



Time in a Bottle; Eternity in a Cup

pre-sermon music -

“Time in a Bottle”, Jim Croce

## Introduction:

“There never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do, once you find them...” Can you relate to that statement?

I'd like us to take a brief moment to think about 2017, in terms of that 'enough time' phrase.

- What are some things that you hoped you would do, or would happen, that now on this last day of the year you realize - nope. not gonna happen?
- What are some surprises that came your way - didn't know that was gonna happen!
- How often did you hear the word 'busy' in 2017? From yourself. From your family. From others. It's almost like you're not normal if you can't claim to be busy!

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/experts-time-division-days-hours-minutes/>

Since 1967, we've been on 'atomic' time. There's a specific measurement for the length of a second. It is the duration of 9,192,631,770 energy transitions of the cesium atom. But 'atomic' time doesn't completely line up with 'astronomic' time - so about 8 times a decade, there is a minute that actually lasts 61 seconds. So there you go - some extra time for you.

Here are some general reflections on 'time':

God created time. He created the atoms we now use to measure time. He exists in eternity. He is eternal. He is infinite. He created us, and knows that we are mortal - yet set eternity in our hearts. God doesn't expect us to function outside of the limits with which he created us. We require food to sustain us, sleep to refresh and strengthen us, and rhythms of labor and rest to flourish. Yes, we have eternity set

within our hearts, but we shouldn't succumb to being eternally busy. God knows how many hours are in a day, and we always have enough time to do his will. We traverse the nexus of time and eternity, space and infinity throughout our life. time is real yet intangible. it can be put to use or wasted. (Side note: I learned this week that some cultures do not have a concept of 'wasted time'; those who are not linear in their understanding of time do not struggle so much with the idea of losing time or wasting time.)

Time can be filled with purpose or emptied of joy. it is not recyclable or renewable. God has chosen to set rhythms of time - the sun to rule the day, the moon and stars to rule the night. He has created seasons and dispensations. Jesus came to earth as a babe in the fulness of time. We live in the time of God's mystery being made known - Christ in us, the hope of glory.

God connects with us in time. His mercies are new every morning. The Psalmist says that He grants sleep to those he loves. Yet he never slumbers or sleeps, and is always watchful over us. Jesus promised that He will never leave us alone, unto the end of the age.

In our text, time is addressed in the form of 'opportunity' - the Greek word is 'kairos' rather than 'chronos' - the fit time, the God-given opportunity. Let us read:

## **Ephesians 5**

### *Living in the Light*

Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. <sup>2</sup> Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.

<sup>3</sup> Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. <sup>4</sup> Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. <sup>5</sup> You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

<sup>6</sup> Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. <sup>7</sup> Don't participate in the things these people do. <sup>8</sup> For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! <sup>9</sup> For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

<sup>10</sup> Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the worthless

deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them. <sup>12</sup> It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them, <sup>14</sup> for the light makes everything visible. This is why it is said,  
“Awake, O sleeper,  
rise up from the dead,  
and Christ will give you light.”

<sup>15</sup> So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. <sup>16</sup> Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. <sup>17</sup> Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. <sup>18</sup> Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>19</sup> singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. <sup>20</sup> And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Eph 5). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

The Word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

The last day of the year is a fitting time to reflect on this passage - what does it mean to “carefully determine what pleases the Lord (v10)” and “...understand what the Lord wants you to do (v17)”? How do we make the most of every opportunity? It will require living a life filled with love (v1) - following Christ's own example of sacrificial love.

## Observations

A couple of quick observations on the text:

The list of immoral activities and speech especially focus on the concept of ‘greed’. For example, sexual immorality is at its core a greedy thing - a choice to seek pleasure and gratification outside the commitment of marriage. We hear the idea of ‘consent’ being the highest value in determining the ‘rightness’ of any particular sexual encounter, but I challenge you to be wise. Be understanding what the Lord's will is. His will for us is to learn to live ‘not greedy’, thinking only of ourselves. The temptation is strong, and young people, [and old people!] I get it -

consensual pleasure can feel just right. But in the end, it is actually taking something that doesn't belong to you.

This scripture **is not** forbidding us to speak of sex, or to enjoy hearty laughter with each other. It **is** telling us to be thankful for the gifts of God in our lives, and don't degrade any of his gifts through filthy language and coarse joking.

v16 says: Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. We are encouraged to 'redeem' time, take it back from what the enemy would like to do with it, and instead put it use for God's kingdom. Let's think a bit more about time.

## Rhythm

In music, time is an element in every composition. There is the pace or tempo of a song, and there is the time signature, which dictates rhythmic parameters of a piece. And within a given time signature, all types of rhythms can be developed.

God created the universe with rhythms in place; the seasons, the phases of the moon, and the accompanying tides, the frequencies and wavelengths of sound and light - we are surrounded by rhythm.

God developed rhythms in the life of His people - feasts to be observed at specific times of year; offerings to be made at specific times, such as the first fruits offering at the beginning of harvest, the priests made daily burnt offerings, the people brought sacrificial offerings; etc.

## an Essential Rhythm - Prayer

An essential rhythm in the life of a disciple, which is one who is following Jesus, or as Ephesians 5:1 put it, is imitating God in everything he or she does, following Christ's example - an essential rhythm in this is prayer.

God has provided a portal into eternity through prayer. Although we are confined in time and space, our prayers are not. Prayers do not degrade with time. They do not become un-heard or forgotten. (Revelation 5:8) Revelation says that they come up before God as incense. Prayers are generated in time, they are produced by us giving time to prayer.

From the earliest times, God's people lived with daily rhythms of prayer. Daniel prayed three times a day. Jesus prayed early in the morning, and deep in the evening. The Apostles regularly went to the temple to pray, at set times. Peter was praying on a rooftop at noon - one of the set times - in Acts 10, since he was

traveling and not able to go to the temple.

In our exercise of freedom, I fear we have thrown off a gift of godly rhythms of prayer. We do not want to be legalistic. We don't want to practice rituals without heart, or become rigid in our prayers, thinking we will be heard for our many words, as Jesus said the pagans do. But we are to pray. Always. Without ceasing. Finding a natural rhythm that disciplines our life in prayer.

**We are called to be disciples and to make disciples.** If you struggle with the concept of discipline - please come to terms with this reality. Disciples practice disciplines. Living transformed by Jesus requires formation. **Always by grace. Never without our participation.**

I believe that I have a 'one-word' message to guide us forward in 2018 - it is "TRANSFORMATION". God is calling us to live transformed lives, in His image, following His example, in His strength, by our submissive will. I don't know everything that that means, for me as an individual, for each of you, and for us as a church. But I am convinced that on December 31, 2018, we want to be able to say that we used the gift of this year full of time according to God's will. That we have experienced transformation in ways that astonish us.

And I believe the Lord has given us an opportunity for the FIRST WEEK of 2018 to put Him first through prayer. I am approaching this week of concentrated prayer as a first fruits offering of time; and as a way to find out what the Lord's will is for me in 2018. And to practice praying, and developing the rhythm of prayer personally and within our congregation.

It is vital for each one of us to have a personal rhythm of prayer. But/and - it cannot just be an individual thing. The scriptures tell us that the church was together frequently for prayer. We need to pray together. It is important for this disciple-making aspect of prayer. We need to engage in the prayer of agreement with each other, we need to learn from each other's prayers, and we need to encourage each other with our prayer, and in the practice of prayer.

As I have already asked, I repeat now, please consider the schedule for this coming week, and participate as you are able in the FIRST WEEK prayers.

## Eternity in a Cup

We are going to end our service today with Communion.

On your handout is space for some notes. I want us to give time to reflect on

2017 - (pause for a moment with each line)

- offer **thanksgiving** to God for the many blessings of this year.
- **Release** to God the disappointments you may feel.
- **Confess** to God any sin that may come to the forefront of your memory, and **receive** the forgiveness provided through the blood of Christ.
- **Forgive** any hurts that still trouble you.
- **Trust God** for answers that have yet to be complete. Offer 2017 to God.

Stan and Eric, please come and begin distributing the elements. As you receive your elements, please hold on to them, and we will partake together in a few moments.

Quiet Prayer.

## The bread.

Jesus said, as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me. Jesus, the Word who was with God and was God from the beginning, confined himself to time and space when he came to dwell among us. He bore in his body our sin and sickness, and took the punishment that we deserve. At his last meal with his disciples, he broke the bread and gave it to them, saying, 'Take. Eat. This is my body.'

## The wine.

And he offered them the wine, saying, '*Take. Drink. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*' The Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world, who died for our sins, was buried and raised again on the third day, this is the one who promised that he will drink the fruit of the vine again on 'that day' - a promise of a future in eternity. We cannot save time in a bottle - we aren't able to store it up and use it later. But before us right now, we see eternity in a cup. The cup represents the blood of the covenant, an eternal promise from God. The blood of Jesus is more powerful than any sin, any wound, any attack on your identity. Past and Future collide in the Now, as we receive the cup.

Concluding prayer from Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace: "Grant Me Your Sense of Timing"

O God of all seasons and senses,  
grant me your sense of timing  
to submit gracefully  
and rejoice quietly  
in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights,  
of gray and white and cold,  
teach me the lessons of waiting:  
of the snow joining the mystery  
of the hunkered down seeds  
growing in their sleep  
watched over by gnarled-limbed, grandparent trees  
resting from autumn's staggering energy;  
circling to race back home to the sun  
O God, grant me your sense of timing.

In this season of short days and long nights,  
of gray and white and cold,  
teach me the lessons of endings:  
children growing, friends leaving,  
jobs concluding,  
stages finishing,  
grieving over,  
grudges over,  
blaming over,  
excuses over.  
O God, grant me your sense of timing.

In this season of short days and long nights,  
of gray and white and cold,  
teach me the lesson of beginnings  
that such waitings and endings  
may be a starting place,  
a planting of seeds  
which bring to birth  
what is ready to be born—  
something right and just and different,  
a new song,  
a deeper relationship,  
a fuller love—  
in the fullness of your time.  
O God, grant me your sense of timing.

TED LODER. *Guerrillas of Grace*, p. 136