

Countdown 7 – 6 – 5...

Message for Sunday, October 6, 2013
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-16 and others

Children's Message: (from Romans 12:1)

Describe what sacrifice is like. Clear the communion table, so it be used as an altar. The people would bring animals to be sacrificed.

The Bible says, "Offer yourself as a sacrifice." So demonstrate this by climbing up on the table myself, and stabbing myself (with a rubber spatula!). Problem: how does this help God? *It doesn't!* What God wants is our lives, not our dead bodies.

Sermon: "Countdown 7 – 6 – 5..."

Use your life wisely

I heard about a very successful (as the world counts "success") and very wealthy businessman who was concerned about his money. In his funeral arrangements, he ordered that, inside his coffin, there be a suitcase full of gold bars. He had spent his life accumulating this wealth, and he wasn't going to give it to his kids who would just waste it. He was taking it with him. Well, he died, and when he arrived at heaven's gate, the apostle Peter said to him, "You can't bring your baggage with you. This is a new life; you leave that stuff behind." But the man said, "No, it's OK. I got special permission from God to bring it with me."

Peter replied, "Well, if God says so, I guess it's all right. Please open it for inspection." The man dialed the combination lock and popped up the lid. Peter's eyes opened wide with amazement and he exclaimed, "You brought pieces of pavement!?"

What a tragedy it is to come to the end of life, and discover that the things you've worked so hard for, the things you lost sleep worrying about, the things that you thought were so precious, are actually almost worthless. A wasted life is a tragedy.

What is life about, then? What things *are* important? That's what we're going to start learning next week, in the *40 Days of Purpose*. We'll be reading the Bible, and seeing what God tells us about our purpose in life.

Ephesians 5:15-16, Today's English Version:
So be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but like wise people. Make good use of every opportunity you have, because these are evil days.

I underlined the words "careful" and "wise." Don't be careless and foolish. Don't waste your life. Don't throw it away on things that don't matter. Use your life wisely.

What does it take?

Let's be clear about one thing: this program is not a magic pill. I heard about someone who was excited about this new weight loss drink: "All you have to do is drink a glass in the morning, one at noon, and another in the evening, and then just watch the pounds melt off!" The excitement quickly disappeared when it was learned that these three milkshakes are not a supplement to your regular meals; they *are* your meals.

What does it take to not waste your life? What does it take to become all that God wants you to be? What does it take to develop yourself to your fullest potential? Well, I'm going to say it in one word. It's a word you're not going to like. It's a very unpopular word. We cringe when we hear this word. It's the word *discipline*. (And a groan went out across the land.)

Look at these verses:

Proverbs 10:17, God's Word:

Whoever practices discipline is on the way to life.

1 Timothy 4:7, New American Standard Bible:

Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

You can't be a disciple of Jesus without discipline. Those two words go together.

Now, what is discipline? In two words, discipline is delayed gratification. Discipline is doing the difficult now, in order to enjoy the benefit later.

Now some of you don't even need this definition, because you're incredibly disciplined. You plan your day, you're always on time, you're conscientious in your work habits. Some of you never miss your favourite TV show. You're disciplined in some areas. You know where you're disciplined? In the areas you want to be. The things that are important to you, you get done. What if you were as disciplined in having a daily quiet time as you are in watching that favourite TV show that you never miss? What if you were as disciplined in serving others as you are in getting up and going to work everyday?

There's another word for discipline; we like this one a bit better. It's the word "habits." Habits are simply disciplines; and you are the sum total of your habits. Tell me what you do habitually, and I'll tell you what your character is. If you habitually tell the truth, you have integrity. If you are habitually faithful to your spouse,

you are a faithful person. If you want to change your life, all you have to do is change your habits.

One of the goals of 40 Days of Purpose is to help you develop some new spiritual habits, like having a daily devotional time, reading the Bible, being part of a small group.

The question today is: do you want to grow as a Christian? If you do, then what are you doing to make that happen? Most people find it easier to exercise with others; we encourage one another, we hold one another accountable. The small groups are a type of spiritual exercise. I can't emphasize enough how important these groups will be in helping you to grow.

What does God want from you?

It occurred to me: asking "Do you want to grow?" may not be the right question. The real question we should be asking is: What does God want from you?

Romans 6:13, Today's English Version:

Give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes.

God wants all of you. Not because God needs you. But because you need God.

Nicky Gumbel tells the story of Bill Burnett, who was at one time the Archbishop of Capetown.

I heard him say, 'When I became a bishop I believed in theology [the truth about God], but not in God. I was a practical atheist. I sought righteousness by doing good.'

One day, after he had been a bishop for fifteen years, he went to speak at a confirmation service on the text in Romans, 'God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us' (Romans 5:5). After he had preached, he came home, poured himself a strong drink and was reading the paper when he felt the Lord saying, 'Go and pray.' He went into his chapel, knelt down in silence and sensed the Lord saying to him, 'I want your body.' He could not quite understand why (he is tall and thin and says, 'I'm not exactly Mr. Universe'). However, he gave every part of himself to the Lord. 'Then,' he said, 'what I preached about happened. I experienced electric shocks of love.' He found himself flat on the floor and heard the Lord saying, 'You are my son.'

When he got up, he knew indeed that something had happened. It proved a turning point in his life and ministry. Since then, through

his ministry, many others have come to experience being a child of God through the witness of the Spirit.

Our response

"God did not give us the Bible to merely *inform* us. God gave us the Bible to *transform* us" [Rick Warren]. Will you invest six weeks of your life to allow God to do this?

In fact, this is a perfect opportunity for you to invite friends, neighbours, family members, co-workers – everyone you rub shoulders with – to come to church with you. Invite them to come with you next Sunday for our Thanksgiving service. That's when I will begin the series on what is our purpose in life. At the end, I will say to everyone, "If you found this helpful, then why don't you plan on coming back for the rest of this series?"

Next Steps:

- Sign up to be part of a small group.
- Even better, offer to host a group in your home or apartment.
- Get a copy of the book *The Purpose Driven Life*, just \$7.
- Commit to coming for the next six weeks for the whole series.
- Invite others. Start praying for them now.

Thank-you. It's going to be a fantastic journey!