

## MAKE UP YOUR MIND

## EPHESIANS 5:15-17

**INTRO:** There's a bumper sticker out there that says, "Life is too precious to waste." I don't think anyone deliberately wants to waste his or her life, but we all know that it can happen. How do you prevent wasting your life? Let's consider what the Bible says. If you believe that God the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author of the Bible as I do, it clearly says there that He wants you to be very careful how you live your life. What's the opposite of careful? Careless! In other words, don't live your life carelessly. Don't just stumble through life. Don't just drift along aimlessly. We're in the midst of a four part message series I'm calling, "Let's Invite Him to Show Up." The "Him" is God.

These messages are about experiencing spiritual renewal. Spiritual renewal is necessary but not inevitable. In other words, every follower of Jesus goes through periods in his or her life that leave you spiritually dry, tired or defeated. We all need to reconnect with God from time to time. But that sense of reconnection isn't inevitable. We need to move towards God to re-establish that sense of connection. Last week, we thought about the importance of resisting our enemy, the devil, in terms of restoring a sense of connection with God. Two weeks ago, we reflected on what it means to plow up our hearts as a vital part of inviting God to show up. There's another reason I'm asking you to think with me about what it means to invite God to show up. We're two weeks away from starting our *Just Walk Across the Room* emphasis. I'd like God to show up during that month long program. I don't know what that will look like if it happens, but I'm ready, willing and available for it to happen! I hope you are, too.

Inviting God to show up in our individual lives and in our church involves many factors. I'm just suggesting four. Plow up your heart. Resist your enemy. And, today, make up your mind. Contrary to what many people think, following Jesus is as much about your mind as it is your heart. You need constantly to think it through, evaluate, discern and make wise decisions. The scripture we read says that this is necessary if you're going to make the most of every opportunity in life and understand what God wants you to do. Let me ask and try to answer three important questions. Here's the first one:

### WHAT DOES GOD WANT?

After you read the whole Bible, you can summarize the answer in a few words: my whole life. God wants your entire life. There's nothing in the Bible that suggests that as a follower of Jesus, God is ever satisfied with a portion of your life – 10%, 50%, or 99%. God is very clear about this in His Word. It says, "...give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God." (Romans 6:13 NLT) C.S. Lewis, that great Christian thinker and author, once said, "The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important." If it's true, then it deserves everything you've got. If it's not true, then we'd all be better off having slept in today and enjoyed scrambled eggs or pancakes in front of the TV. All of us have a tendency to split up our lives into parts like slices of a pie. Here's my social life slice, my career slice, my family life slice, my finances slice and over here is my spiritual life slice. At the very least, my mind tells me

from that verse that God doesn't want just a slice of my life. He wants the whole pie! He wants your entire life to be under His loving control and direction.

Someone might say, "Well, I don't really know what God wants me to do." The Bible says, "...what does the Lord your God ask of you? He wants you to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him. He wants you to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul." (Deuteronomy 10:12 NLT) How do you do that? It involves applying the wonderful mind God gave you to find out fully what that means to your every day life. As you do, it becomes very clear that God demands to be first. I've been reading a great book by a pastor named John Piper called *Desiring God*. He says that God is in Himself the greatest joy we can ever experience; therefore, we should seek Him, desire Him and want Him above all else. He offers a subtle but interesting variation of a saying that you might have heard at some point: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Piper alters it to read: "The chief end of man is to glorify God *by enjoying* Him forever." God demands to be first in your life because He knows that He Himself is who you crave and need and must have above anything and anyone else. God wants you to have the best and the best is Him. But to get God and keep God first, you have to make up your mind constantly.

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24 NLT) It's impossible to have two "firsts" in your life. It's impossible to have two number one priorities in life. Now there the issue is money, but a lot of other things can push God out of first place in your life. Like what? Like advancing your career, like educational accomplishments, like increasing your financial wealth, like enjoying your retirement, like even focusing on your kids and family life. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with any of those activities until and unless they move into first place in your life. Whatever occupies first place is your god. If God isn't in first place, then whatever is in that position is an idol.

Frankly, some of the best stories about what it means to give your whole life to God come from places in our world where being a follower of Jesus is not welcomed or tolerated. Following Sunday worship services on January 8, 2006, five young men attacked and threatened to kill a Protestant church leader in Turkey. Kamil Kiroglu, 29, had just left his church in the city of Adana when he was ambushed and beaten so severely that he fell unconscious twice. "They were trying to force me to deny Jesus," Kiroglu said. "But each time they asked me to deny Jesus and become a Muslim, I was saying, 'Jesus is Lord.' The more I said, 'Jesus is Lord,' the more they beat me." One of the attackers pulled out a long butcher knife and threatened to kill Kiroglu if he did not deny his Christian faith and return to Islam. Kiroglu refused. After the incident, he said, "I am praising God—not because he saved me from death, but because he helped me not to deny him in the shadow of death."

"What's going to have first place in my life today?" That's a question that you should ask yourself daily. You need to make up your mind if you're going to pursue God above everything else. Here's a wonderful promise. If you put God first and keep God first in

your life, He'll take care of everything else. The Bible says, "In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success." (Proverbs 3:6 LB). If you want God to show up and keep on showing up in your life, you need to make up your mind to put Him first and keep Him first. Have you been trying to be a part time follower of Jesus? Have you been offering Him a slice of your life when He wants the whole thing? The first question is: What does God want? God wants your whole life. Here's a second question:

## **WHAT DOES IT TAKE?**

What does it take not to waste your life? What does it take to make up your mind and keep God first? Let me suggest a one word answer. It's not a popular word, a likeable word, a fun word, but it is a true word. It's the word "discipline." The Bible says, "...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7 NASB) You can't be a disciple of Jesus without discipline. Those two words go together: disciple and discipline. Let me clarify something immediately, however. Discipline doesn't make you a child of God. You can't work your way or discipline your way into heaven. Heaven is a free gift of God's grace received by faith. You say, "God, I'm a sinner. Thank you for sending Jesus to pay the penalty for my sin. I put my trust in your Son and what He has done for me." But to be a follower of Jesus – in other words, to be a growing, faithful disciple in whose life God shows up frequently – you need discipline.

Some of you are incredibly disciplined in certain aspects of your life. You might be disciplined about your work. You plan your work and work your plan day in and day out. You might be disciplined about physical exercise. You never miss a workout. You might be disciplined about watching your favorite TV show. If you could, you might delay the second coming of Jesus in order to watch that show! Some of you are disciplined about food, but in different ways. Some of you only eat the right stuff in the right amounts. Others of us are disciplined about never missing an opportunity to eat!

I'm thinking of discipline in the sense of making up of your mind to pursue what really, truly matters day after day. I define what really, truly matters as whatever's important to God and has eternal impact. That requires mental and spiritual discipline. That will require you to let some things go in order to pursue what's truly important. The Bible says, "... let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us." (Hebrews 12:1 NLT) According to that verse, two things will limit the potential of God showing up in your life. One is sins and the other is weights. Sins are anything that break one of God's commandments about how to live life. But a weight is something that's not necessarily wrong in and of itself; it's just not necessary. A weight can be many things in life – a relationship, an expectation, an activity, a pattern of behavior – just to name a few. Getting rid of an unnecessary spiritual weight requires discipline. It demands making up your mind every day to honor God.

I'm also thinking of discipline in the sense of developing godly habits. Habits are disciplines and, frankly, you're the sum total of your habits. Tell me what you do

habitually and I'll have a good insight into your character and your soul. If you habitually tell the truth, you have integrity. If you're habitually faithful to your spouse, you're faithful. Habits are what you do over and over again without even really thinking about them. They shape you, control you and direct your life. Here's a thought: if you want to change your life, you must change your habits. Likewise, if you want to change your spiritual life, you must change your spiritual habits.

Being a vital part of *Just Walk Across the Room* will encourage the development of godly spiritual habits. I encourage you to be here for worship all four Sundays of the program – September 9, 16, 23 and 30. Why? Worship is an essential spiritual habit. I encourage you to buy the hardcover book for \$10 and read it. Some of you have never read a book on how to share your faith. This is a good one to start with. Let the Holy Spirit use that book to help you understand how he wants to use you to reach lost people. Pick up a participant's guide and make sure you're a part of a Sunday School class or a small group that's doing the *Just Walk Across the Room* study. Why? Because study and interaction with other followers of Jesus is an essential spiritual habit. It will sharpen your thinking and motivate your heart. Join our prayer effort. Sign up for the Day of Fasting and Prayer on Saturday, September 8<sup>th</sup>. Be part of our Daily Blanket of Prayer through this month long program. Pray weekly in your small group or Sunday School class. Why? Because prayer is an essential spiritual habit. Some of you here today sorely need to build the habits of worship, study, interaction with believers and prayer into your spiritual life. Many of you already practice those spiritual habits, so being a vital part of *Just Walk Across the Room* will be easy for you.

But there are other godly habits we all need to develop. One of the major goals of *Just Walk Across the Room* is to help you and me develop some new, equally important spiritual habits. Like what? Like learning to listen to the Holy Spirit's leadings particularly when it comes to sharing our faith; like taking the initiative to develop relationships with people far from God; like consciously thinking about what next steps we might take to move those relationships towards a spiritual conversation; like learning how to tell our spiritual stories briefly and sincerely without coming off as superior. Developing those habits could well change your life and someone else's eternal destiny.

I like the story about the rabbi who taught that experiences of God, contrary perhaps to what I've just been saying, can never be planned or achieved. The rabbi said, "They are spontaneous moments of grace, almost accidental." His student asked, "Rabbi, if God-realization is just accidental, why do we work so hard doing all these spiritual practices?" The rabbi replied, "To be as accident-prone as possible." Developing godly habits don't somehow guarantee God's presence in your life, but developing godly habits does provide God the opportunity to show up in your life often.

The Bible says, "Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever." (1 Timothy 4:8 MSG) There's physical fitness –important and good for you – but of limited value because you will die one day regardless of how fit you are. Then, there's spiritual fitness – that has value today, tomorrow and forever because it

has to do with your relationship with God. Learning better ways to share your faith, looking for daily opportunities to share your faith, living out the realization that you're the way lost people find Jesus – it's part and parcel of being in good spiritual shape. It's a direct result of making up your mind to value supremely what Jesus values. What does God want? My whole life. What will it take? Discipline. Here's a final question:

## **WHY SHOULD I DO IT?**

Why bother? Why invite God to show up? Why make up my mind to develop new spiritual habits? Why get better at sharing my faith? It's summed up in only one good answer: the cross. The Bible says, "He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them." (2 Corinthians 5:15 NLT) Jesus gave up His life for you and He expects your whole life in return. Jesus died and rose again for everyone here this morning. Many of you have placed your personal trust in Him already; you've received forgiveness of your sins; you have the assurance of eternal life in heaven with God. Maybe you're a person who's just understood this truth fully for the first time this morning. In any case, all of us recognize this morning that we just can't live life to and for ourselves. No, you've been called to the best life possible: you live for Him who died for you. And part of that grand purpose for your life is sharing the love of Jesus with those who haven't experienced it yet. *Just Walk Across the Room* starts in two weeks. Why do it? There's really only one good reason at the end of the day: the cross.

Tim White had a son, Ryan, who in the first 15 years of his life had over 30 surgeries. When he was about eight years old, Ryan was in the hospital for another surgery. The medical staff had already given him some "Barney Juice" to drink – a purple liquid with something like morphine in it. Then they started to roll Ryan's bed to the operating room. As usual, Tim and his wife accompanied him to the two big doors that led to the surgical unit. That's where they stopped and told him everything would be OK before surgery. But on this day, as they got to those two doors, Ryan sat up in the bed, looked his dad in the eye and pleaded, "Dad, don't let them take me!" At that moment, Tim White's heart was broken. He would have given anything to be able to take his son off that bed. But Ryan needed the surgery. Tim just stood there trembling as the doors closed and Ryan disappeared. Then he dissolved into tears. Shortly after, Tim was asking God why love hurts so much at times. As he prayed, he realized God had gone through the same thing on an infinitely higher scale. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "Father, if there is any other way, let this cup pass from me." If you translated that prayer into the language of a child, it probably would have sounded much like Ryan's plea: "Dad, don't let them take me!" Tim White allowed the surgeons to take his son that day for his own good. And God allowed the crucifiers to take His Son on that day above all days for our good. That's how much God loves you and me. That's how much God loves lost people. It's been said, that "something is worth what someone else is willing to pay." Jesus' willingness to give up His life shows the value He placed on you and me. Make up your mind to value what God values. Make up your mind to invite Him to show up.