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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**December 28, 2014**

**New Year's Message, 2015**

**Ephesians 15:16**

**Prayer:** *Father God, we just again we thank you for your grace, we thank you for just for Christmas, we thank you for the ultimate gift that you gave us in your son, we just again praise you for that gift. And Lord, we are again looking towards a new year this day, and so I want to pray, Lord, as we specifically look to your word, look to what you have to say about time and about this year in front of us, that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit, that as we open up your book, you would accompany us, that you would be with us and that the words, particularly your words, Lord, would be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are looking at *Ephesians 5:15-16* which says this, it says: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* I thought this scripture this morning would be the perfect scripture to meditate on as we approach the end of the year, and as a scripture that we can use to ask ourselves looking backwards how we used this

past year and looking forward how we're going to use the next one. And in this scripture God starts off by first telling us to look carefully how we walk, and we define that, that particular word, as being circumspect. Circumspection, really means looking carefully how you walk. I once heard an excellent working definition of what that was. It went this way, in some cities -- you probably know this -- folks don't like to have animals on their stone walls and so what they often do is the very top of the stone wall they embed broken pieces of glass and sharp things and things that no animal is going to want to sit on. And someone was once observing a cat walking down the top of one of these stone walls, and it was walking in such a way that it literally had to watch every single step it took so that it wouldn't be stepping on something painful. That's a great picture of what it means to be circumspect. So God calls us to be circumspect in the way we treat time, using it not as the unwise but as wise and then he further defines that wisdom saying, again making the best use of time, because the days are evil.

The question is how do we do that? How do we make the best use of time? Well, you know, time is the only commodity that virtually every one of us receives in equal amounts, you know, at the end of the day every one of us has received the exact same 24 hours. So God charges us to make the best use of these hours and he's not

silent in the way that he expects us to do that. In fact, scripture describes three different places that any of us could be at any given time with regard to time. You know, you can be in the present, in the past, or the future. And two of them are just reference points, they're just stopping points that are okay to visit as long as we don't make plans to stay there. Those places are the past and the future. God says we can learn from the past, we can prepare for the future, but he expects us to live in the present. So I want to take some time this morning looking into those three different places in time to see what God's idea of making the best use of time is all about, 'cause like I said, God has much to say about living in the past, the present and the future.

So first let's look at what God has to say about the future. This is the place where believers place their hope. And biblical hope is not wishful thinking; instead it's this confident expectation that I may not know what the future holds but I know who holds the future. Now I know that's a cliché, I know you've heard that many, many times, but it's a cliché rooted in absolute truth. See, the secret to being able to joyfully anticipate the future is rooted in understanding that God is firmly and absolutely in charge of it. A while back we discussed Kay Warren's definition of joy, and her definition is the key to being able to face the future without

fear. This is the way Kay Warren describes joy. She says, "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all of the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation."

Now to see how the spirit of joy can transform our future, sometimes it's helpful to look at saints who use joy to handle a future that is not at all good, a future that does not look at all joyful, and one of the worse case scenarios of that kind of future that comes to my mind is that of Saeed Abedini. Most of you know, he's the American pastor who's been held in an Iranian jail three years now, and I can't think of a more awful place to be than to be housed in what is arguably one of the worst prisons in the world that is filled with people who hate with a passion everything that you stand for, with many in that prison population who are committed to somehow finding a way to kill you. I mean it's been said that there are members of ISIS that are now in his prison who are dedicated to finding a way to get to Saeed and kill him. And you think about it, Saeed went from being just a pastor in the midwest to being a prisoner in one of the worst prisons in the world. And he's written a series of letters from prison that detail his beatings, his mistreatment, and we've been following these past three years watching his hope of being released get

repeatedly dashed but also detailing the grace that God has given to him. And so I'd like to read to you from his Christmas letter of this year, this is from Rajai Shahr prison, and this is what Saeed says. He says: "Merry Christmas! These days are very cold here. My small space beside the window is without glass making most nights unbearable to sleep. The treatment by fellow prisoners is also quite cold and at times hostile. Some of my fellow prisoners don't like me because I am a convert and a pastor. They look at me with shame as someone who has betrayed his former religion. The guards can't even stand the paper cross that I have made and hung next to me as a sign of my faith and in anticipation of celebrating my Savior's birth. They have threatened me and forced me to remove it. This is the first Christmas that I am completely without my family; all of my family is presently outside of the country. These conditions have made this upcoming Christmas season very hard, cold and shattering for me. It appears that I am alone with no one left beside me."

I mean, I don't know if I can think of worse circumstances than this. I mean, there's no doubt that these circumstances would drive most people to absolute despair. And, you know, over these past three years there's been hope and that hope has been repeatedly dashed and just this fall, there was a national prayer movement to have Saeed released, churches all around the country

participated, we were participants in that, there were hundreds and hundreds of churches lifting up prayer for Saeed's release. And as you can guess, it never happened. In fact, things have only gotten worse. So the question is how does Saeed deal with his future? Well, he does it with hope and he does it with joy. And again, not the fairy tale response that people often associate with those words, but with a steely determination to endure a bleak future with the tools that God has given to him, with confident expectation that God is still in charge of his future and joy based on his quiet confidence that God is still sovereign in spite of the circumstances. This is what he goes on to say in his letter, he says this: "These cold and brittle conditions have made me wonder why God chose the hardest time of the year to become flesh and why he came to the earth in the weakest human condition (as a baby). Why did God choose the hardest place to be born in the cold weather? Why did God choose to be born in a manger, in a stable, which is very cold, filthy and unsanitary with an unpleasant smell? Why did the birth have to be in such a way that it was not only hard physically, but also socially? It must have brought such shame for Mary and her fiance that she was pregnant before marriage in the religious society of that time. Dear sisters and brothers, the fact of the gospel is that it is not only the story of Jesus, but it is the key of how we are to live and serve like Jesus. Today we like Him should come out of our safe comfort zone in order

to proclaim the word of life and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the penalty of sin that he paid on the cross and to proclaim his resurrection. We should be able to tolerate the cold, the difficulties and the shame in order to serve God. We should be able to enter into the pain of the cold dark world. Then we are able to give the fiery love of Christ to the cold wintry manager of those who are spiritually dead." And he goes on in the letter but he concludes that letter by saying that Christ "is turning our world into a world full of peace, joy and love that is so different than the dark, cold and wintry world that we used to live in. Hallelujah!" He writes "hallelujah" from prison. Like I said, I can't imagine it gets any worse than what Pastor Abedini is experiencing and yet he's able to face the future knowing that in spite of his circumstance, God is still in charge. Listen to how he explains this. This is a brief letter he wrote to his eight-year-old daughter. He wrote this a couple of months ago. He says, "My Dearest Rebekka Grace. Happy 8th birthday! You are growing so fast and becoming more beautiful every day. I praise God for his faithfulness to me every day as I watch from a distance through the prison walls and see pictures and hear stories of how you are growing both spiritually and physically. Oh, how I long to see you. I know that you question why you have prayed so many times for my return and yet I am not home yet. Now there is a big why in your mind and you are asking: Why Jesus isn't answering your

prayers and the prayers of all the people around the world praying for my release and for me to be home with you and our family. The answer to the why is Who. Who is in control? Lord Jesus Christ is in control. I desire for you to learn important lessons during these trying times. Lessons that you carry now and for the rest of your life. The answer to the why is Who. The confusion of 'Why has all of this happened' and 'Why your prayers are not answered yet' is resolved with understanding who is in control. Lord Jesus Christ, our God! God is in control of the whole world and everything that is happening in it is for His good purpose, for His glory, and will be worked out for our good (Romans 8:28). Jesus allows me to be kept here for His glory. He is doing something inside each of us and also outside in the world. People die and suffer for their Christian faith all over the world and some may wonder why? But you should know the answer of why is Who. It is for Jesus. He is worth the price. And he has a plan to be glorified through our lives."

Once again to restate the cliché, Saeed does not know what the future holds but he most definitely knows who holds his future, and there's unlimited power and understanding that even some of the worst circumstances in the world cannot stop you. I mean, Saeed knows without a doubt that he is not the victim of circumstance and he is still the beloved child of the King. And it is that



confident expectation and joy alone that sustains him in the grimmest of circumstance. So Saeed is really, he's a living example of how God wants us to see into the future, to see it as firmly in his grasp and not in the hands of fate. Listen to how Jesus put this in *Matthew 6*, he said this, he said: *"Therefore I tell you do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*

So Jesus asks us to look at the obvious signs of God's sovereign care, even for the humblest parts of his creation and he's asking if you're willing to believe that God cares -- if you're willing to believe that God cares for us more than he cares for birds and flowers. So we look for the future with joy and hope. And we do that not because these are nice things to do but because these are the keys that God gives us to survive. I mean, how do you suppose Saeed had the strength to accept repeatedly a future that looks like an invitation to despair? He had joy and he had hope. But my guess is he had something else that all the other saints had as well. This is something that he uses and he uses it by visiting the other place in time that God calls us to visit in moments like that, and that is the past. You see, literally there's hundreds of times in scripture where God commands us to visit the past by calling us to remember. *1 Chronicles 16* says: *Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered.* Listen to how David uses the past to remember what God has done to use that to strengthen his hope for the future. This is what he says in *Psalms 40*. It says: *A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.* So David looks back and he

looks back at this miry bog that he was in and he describes a time of patient waiting and then being lifted out and set upon a rock, so much so that he has a song of praise for his God.

I can think of at least a half dozen or so miry bogs that I've been in in my life, and some of them required more patience than I ever thought I could muster, but in each case, God faithfully lifted me out and he set me on a rock. You know, many a time I've spoken about God's miraculous provision that got me through some absolutely impossible situation and I've told it so many times I'm not going to bore you about telling you about the septic tank and telling you about the cars and telling you about all the other specific things that God has done to clearly move heaven and earth to demonstrate to me and my family that he's there, but each time he's done that, I've been able to remember. And when things get dicey all over again, it's that remembrance of what God has done in my particular past that enables me to trust that he's going to get me through whatever I'm facing. You know, I've used the term the "celestial bank account" to describe what happens when God's sense, God's presence gets you through a difficult circumstance. Each time he does that, he's kind of making a deposit in your mental/spiritual bank account. And it doesn't have to be some spectacular miracle, I mean, more often than not it's simply God letting you know that he's got his fingerprints all over the facts

and the circumstances of your life, that you're not alone.

I want to give you an example of one that I recently heard. This took place a few weeks back. We had a luncheon for Mike and Cindy Gingerich who are our missionaries to the Philippines, we were just kind of sitting around, we asked Mike if he had any stories to tell about what God had been doing in his life, how God had lifted him up, and he shared with us when he had been struggling with moving his family to the Philippines and go into full time missionary works, with all the responsibilities that that included in his family. And his family were in the midwest at the time and it was in the middle of winter and you know what the weather was often like out there and they were unable to get out because the roads were all snowy and icy and the weather was lousy, and Mike said he realized that the family was missing something vital. It was toilet paper. And so he was sitting there and he was thinking the family's completely out of toilet paper and the weather's too nasty to go out and buy some, and Mike said that simple need put him in the middle of a very deep funk because he thought, you know, how am I going to trust that God's going to take care of my family's needs in the Philippines if we're here stuck in the midwest and we can't even take care of a need as simple as that that I can't even address because of the weather. And he said as he was saying that, in that weather the mailman pulled up to the mailbox, and he put a

package in the mailbox. He said he waited till he left, he walked out to the mailbox and he opened it up, and there in the mailbox was a roll of toilet paper. It was a free sample. It had come from some company and you can say this was just a coincidence, you know, but Mike said he knew better. I mean, to Mike, it said everything he needed to know about God's desire to meet his family's needs. And you know that happened many, many years ago. We asked him to just talk about some stuff in his life, and he began to tear up as he remembered what God had done in his life, and that's why it's incredibly important to do just what God says to do, to remember, to remember things that he's done in the past. You know, my stories about my septic tank or the other cars, the other issues that I had with cars, they're a very powerful means of pulling me out of the miry clay and setting my feet on solid rock. And so I say it's important to memorialize even the tiniest things like a roll of toilet paper because God always causes us to revisit the past to give us hope for the future and confidence to live in the present. And that's why when you look in scripture you see God constantly commanding people to create memorials, whether it's feast days or sacrifices or stone monuments or simply scripture itself. And God asks us to remember because it's so easy to forget what God has done in our lives. You know, hard times and difficult circumstances have a way of burying themselves deep into our consciousness. And good times and miraculous times, times when

God's intervention is obvious, not so much. One of my greatest regrets is that I did not keep a detailed journal of God's faithfulness in my life in the little things that God had done, 'cause now I have to rely on an increasingly faulty memory. You know, and I have a hunch that at some point and I'm going to get up to heaven, and some angel or some other messenger is going to fling out some gigantic scroll and on that scroll will be all the different times God intervened in my life, some of which I will remember, most of which I will have forgotten. God gives us these memories to fall back on when times are tough to give us the courage to go forward. In fact, the psalmist captures this in Psalm 42. He says this, he says: *My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon -- from Mount Mizar.* And so we prepare for our future by remembering our past. But we live in the present. Again, *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

So here's our challenge for this brand new year that is in front of us. I mean, we may know how to walk circumspectly but just what is *the best use of time, because the days are evil?* I won't deny that these days are about as evil as I've ever seen, and so we wonder if God is telling us, okay, now's the time to get out the sandwich signs and start walking around with those things that say, "Repent!"

The end is near." You wonder, is that the best use of our time? Well, those words "make the best use of time," they were written over 2,000 years ago, and the folks back then, they thought the end was near as well. Some of them even thought that Christ had already returned and they had missed it. So much so that Paul had to comfort them by explaining the timetable of Christ's return, and it wasn't that time then, it's not that time yet, but I firmly believe that God could come this afternoon. Or not. Or not for another 500, 5,000 or 50,000 years. That's -- that's not our call. But the question that still deserves to be asked particularly when we're looking at the wise use of time is this: If you knew the world was going to end tomorrow, what would you do today? I mean, if your answer involves a radical change from what you're already doing today, then I suggest that what you're doing today somehow or another needs to be different. I mean, if you knew that Monday at 5:00 o'clock the second coming would begin, how would it affect the last 24 hours you spent on earth? I mean, would you be on the phone calling up all of your unsaved friends, would you be out on the street passing out tracts, would you be shouting from the rooftops? What would you do with your last day on planet earth? Well, the answer attributed to Martin Luther is as good an answer as you could get. This is what he said, "If I knew that the world was ending tomorrow, I would still plant an apple tree today." You see, Luther was a man who had his priorities in order, and if it

was God glorifying to plant an apple tree on any old Monday, then it's also God glorifying to plant it on the last Monday. God has another way of putting that, it's in *1 Corinthians 10:31*, he says this, he says: *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* Paul is describing eating and drinking, Martin Luther's describing planting a tree. You know, many people would think these are the last things that you would do to develop and proclaim God's glory. I mean, in their mind the wisest use of the last 24 hours on planet earth would be doing exclusively religious things, you know, perhaps thinking that the best place to be is in church, the best activity to be in the middle of is praying or singing hymns or better yet giving alms. Wouldn't that be great if God came right at that exact moment? And if you can't make it to church, well then the next best thing would be feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Yeah, well, all of those things may be wonderful things -- and make no mistake, they are, that's not necessarily what God expects. Jesus actually describes what must be rated as one of the best things to be caught doing at his return, and it doesn't even look remotely religious. This is what he says in *Matthew 24*, he says: *"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that*



*servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all of his possessions."*

Jesus is describing someone doing their job and doing it well, doing it faithfully. From what I can tell, this person's not even in church. He's not singing hymns, he's not praying, he's doing something far, far more prosaic, he's cooking and serving food to his fellow servants. So how could that possibly be a better use of time from a spiritual standpoint than being in church or singing or praying or giving alms? What then is the answer to the question what is the best use of time?

Well, let me give you my thinking by way of a contest that I had a while back, a little debate that I had with Steve Weingartner, who's sitting right back there, you'll be familiar with this. This came about because Steve called me one day, he really want to understand how I watched football. I've mentioned this before, I'm a football fan. And he said to me how amazingly annoying it was to watch this silly game of grown men trying to push a piece of leather back and forth across a field, and he couldn't imagine that people could spend three whole hours watching a such complete waste of time. So I said to Steve, I said, well, Steve, you spent yesterday sitting in one spot for four hours in the cold and the rain waiting and hoping for a turkey to be stupid enough to walk into your pathway so you could shoot it. I said, you realize that

you can go to Shop Rite and you can get a turkey for ten bucks, take you about two minutes. So you think that the time that I spent in front of the TV is misspent but the time you spent frozen and staring wasn't a complete waste either? And so Steve and I carried on this debate which is a greater waste of time watching football or watching for a turkey. Well, the ultimate answer is not that hunting turkeys is better than watching football. It's that in the end whether you're watching sports or hunting turkeys or curing cancer or bringing about world peace in the end makes very little difference. Hear me out. Ten thousand years from now, there's only one thing that will have mattered in no matter what it is you're doing. And that is did it glorify God. You see, ten thousand years from now I guarantee you nobody's going to know or care who won the Super Bowl. Nobody's going to know or care whether or not we got that turkey or yes, even how effectively we promoted world peace. You know, the year 2015 would have been ten thousand years in the past and people would have cared about as much about our peace efforts as we care about peacemakers among the Cro-Magnons. You see, time has a way of making a mockery of virtually anything anyone does, whether it is good, whether it is bad, whether it is indifferent, and if you doubt that, I want to repeat an experiment I did a while back. This is a repeat, so if you've heard this, don't cheat on me. I want you to raise your hand if you know who Albert Schweitzer is. Okay, there's a decent

amount. That works. Some of you guys cheated 'cause you remember the last time I did this. Albert Schweitzer was one of the most noble men who ever lived. He didn't waste time watching sports, he didn't waste time hunting turkeys. He spent almost all of his time in the heart of Africa building clinics and saving people from the ravages of disease. Schweitzer was a medical doctor. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952, and he took his winnings and he invested them in clinics in Africa designed to help the poorest of poor. Well, what he was doing and the work that he did occurred mainly in the 1940s and 50's, almost 75 years ago. He died in 1965. And here's why time makes a mockery of everything anyone ever does. See, the folks that he treated, the folks that he helped, they're all dead as well. The vast majority of those that he treated have already fallen victim to the one enemy that nobody can defeat, and that is time. And all it took was time. All it took was time and all the good that Albert Schweitzer did along with his name, along with his reputation, they've all begun to evaporate into the air. You know, many of you have no idea who he was and yet 40 years ago his name was a household word. And time has taken his work and it's in the process of erasing it. You know, a hundred years from now Albert Schweitzer's going to be a tiny little footnote in some little history book and most of the evidence of his existence is going to be absolutely gone. It's the ultimate frustration when it comes to time, and this is why Solomon said this in *Ecclesiastes*

1:2: *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities!*  
*All is vanity.* What he does is he catalogs the fact of everything, from the noble to the ignoble, ultimately turns into the very same dust. Time ultimately wipes away everything anybody can do including the very remembrance of your efforts. He says in verse 11: *There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.* You know, Solomon was a great builder, a great leader, and he lamented the fact that everything he had built would eventually be turned over to somebody that he had no control over whatsoever. I mean, he realized that his own control over his own destiny was fleeting, it was slipping through his fingers and that eventually somebody who cared little or not at all about him or his legacy would be in charge of everything that he dedicated his life to. So he realized that in time his life would also become utterly meaningless. Albert Schweitzer dedicated his life to an even more noble cause, I mean, to healing the diseases of the poor. See, but time doesn't care if our efforts are poured into a grand palace or tremendous parks or even a person, because in the end it will be no different than anything else, just a pile of dust. I mean, we may not worry about our own grand kingdoms or our Nobel prize winning clinics, that they'll ever fall into disrepair, we have far more humbler achievements than they do, we have maybe a home, a spouse, and kids, but time goes by, the kids grow up, we get old, and then

we die. Soon enough we, like Albert Schweitzer, are completely and ultimately forgotten. Solomon found that incredibly depressing.

How about you? You know, when my dad was dying, I used to go down to visit him at his house. He had a house down at the Jersey shore. And occasionally I'd pick up his mail at the post office, and every time I'd go in there, the folks would be asking me, "Oh, how's your dad? How's he doing? What's going on?" They wanted to know everything about what was going on in his life, and I'd share with them what the latest news was. And he died, and then a few years later I just happened to be down there, I had reason to go in there, and there was a whole different set of people there, people whom I doubt had any idea who my dad was and therefore couldn't care. I mean, my dad was once a very well known and highly respected man, but he disappeared. I mean, I thought of *Psalm 103* which says this, it says: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.* The wind passed over my dad and he was gone and his place knew him no more. I mean, it's as depressing as it gets.

How about there's a "but" to that fact. There's an answer that completely reverses the hopelessness of simply existing in time, and the answer is found in the very next verse of that Psalm, *Psalm*

103, it says this in verse 17: *But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.* What I want us to understand as we approach this new year is that everything you do will fall into either of two categories: There will either be vanity of vanities or they will be from everlasting to everlasting, and we get to make the choice. See, the bottom line is this, everything that you do that is rooted in the kingdom of God will have eternity stamped all over it. Everything you do that is not eternal will wind up being complete and utter vanity. And probably sounds like on surface I'm saying, okay, only the holy Joe stuff, only the churchy stuff, only the super spiritual stuff is worthwhile and all that other stuff is just vanity. But you have to remember that God sees this much more like Martin Luther saw it, and Luther saw himself planting a tree the day before the world came to an end. Does that sound super churchy? I mean, shouldn't Luther have been giving out tracts or maybe singing hymns or attending a church service? You see, if you're still stuck thinking that way, you're missing out on living in the joy of the kingdom of God. I mean, what do you think *1 Corinthians 10:31* means, it says: *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* There's nothing churchy or spiritual about eating and drinking, but God is glorified nonetheless in how

we do it. The faithful servant who Jesus commended was engaged in that very thing when Jesus said: *"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them food at their proper time?"* So I said there's something so prosaic as providing food and drink be the kind of thing that Jesus delights in commending? Well, yeah, and it all depends on how we do everything we do. Consider what Jesus said in *Matthew 6:33*: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

So how do we walk carefully then how we walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil? We seek the kingdom first. Albert Schweitzer may have gone along with his clinics and all the people who he once healed, but to the best of my knowledge, he knew Christ as his Savior, so really everything he did counts, and it counts for eternity. He made the best use of his time. I want you to picture that image of a cat walking circumspectly down a glass lined wall. He's got three paws down, he's got one paw up and he's looking, and he's just kind of looking where can I put my paw down without it causing me some pain. God says a wise person looks with that kind of care. And what is he looking at? He's looking for the very next step as a place to glorify God and advance the kingdom wherever and whenever he can. I mean, it could be singing in church, it could be setting

up clinics in Africa, you could be watching a football game or hunting turkeys. Saint Augustine once said this: "Love God and do whatever you please." Think about that. "Love God and do whatever you please." And you have to understand, the more you get the first part of that statement, the more the second part is going to glorify God as *1 Corinthians 10* says: *In whatever you do.* I think Augustine's statement is worth pondering as we enter the new year because the key to making the best use of our time is the passion that we have for the kingdom of God and for the King himself, and if you have that passion, then anything you do is going to be marked directed and clearly aimed at God's glory because that's what's going to matter the most to you.

In a couple of days we're going to once again start another brand new year. God says we can learn from our past, we can prepare for our future, but he expects us to live in the present, and that present will be wisely used depending on the passion that you have for Christ and his kingdom. You see, the best use of our time is not some kind of time saving technique, it is a heart changing technique. It's all about the passion that you have for Christ and his kingdom. Here's the good news. If you say, "I don't have that, I wish I did," well you can. All you have to do is ask for it. You can have that passion in 2015. You know, when David first finally repented of his adultery with Bathsheba, he came before God



with a heart that was empty and crushed and broken, and he asked this of God in *Psalm 51*, he said, *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* So every one of us in this room regardless of what 2014 did, it's gone, it's past, 2015 is in front of us. I don't have a heart for this, I don't have a passion for the kingdom, I don't have a passion for the King, you can have that passion. You can get it. You can ask God who will be delighted to give you that heart. You can start this year out with a new direction, a new spirit and a new heart. You can look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Let's pray.

*Father, again, we are at the very end of a year that went by so fast, just for most of us we just blinked and it's gone. And Lord, the next one's going to go by just as fast. And Father, we want to make the best use of the time that you've given us. And Lord, we want to do that in everything that we do, not churchy stuff, not "spiritual" stuff, but in living our lives for you day in day out. Father, we need passion for you, we need passion for your kingdom, passion for the King to do that, and I pray that you would give each and every one of us just that; and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*