

Look Carefully How You Walk

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Preacher: Dave Moynihan

[0:00] Always sped up along the way. So in this last Sunday of 2018, I wanted us to just stop, take a deep breath, think about the year that we've been in, but also look into the next year as well and ask yourself some questions.

Is this new year that God has laid out before me, is it going to be as crazy busy as it has been this last year for me? And in the 365 days that God, if he's so kind, gives to us, am I going to be able to look back with satisfaction? Am I going to look back with regrets? Am I going to look back with a sense of there was victory in my life this year? Am I going to look back with a real horrible sense of defeat? Am I going to look into the future with anticipation and hope?

Or am I going to look back and look forward with the burning regret and dread of the next year? There's a passage that was read in our scripture reading this morning that I want us to focus on. In particular, I want us to look at Ephesians chapter 5, verses 15 to 17. This particular passage here can do much for us to get our focus for the upcoming year, not so much if we read it, not even if we memorize it, but if we heed it for the upcoming year. Here Paul writes, see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Here we find the Apostle Paul presenting some very important instructions that if we take them to heart, can greatly help us here on the threshold of a new year. The first thing he tells us is to walk circumspectly. See then that you walk circumspectly. And that's a King James word. Some translations have carefully, cautiously, not as fools, but as wise. Why does Paul tell us to walk circumspectly?

[2:25] Well, the word of God tells us that in many different places that it's because our time here on earth is very limited.

For instance, in Psalm 39, verse 4, the psalmist wrote this, Lord, make me know my life's end. And what is the measure of the number of my days that I may know how frail I am or how fleeting my life is?

Moses, the man of God, wrote in Psalm 90, first part of verse 10, he said this, the days of our lives are 70 years, and yet if by reason of strength, they are 80 years.

Now I realize that some of you who are younger than I am, look at 70, 80 years, and wow, that's a long time.

And I understand that. I've been there with you. I remember the time in my life when anyone over 50 was ancient. Oh, how I wish for those days when I was ancient.

[3:32] Time is relative in many ways. For teenagers in love, speaking on the phone for an hour or two is like a moment.

The parents wanting to get in, I guess I'm speaking more in terms of those with landlines.

Everyone's got their cell phones today. Maybe I'll change the analogy. For teenagers in love, an hour or two in the automobile at night is like a moment.

For the parents wondering what in the world is going on out there, it's like an eternity. Same way for time, but it depends on the perspective. Not only time is relative, but it's also very, oftentimes it's something that we take for granted.

We don't give a lot of thought to what our lives. Some years ago, People's Magazine came up with an article called Dead Ahead.

And in that article, they talked about this clock that had been invented that you put your sex in and you put your age in and it would calculate how long you had to live.

[4:57] They sold for \$999. I'm sorry, \$99. I didn't buy one. But I thought it was kind of a unique idea.

And yet some people say, that's awful. That's morbid. Who in the world would want to know how much more time I have to live?

Well, for one thing, one reason why you might want to know that is because we don't have any more time. You cannot buy time and get more of it.

Time with your family, time with your friends, time to do the things that are really important to you or anything like that. Ask that you need to do the things that are really important, not urgent, but important to you now.

Less some premature ailment or early death forbid you to do that thing. Why would we want to know how long we have to live?

[6:07] Well, because the Word of God tells us that we ought to do that. Moses, again, in Psalm 90, verse 12, says that, So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Here, Moses is telling us, number your days. How much time do you have left? So that you can develop a heart of wisdom in light of eternity.

Let's see. If I live to 80 years old, I have 4,654 days left to live. That's it.

4,654 days. Yet we know that I'm not guaranteed one of this. I may leave here today and get smacked by a Mack truck on the way home to lunch.

We're not guaranteed anything. In fact, that's what James tells us in James chapter 4, verses 13 to 14. He says, Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a place, I'm sorry, city, spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit.

[7:22] Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. But what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little while or for a time and then vanishes away. My friends, all we have as we're standing on the threshold of a new year is today, is now, right now.

Our time on earth is very, very valuable. It's limited. And it can, in fact, be even uncertain at times. And so Paul tells us to walk circumspectly.

Walk carefully. Take consideration of your steps day in and day out. Secondly, Paul tells us here that we need to redeem the time, verse 16. Why?

Because he says the days are evil. Any disagreement with that? In the world that we live in today, the days are, in fact, evil.

Not only do we live in a world that is not God-fearing, but we live in a world that we have what is called the God of this world, namely Satan, who would love nothing better than to just destroy your life and mine.

[8:33] Satan, the scriptures tell us, is a thief and a robber. And one of the things that he loves to rob is our time, because he knows how valuable it is in life of eternity.

It's a very precious commodity. Just think for a moment. How much time is wasted sinning? How much time is wasted in bars, in gambling concedents, in shallow affairs?

We love the time that's wasted as we fear what the consequences might be of being found out from those sins.

You see, in light of eternity, Satan knows better than we do just how precious our time is here. And he's a robber and a thief.

But you know, sin, it's not just sin that makes demands on our time. There's a lot of good things that do as well. I think most of you are probably familiar with the story of Mary and Martha and Lazarus when they invited Jesus over one time.

[9:55] And Jesus comes in, and Martha's all excited. Really, the whole household is excited. And Jesus comes in and sits in their, I guess, living room of sort, and begins to teach them.

And Mary is there sitting at his feet, just drinking it all in. Martha, on the other hand, says, Well, we've got guests to take care.

We've got a very special guest. We've got Jesus here today. And she's busy in the kitchen. And getting more and more perturbed by the moment.

Because her sister is not helping. And it finally gets to a boiling point to where she goes out there and said, in Luke chapter 10, verse 40, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Therefore, tell her to help me. Someone will smile at that because we can identify with Martha. But I want you to take note of Jesus' response here.

[10:58] He says, in verse 41 and 2, he says, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen the good part, and it will not be taken away from her.

Was Martha sinning by preparing a meal in the kitchen? Well, of course not. She was, that was the way she was serving her Lord.

But the problem was, is that she was so preoccupied serving him, serving Jesus there, that she lost sight of the fact that she had the Son of God sitting in her living room that desired to have deep, intimate relationship with her.

And they shared, he shared the words of life. Truth be known, we even in church ministries can get involved with serving our Lord and not taking time to have deep, intimate, personal relationship with her.

We can get caught up, just like Martha, in doing all kinds of things.

[12:17] We fail to have eternity in view. We fail to understand what God really wants of us. You see, he doesn't need our service.

He spoke the worlds into existence as it was shared today. He doesn't need our service. What he desires so much is our love, our intimate relationship with him.

But that takes time. It takes time. Dr. Richard Swenson, medical doctor who's the author of the bestselling book, Margin, wrote another book that was entitled The Overload Syndrome.

And he discusses that one of the maladies of our culture today is something what he calls overload. He says it's something that creates all kinds of anxiety and stress in our lives.

My friends, if we're honest with ourselves, we'd have to admit that many of us here are overloaded with commitments. We're committed to go here, committed to go there, take part in this activity, be involved with that social activity.

[13:38] We begin to meet ourselves coming and going. And all of those things tend to cause great stress and anxiety.

And we are overloaded with the number of commitments that we have. We're also overloaded with possessions. Dr. Swenson goes on to say, our closets are full and our garages are overflowing. We've gone into debt to pay for all of these things that we simply must have. And now we're afraid that someone's going to steal them. We're overloaded in the area of possessions.

Maybe that's a bad topic at this time of year. Following Christmas. We're also overloaded in the area of work as well.

We get up early. We fight the traffic. We often get involved with all kinds of overtime or very difficult work conditions and things like that.

[14:49] Why? We do this day in and day out. Well, we do it because we've got to pay for all those things that we now are in possession of, that we've accumulated.

And that's why perhaps this goes back. This is in justice generation. That goes back to even before my generation where they used to sing, I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go. And that's more and more today of this culture.

Our culture is in debt way over their heads. Because they have an overload of stuff.

And they have to keep working and working and working. Just pay for that stuff. There's also an information overload. Dr. Swenson points out the fact that because he's a medical doctor, he has to read some 220 articles, medical articles a month, just to stay up to speed with his practice.

You combine that today with all the stuff that are at disposal, whether it's the internet, it's like a super information highway.

[16:04] And then there's social media. How many hours are spent on the internet and social media? 20, 25 hours a week? Television used to be a big thing, where the average family spent about six and a half hours a day in front of the television.

I don't have time to read this Bible. You see, a lot of this overload is not creating just stress and anxiety.

It's also tending to keep us away from the things that are really important, important in life of eternity. And I want to underscore that phrase, not only for this message for the upcoming year, to be giving thought to what you're doing and how you're spending your time in light of eternity.

Because that's where you're going at some point. You want to give your best now to the Master. I can go on and on and talk about hobbies, clubs, great things like that.

There's all kinds of things that not necessarily bad things that draw our time away such that we really don't have that much time to maybe serve the Lord, to serve in a local church, to go on a mission trip.

[17:35] Because I'm just so busy. I'm overcommitted. But what are we doing to uncommit ourselves to those things that in light of eternity are going to go up and smoke?

Maybe we want to spend our time on those things that are going to last on into eternity? Apart from God, there's only two things that last forever.

People and the Word of God. What are we investing our time in? That's so precious. We have 8,760 hours in this upcoming year.

That sounds like a lot. But boy, does it go by fast. We may say that we want to redeem the time.

It's New Year's resolution time. But what do we do? How do we go about that? Well, Paul tells us here in the next verse, he says, therefore don't be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

[18:52] And I've added something to the verse, not that I want to add to God's Word, but I can draw from God's Word to come up with that and do it.

Christians can be so given over to, if they're inclined to study God's Word, they get really excited about Bible studies and Bible knowledge. I know this and that about the big image in the book of Daniel and this, that, whatever.

But am I doing it? Am I putting it into practice? See, God never gave us His Word to give us all kinds of facts and figures and look smart in Sunday school class or whatever.

He gave us His Word to change us, to transform us. And to do that, we need to put it into practice to do it. So let's look at a few things here this morning.

What do you think God wants for you regarding His will for the new year? Do you think He wants your mind so given over to worry and anxiety that you can't really take in spiritual thoughts?

[20:02] Do you think that He wants your calendar so very full that you don't have time to read His Word or to serve Him in the local church or elsewhere?

What are the really important things in life? When you begin to establish priorities in light of eternity, you need to decide where does God stand to do this?

Does He stand right there, smack dab in the center? or is He off in the periphery? I kind of bring Him in on Sundays.

There is God as He establishes your priorities. You may ask yourself, who or what is the most important thing in my life?

You might mulling that a little bit. And if you're having a hard time, you might ask your spouse or kids what they think is the most important thing in your life.

[21:14] You'd be surprised. Maybe even a little embarrassed at what they've come up with. Would they say the most important thing in your life is the stock market or football or baseball or fishing?

they say Jesus. What would they say?

Hopefully, in answering that question, your answer would be that of my relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That's what's most important to me. And if not, may I say as kindly as I can, because I have to tell myself this at times when I'm not on track, is that you're living unwisely from the Scriptures here in light of eternity.

If God is not central, that's unwise living. That's what Paul tells us in this passage here. And so we need to get in line with death.

He wants us to get to the point where we know the Lord our God and love Him with all our heart, mind, and soul. Isn't that what the Great Commandment is? We read there in Matthew chapter 22

verse 37 when Jesus was asked, what was the first and Great Commandment?

[22:40] He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. He wants you to love Him with your entire being. And when you do that, that should affect your everyday decisions, your everyday schedule, your everyday relationships.

This was the passion of the Apostle Paul. We read in Philippians chapter 3, verse 8 and 10, he says, what is more, I consider everything, now he had just gone through a limit of all the things he had to point to as a religious person.

He says, I consider everything lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. In fact, I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. He goes on to verse 10, he says, I want to know Christ, yes, to know the power of His resurrection and the participation of His suffering and to become like Him in His death. Is that you, Ashley? that my passion? If not, don't give the spirits and still abide, you know, we have this flesh that can distract us, but it is something to be praying about, God, we need that passion for you.

[24:08] If you look at that verse, the words knowing and know or knowledge in some translations doesn't have so much to do with content and information. It's the word that the Bible uses for personal intimate relation knowing.

That's what Paul did. Paul already knew about Christ. He's running, you know, a third of the New Testament. He knew about Christ and the doctrine of this and that, whatever, but he longed to know the Savior, the lover of his soul, personally.

life. How do you get to know God in a very personal way? Well, to begin with, if you're here today and you've never put yourself in a position of realizing that the Bible says that you're a sinner before God, you've never put your trust and faith in Jesus, and you've never seen that you have a need for a Savior, then I would say that this is what's most important.

You need to recognize that the Bible says that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You need to recognize as well that that's kind of like the bad news, especially where it says in the wages of sin is death, separation from God for all eternity.

That's the bad news, but the good news is that God so loved us, that Jesus took upon himself our penalty. He died in our place so that we might live with him forever.

[25:47] Praise God for that. What grace. What mercy. If God still leaves it up to you in many ways, are you going to receive him or are you going to turn from him?

He reads in John chapter one, verse 11, verse he came to his own and his own did not receive him. But then we move on to verse 12. He says, but as many as did receive him, he gave him the right to become children of God, even those who believe in his name. And so I want to ask you this morning, because I don't know all of you, have you ever come to a point of recognizing you need this day to receive Jesus as their heart and that he was saved in his strength.

He's reaching out to you this morning. He says there that if you believe in him, you will receive him. You not only have all your sins forgiven, but you become part of the family of God.

You'll become a child of God. You're part of God's family. If you've already done that, then I hope you do not pretend to save it.

[27:14] I hope, like the Apostle Paul, that you want to go on, you want to move forward. If you're walking deep in your knowledge of the one who has loved you so much, even longer you're yet a sinner or enemy of this, he can really die for you.

The kind of person dies for his enemies. Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, I want to know him better. Knowing to be like that and to know him better is a good thing.

But we need to put feet on it. It's going to become a grown reality in our lives. We can't just talk about it or even think about it. So how do we get to know God better?

May I suggest that you schedule some time with God each day to be in his word and to pray. May I suggest 20 minutes a day?

20 minutes! Remember average family watching television six and a half hours a day? How many hours on internet, social media?

[28:27] Can you find 20 minutes? For the lover of your soul. Ten minutes reading the word of God, ten minutes praying. And I would suggest don't make it complicated.

Just go to the word of God looking to have God speak to you through his Holy Spirit. And say what do you want me to learn about you today Lord? What can I worship you about?

What can I thank you for? In fact I'd encourage you after that 20 minutes jot a little thought down for the day. Get a little tad. Don't make a big essay but jot a little thought down that God spoke to you for that day so that you can maybe review it at the end of the week.

Say God is speaking to me about these different things. No matter what path I'm in it keeps coming up. Maybe the Spirit is trying to talk to you. Something else in keeping with the great commandment though.

We want to understand that while we're there praying to God we ought to be telling them I love you Lord. Who have ever said that? I don't want to turn this far. But you answer it for yourself.

[29:38] Come right on and say I love you Jesus. Oh I love you God. God loves you God. But when we say that and we even sing songs like that.

Oh how I love you. You want to understand that Jesus puts a premium on a validation of our words. You look at John chapter 14 verse 21 he tells us that our love for him is validated by our obedience. He says he who has my commands and keeps them he is the one who loves me and he who loves me will be beloved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him. The only way you're going to have the commands of Christ is to be in the word of Christ.

It's got to be in the Bible. You're not going to know if you're even disobeying something. You need to know what God's word says and then you need to read the word of God with a heart's desire.

[30:51] I want to do this. I want to serve you. I want to obey you. And he says if you'll do that he's going to show himself manifest himself to you in deeper and more ways.

in your prayer life I guess I would encourage you as well that rather than going with the proverbial laundry list or shopping list of God I need this and that and whatever the case might be, is take the little acronym of ACPS, ACPS.

Some of you have seen that before and structure your prayer like that. There's many other ways to structure your prayer and structure like the Lord's prayers or things like that.

But with ACPS, have a balanced prayer time, not all about me and my needs and wants, but start your time worshipping God. Thanking him for his sovereignty, his omnipotence, his omniscience, his mercy, his love.

His holiness, fall down, worship him. It gets you kind of in the mood and when you're worshipping him for his holiness, you might, like Isaiah say, woe is me. And you might realize that you have some things that you need to confess and make that confession before him.

[32:14] Once that's clear, know that if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, well, you're a fiended individual. Go on to thanksgiving.

And then once you spent some time in thanksgiving, now take out your laundry list. And say, by the way, Lord, there's this thing that I'm concerned with or whatever, and begin with bringing it to the world. You don't have to use that structure all the time, but it's a balanced approach to recognize who are we approaching, the God of the universe.

It's not just some pal down the street. We're approaching the God of the universe who loves us, but he's still a holy God. He's come before him with desire, with reason.

Like establishing priorities for God in the center, I want to encourage you to, in those priorities, put your family in a high priority, and encourage you to husbands to ask God to help you have the grace of love your wives as Christ loved the church and sacrificially gave her himself for her and to live with her in an understanding way, that requires that we live there.

That's one of the most difficult things that most guys remember with. They're sitting through their lives. Kind of concise tune that out. He knows what they're going to say.

[33:50] Or we're preparing what we're going to say in response. Live with your lives in understanding ways. Spend time with them. Time apart from the cell phones and beepers and everything like that.

I go out to the restaurant and I see a husband and wife or whatever sitting across from one another both on their phones. That's not complete communication. That's not deepening the relationship with your wife.

Spend time with your kids as well. They grew up so bad. I've got green kids in the college now. Of course they have one that's just running around and one that's not running around that's months old.

But it goes by so sometimes in the midst of all of your I'm pulling my hair out. I don't know if I'm even going to make it through the day. Understand that those moments will fly by.

And what you've invested in your children will make a little difference not only to this life but to eternity. And as I've said to make your family high on that priority list.

[35:01] One of the things that I would encourage you to make sure you're doing is discipling the kids. Isn't that what the great mission is?

We'll make disciples of all people. Sometimes especially those in public ministry they're big on discipleship out there but they don't have time often times when they get back here.

Those Sundays we met on a dying bed. We'll save tens of thousands of people and children in the Lord.

My friends one of the main reasons why God has left us here is for that great commission to make disciples and I can't think of anyone more important than those whom God has entrusted to you in those children those precious children so that they come for a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. and not just that your plan as a parent is not just to raise good boys and girls that make you feel good when you're out in public but to raise godly men and women for his glory.

[36:19] That's your charge. But don't stop there. God said to meet disciples of all nations.

He says that in Matthew chapter 28 talking to great commission now. Have that there because I talk to so many Christians and witnessing just as they're not part of their schedule or even their mindset. He said go and make disciples of all nations baptize in the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I command you and lo and behold I'm with you always at the end of the age. Our pastors have been emphasized in recent months.

I hope that we're not only taking notes but we're praying about saying God give me a holy boldness to all do with that. You say that it feels right on the harvest.

Give me the courage to speak a word from Jesus. You might ask yourself before the Lord not here. How many people have shared Jesus Christ with you?

[37:24] finished? How many have left to Christ? I'm not asking that too much for a guilt trip or anything but just getting the Great Commission is not a great suggestion.

It's a command. And if we're commanded by our Lord and Master to do something we're not doing it. We're living in disobedience. Now there's all kinds of personality and gifts and things like that but is our heart there?

Are we passionate for the lost? That's an area to pray about this coming year.

Stand on the list and say, God, we need a passionate desire for those who love and guide. Finally, there's our work.

I guess most of us have to work for the thing. But we need to step back and ask ourselves some questions, a couple questions. One is, when it comes to work, there are those who might call workaholics, you have to ask, am I living to work?

[38:40] Or am I working to live? There's a difference in how we answer those questions. things. And if I'm living to work, I need to ask God for readjusting because I'm missing the world altogether.

But if I'm working to live, then what am I, or who am I living for? need to extra time off so we can read our Bible or share, even share music with some.

No, he wants us to honor the Lord in the marketplace by being good workers. We're reading Colossians chapter 3, verses 23 and 24.

It says, whatever you do in the context of speaking to slaves or servants, he says, and whatever you do, work at it with all of your heart as working for the Lord and not for human masters or bosses.

When you're out in the marketplace, you're working for the Lord. Do your best. He goes on to say, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward, it is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving at ED or over at Pfizer or wherever you are, the military, you're serving the Lord.

[40:23] Do your best. That may not come easy, but that's what he would give for a fair time. Oh God, help me. My boss drives me nuts. Well, we got our priority list and we shouldn't run a lot more, but we're not going to.

Well, what do we do when we get our list? God has laid on our heart. And we start January 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and inevitably we start feeling different areas.

What do we do? What do we do? We just say, ah, I knew it was going to work, or I just give up, go to the power, win, whatever. I don't believe God says. I don't believe God says that's what God wants to do.

In fact, when we say that we failed and we haven't been, we haven't arrived just yet, we're in good company because that's what the Apostle Paul also said. In Philippians 3, verses 12 to 14.

He says this. He says, and this is right after he says, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. That's what I want. There was that burning passion.

[41:38] But he says, it's not that I've already obtained this or that I'm already perfect. I'm just expressing my heart's passion. But I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what is lying behind and straining towards that which is lying ahead, I press towards the gold and the prize of the Paul of God.

What do you do with your failures, your mishaps, even your sins? It's your sin, you confess it before the Lord and receive it as forgiveness. But you don't let regrets of failure paralyze you for the present.

You forget it. If need be, confess it and put it under the blood. A lot of people also struggle with the fear of the future. Jesus talked about that in the Sermon on the Mount.

And what he says here, what we got in the future is straining towards it. He gets the energy that's involved. Paul is straining towards becoming what God has called him to be in Christ Jesus.

[42:52] The words that he uses there, that he presses towards that goal, the prize of the upper call of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus. We don't make major changes overnight.

In fact, most, if not all change, is made by a series of many choices, day in, day out, day in, day out. I guess my desire for myself as well as for you today is to have something, some goals, some priorities in light of eternity.

And then from there, recognize that you're going to fail. But that past God, that heart is this, God, I want to keep pressing on, pressing forward with you.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Our dear Father God, I'm going to ask that you might help each of us to recognize the preciousness of the time that you give us.

[43:56] And to use the 8,760 hours of this year in the wisest way that we can for your glory.

Help us, Lord, to live each day in light of eternity. Help us, O God, to keep the stake in the ground today. And truly press on to spend more time this year.

Lord, to get better connected with you, the lover of our souls, and experience the grace that you just want to shovel us with.

And Lord, again, if there's anyone here today that knows not you as Lord and Savior, may this be the day to open up their hearts when we see Jesus Christ for themselves.

We ask this in the most precious name. Please stand and sing with us.