

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY”
Ephesians 5:15-20
August 16, 2009
10:00 A.M. SERVICE

Listen to Paul’s words again: *“Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is . . .”*

How do you take advantage of every opportunity while at the same time exercising caution so that you do not make a huge mistake? How do you make the most of every opportunity, while at the same time seeking to understand the Lord’s will?

The very first thing I want to point out this morning is that **God’s will is for you to have an abundant life.** This abundant life consists of both the physical and the spiritual. God wants us to have a rich, rewarding relationship with Him and with other people, but God also wants us to have our material needs met. Why else would Christ have taught us to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread . . .”*? Why else would God have given us healthy bodies and good minds?

The second thing I want to point out is that **sometimes we are our own worst enemy.** Think about it for a moment. We sometimes sabotage ourselves. We do not always make wise choices. Therefore Paul cautions us to be careful how we live; *“not as unwise but as wise . . .”* Paul writes about *“living foolishly.”* When we choose to live foolishly we are our own worst enemy. Those are the times when we make bad decisions, poor investments, and unwise plans. We foul up God’s will for our lives--spiritually, relationally and materially. In other words, we defeat God in his

purpose for us. So, how can we avoid this? How can we make the most of every opportunity while avoiding treacherous pitfalls?

Paul tells us to keep a clear head. That really makes sense, doesn't it? We make the best decisions when we use the brain power that God has given us. Paul writes, ***“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”*** There are many addictions out there that are destroying people's lives today.

Alcohol is one of our most serious addictions. Despite the warnings years after year, many teens and young adults are killed as a result of drunk driving. Warnings come from parents, school officials and the church, but the problem remains. Many lives have been destroyed by addiction to alcohol. Many families live in poverty because of addiction to alcohol. We could make a significant impact on the number of deaths from automobile accidents each year if we could only keep people, particularly young people, from drinking and driving. But that is not the only addiction plaguing our society.

We could make an enormous dent in crime in this nation if we could just stop the flow of illegal drugs. Look what it is doing to nations like Mexico, Colombia and Afghanistan that are involved in feeding our appetite for drugs.

Of course, some get addicted to prescription painkillers, as well. The truth of the matter is that addictions of all kinds are proliferating in our society.

In his book ***Secret Life***, prize-winning poet Michael Ryan tells the story of his lifelong addiction to seducing women. Is there such a thing as sexual addiction? Yes. After recounting his experience of being repeatedly abused when he was five years old, Ryan describes his adult life as a predator who was **“drunk”** with his own sexual compulsion. **“All of my talents,”** he recalls, **“all of my good qualities as a human being were devoted to serving it, and I was willing to sacrifice anything to it.”** Michael Ryan finally perceived the depth of his sexual addiction one day while he was driving to his friends' house in another state. He had already lost his teaching position and destroyed his marriage. Nevertheless, all he could think about during the trip was how to seduce his friend's fifteen-year-old daughter. Gripped by fear and panic, he glimpsed his own fallen condition,

his deep loneliness and despair. Rescued by what he calls “**the grace of God,**” Ryan turned his car around and drove home. (1)

There is something about modern life that seems to encourage additions of all sorts. Dateline NBC carried several reports on the effects of gambling addiction. One report focused on the vulnerability of women to video poker machines located in places women are likely to frequent. One woman put her family into bankruptcy and lost her husband and two children. Another left her 10-month-old infant in a car for seven hours and the child died. Men who had lost their homes through gambling debts allowed a reporter into one of their closed 12-step meetings. The stories were heartbreaking--tales of how families were destroyed by this addiction. (2)

There is something about modern society that feeds these addictions. Some people are addicted to pornography, some to shopping, some to their computer, some to snack foods. If we become addicted to anything that becomes an impediment to our being what God has created us to be, we need to get rid of it. If there is anything in your life that is pulling you in the direction of unwise decision-making, that is endangering your health, your relationship with others and your relationship with God, then it's time to turn around. St. Paul encourages us to keep a clear head. “...*be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord . . .*”

Rev. Douglas Meyer, pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit in Lincolnshire, Illinois tells about a man who claimed to be the most accurate fortuneteller in the world. A man once came to this fortuneteller and said he had only one real question about his future and that was, “**How will my life end?**”

The fortuneteller gazed into the crystal ball and then announced, “**Your life will end when you die.**”

The man nodded and then said, “**Yes, but will I be happy?**”

“**Ah,**” the fortuneteller said, “**that has nothing to do with the future but what you do in the present.**” (3)

God's will is for us to choose to be happy this day and every day, to believe the Gospel, to cherish the truth that in all things God is with us and

we can be victorious in any circumstance. That does not mean that we will not go through difficult times. It is our faith and not our circumstances that should determine how we look at life. When you make a mess out of your life, let God make a life out of your mess.

A little book titled *Daily Grace* contrasts two similar looking animals that reside often side-by-side in the streams and ponds of North America.

One animal, the beaver, works throughout the day toppling trees to create large river dams. The other animal, the river otter, delights in making a game of everything. Otters catch what they need to survive, but also make time to chase after pebbles, slide down slopes, and tweak the tails of their more industrious neighbors.

“Both animals live about the same length of time, but you have to believe that otters enjoy life just a bit more. Otters seem perfectly content if they have enough food and are happy to live in little mud holes along the river. Even in old age they never miss the opportunity to toss a stone in the water and catch it before it hits bottom.” (4)

Are you a beaver or an otter? Both animals have their place in creation, but I wonder how many people miss all kinds of opportunities in life because they are so narrowly focused on the serious business of making a living that they never get around to making a life.

Count your blessings. Develop an attitude of gratitude. Make the most of every opportunity. Keep a clear head and a positive spirit. And in all things, give God thanks. And by the way, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.

1. Ryan, pp. 8-9. Cited in Quentin J. Schultze, *Communicating for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), p. 73-74.

2. Keith Morrison, Dateline correspondent: *The Gambler*, Dateline, NBC/ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14187516/page/2/>

3. www.holyspirit-elca.org/SERMONS

4. (Colorado Springs, Co: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), p. 84.