as important as serving my neighbor who is facing a health crisis. Playing a game of pick-up basketball isn't as vital as praying for the needs of those who are in my circle of friends. Now, that doesn't mean I should never play ball or spend time in the garage, but it does mean that I should consider my discretionary time in light of its eternal significance and God-given priority. We are limited, if I don't create a list of priorities, then I'll likely spend my time invested in whatever comes first or yells the loudest, rather than focusing on things that actually matter.

2. Is It Mine?

No one else shares my responsibility to love Christin—and we alone shoulder the responsibility of discipling our children. With these roles come certain actions that are mandated, like changing diapers, but there are also a host of commitments that should be priorities by virtue of these relationships. I should throw the football with my boys before it gets dark because they are mine and I'm responsible for structuring my life so that I can invest in them well. Likewise, I don't always want to watch another episode of *Call the Midwife*, but it works its way onto the list of my commitments by virtue of my love for my wife. Additional commitments, then, are evaluated in light of whether or not they needlessly hinder me from those tasks which only I can do. What are the things that only you can do? — That you are responsible for?

3. What's My Motive?

This may be the most difficult question to answer because our motives are notoriously difficult to assess. Though I don't do it often, I enjoy a spring day in a trout stream with a fly rod. Spending my day this way could be motivated a need for rest or a time to enjoy and be refreshed by nature. But, it could also be driven by a desire to avoid the craziness of a house with four young kids and a selfish desire to be alone. Some motives are bad at the core— serving to be seen by others, going on a mission trip so you can post pictures on social media, tackling a project to make money to spend in selfish ways. Other motives are valid, but we've still got to question the balance of these motives. Rest is a solid motive, but if it's used as the reasoning behind twenty Netflix movies a week, then it's probably a bit unhealthy. Loving others is a proper motive, but when loving others causes us to fail to love our mom/dads-brothers/ sisters, then we've got a problem.

4. Am I Gifted?

Most of us are not likely to spend our free time doing things we hate or in areas where we aren't gifted. I'd be foolish to invest 5 hours a week in singing lessons. I've got one note and no rhythm, and try as I might, all the singing lessons in the world will do little to change that reality. But

we're all prone to spend time in areas where we are moderately gifted, while we neglect those aspects of life where we make a genuine, unique, and significant contributions. Finally:

5. Can I Finish?

Commitment matters—at least it should to a follower of Jesus. If we say we're going to do something, and do it with excellence, then we need to count the cost before we commit.

There will certainly be extenuating circumstances—times when factors beyond our control slow us down or hinder our ability to meet a certain objective. Such is life. But, we should question our commitments if we begin to notice a tendency towards overcommitting, a failure to meet a commitment by an agreed upon deadline, or the propensity to start something with excellence only to half-heartedly limp to the finish line. Often times, you and I are completely blind to these trends in our lives, which is why we need trusted friends who can help us assess whether or not we are being faithful to our commitments.

A Short Life

Life is too important and time is too short to fail to make solid decisions about the way we spend our discretionary time. Certainly, we will still make poor decisions. We will overcommit and underperform. But, those who are given the mind of Christ should be able to use Spirit-given wisdom to discern how best to use the fleeting days we've been given making sure to redeem the time we have.