

SEIZE THE DAY

Have you ever heard the Latin phrase "Carpe Diem"? Webster said this phrase literally means "to pluck the day," or as we've heard it said, "Seize the day!" This was Solomon's point in Ecclesiastes 9:10—to live life fully means to seize each day: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going!"

Solomon had lived a full life—a life of power, fame, and influence—and his message to us is, "Carpe Diem!" Solomon, an old man nearing the grave, looked back over his life, and this is the exhortation that he decided to leave with those who would eventually follow him in life and death—"Seize the day!" Whatever our hands find to do, we must do it with all our might! In other words, we should make our lives extraordinary! We should pursue life with the utmost enthusiasm. We should seize the day while we may!

Let's notice why we must "seize the day."

Seize the day, for life is short! Listen to David: "We are aliens and pilgrims before You; our days on Earth are as a shadow" (First Chronicles 29:15). And "You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best is but vapor" (Psalm 35:5). Job made a few statements of his own concerning this subject: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (7:6). "We were born yesterday.... Our days on Earth are a shadow" (8:9). "My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away.... They pass by like swift ships, like an eagle swooping on its prey" (9:25-26). "Man...is of few days.... He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow" (14:1-2). Especially in the face of the preceding statements, we cannot help but recall what James wrote in 4:14 of his letter: "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

So we must seize the day while we have it to seize! Today, life is ours; tomorrow, it may be gone! Life is short, so we must seize the day while we may! As Roy Laurin once said, "Time is passing and you are passing out of time."

Seize the day, for opportunity (life) knocks but once! Someone once said, "Time is so valuable that God gives only a moment of it at once, and He gives that moment but once in all eternity." Although initially speaking of Himself, in John 9:4 Jesus was clearly calling us to work while opportunity is ours: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." The door of opportunity opens and closes quickly!

Jesus was a busy man, but He would often set aside His schedule to seize an unexpected opportunity. Once Jesus and His disciples were so busy in their work of teaching and healing that Mark 6:31 says, "they did not even have time to eat," which was why Jesus told the 12 to "Come aside...to a deserted place and rest a while"; but the multitudes saw them leave, and they hastened to meet them on the opposite side of Galilee. When Jesus arrived at the lonely place, it was no longer lonely: the people were waiting for Him. Jesus was tired and hungry, but He felt compassion for the people: here was another opportunity to teach. So He taught them and performed the miracle of feeding the 5,000 from 5 loaves and 2 fish. When Jesus saw the multitude waiting for Him, do you think He saw a nuisance, a bother, or a burden? No! He saw an opportunity, a golden moment, a time for teaching! Putting Himself aside, He seized the moment!

Seize the day, for time is a commodity too precious to waste! Paul urged the Ephesians in 5:16 to "redeem the time." In a sense time becomes ours by purchase, because we pay a price for its use. We exchange time in the market of life for certain activities that may be either worthy or unworthy of the price we paid. Weymouth's translation says, "Buy up the opportunities."

Time, like money, may be lost, but unlike money, time cannot be hoarded: it cannot be set aside for later use; it must be spent while its here. Lord Chesterfield said, "Lose an hour in the morning and you will be looking for it the rest of the day." Time is the stuff life is made of, so we must spend it with

purpose or in a meaningful manner; its too precious to waste. What are we buying with our time? If it isn't spent productively, it's lost forever; listen to how this truth was engraved on a sundial...

*The shadow of my finger cast
Divides the future from the past;
Before it stands the unborn hour
In darkness and beyond thy power;
Behind its unreturning line
The vanished hour, no longer thine;
One hour alone is in thy hands,
The now on which the shadow stands.*

Someone once said, "If you want to be the man of the hour, you must learn to first make every minute count." "Redeem the time," said Paul; he was urging us to seize the day while we may.

Seize the day, for in so doing we come into possession of eternity! Paul wrote to Timothy in First Timothy 6:19 about the concept of "storing up...a good foundation for the time to come, that [we] may lay hold on eternal life." William James once said that "The great use of one's life is to spend it for something that will outlast it, for the value of life is computed not by its duration but by its donation. Not how long we live, but how fully and well."

There's a longing in man to achieve a significance which transcends death: there's a hunger to be remembered and appreciated beyond one's own generation. A vehicle that allows mortal men to have an influence surpassing their lifetime is the written word, so volumes have been written: poetry, music, prose, etc.; our libraries are monuments to man's compulsion to make influence outlive life. We can make influence outlive our lives, and we don't have to write one book or one song; in fact, we can even make our influence touch eternity, and all we have to do is write some letters: Paul's influence stretched into eternity, because the impressions he made were on human hearts. To the Corinthians in Second Corinthians 3:2-3 Paul said, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; you are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart."

Time decays stone, but the human soul lives forever; so let's place our marks there, and our influence will outlive our lives. Find a heart that will receive an impression, then write a letter on it with love and truth. That living, walking, talking letter, and the children of that letter in turn will be read by more people than we could ever meet. However, if this is ever to happen, we must "seize the day": we must be open to those we may impress for good; we must be alert for teachable moments; we must grasp those opportunities as they arise, one by one, and in the end, we'll find that we have contributed far more to the world than pen and ink could.

Let's notice how we must "seize the day."

Seize the day by not using the excuse, "But I don't have time." Consider this: each of us has the same amount of time—168 hours a week; if we make allowances for 8 hours of sleep per day, 4 hours a day for meals, socializing, and household chores, 10 hours a day for work and travel, there still remains no less than 20 hours of time per week. 20 hours is just slightly less than one entire day. The question is, "How do we invest this one day each week?" We might even ask ourselves, "How do I invest these 86.5 hours each month?" Or, "How do I invest these 1,040 hours each year?" Our highest contribution to the work of God's kingdom is determined by how we spend these days or hours; our use of these hours will determine whether our lives will be ordinary or extra-ordinary.

For those of us who claim we "don't have time," I've found that people always seem to find the time to do the things they really want to do, but complain about not having the time to do the things they pretend to want to do. It is said that a young girl asked a friend, "Isn't that lovely?," holding up a large and most elaborately embroidered table-mat. "It is very pretty indeed," said the friend. "It must have taken you a long time to embroider it." "Indeed, it did!" was the almost triumphant reply. "Why, do you know I kept an exact account of the time I spent on that cloth, and it came to nearly four weeks, allowing eight hours to each day!" Later in the conversation, the fact was discovered that this young

lady had given up a Bible study with some people, because she "simply didn't have the time."

Seize the day by mentally preparing for and using opportunities. Too many have come and gone, slipping through our hands, because we had not thought beforehand about how to respond to them; now is the time to envision them again: during moments alone in thought, imagine what you'll do if opportunity knocks once more. One of the saddest stories of the Old Testament is the story of a king, who, after God gave him 15 more years of life after he asked for it, wasted it—failing to use his God-given opportunity; that man was Hezekiah (Second Kings 20). One of the saddest stories of the New Testament is the story of a governor, who, after hearing God's Word preached to him by Paul, said that he would send for him another time—but he was soon replaced; that man was Felix (Acts 24:25).

These two men remind me a story about a preacher who dreamed that he was in Hell amidst evil spirits trying to devise a way to get at the souls of men. One rose and said, "I'll go to Earth and tell men that the Bible is all a fable." "No, that won't do," Satan said. Another said, "Let me go, for I'll tell men that there's no God, no Savior, no Heaven, and no Hell." "No, that won't do either," Satan said. Suddenly one arose and with a wise air suggested, "No, I'll go and tell them that there is a God, a Savior, a Heaven, and a Hell, but then let them know that there's no hurry—tomorrow will do." So Satan sent him. We really need to learn to...

Seize the day by making profitable use of each moment. Since our spare hours are sometimes spent in small portion, and at other times in long portions, we must make use of them as they come to us. We should plan quality study time. Rising early or staying up late may be an option. Albert Barnes, the Presbyterian preacher, awoke every morning at 4 AM and studied until 9 AM to write his commentary; he did this daily for 35 years. By rising so early, he could spend several hours writing without neglecting his work as a preacher. By the end of his busy career, he had completed notes on the entire New Testament and several books of the Old Testament. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote...

*The heights by great men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

We should use all our chunks of free time. Henry Haddow said, "The real secret of how to use time is to pack it as you would your luggage, filling up all the small spaces with small things." Here are a couple of examples: (a) Keep a book with you to read or a pen and tablet to write a letter of encouragement to someone at times such as when you're in waiting rooms. (b) Listen to the Bible or sermons or books on cassette tapes while driving from place to place; even though David said that he meditated on God's Word day and night (Psalm 1:2), we have that ability even more so than he did with all the technology at our disposal.

James Keller told this story: "Kenneth Smith had seven minutes to spare between trips as motorman-conductor on a trolley line in Baltimore. The half-acre loop where his run ended was covered with a dense underbrush and a thicket. He decided to put his seven minutes to work. At the end of each trip he worked at cleaning out the brush and weeds. Eventually he turned the loop that had been an eyesore into a garden."

Seize the day by clarifying priorities. When Jesus came to Martha's house once, He saw different priorities than Martha did. Martha was busy making supper, while her sister Mary was learning at Jesus' feet; Martha complained to Jesus that Mary wasn't doing her fair share. Luke 10:41-42 tells us that Jesus replied to Martha, "You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away from her." As someone has said, if we spend most of our time dreaming of tomorrow and regretting yesterday, we won't find a great deal of time left for doing anything today.

Clarifying priorities means deciding what's truly important; remember, "You always find the time to do the things that are first." There are so many things we want to do. How do we decide what is truly important? Here are a couple of ways. (a) Do the "epitaph exercise." A good way to get a perspective

on what's really important is to write your epitaph based on how you're living; describe yourself as you are today, then determine if that's how you want to be remembered. Consider an example: "Here lies Martha. She was worried and bothered by so many things. But she was a good cook!" On the other hand, "Here lies Mary. She drank deeply and lived fully the doctrine of Christ." Write your epitaph, describing who you want to be, and what you want to accomplish; then, whatever furthers that purpose, make it your priority on your "to-do list." (b) Take the "six-months-to-live" test. Suppose you had just six months to live and had to decide how to spend the time. Make three lists to identify the things you must do, the things you want to do, and the things you neither must nor want to do, then throw out the third list since it contains the many petty projects that hinder you from accomplishing what's really important. The first list should be taken care of at once; that which is urgent must take precedence. Once the first list has been fulfilled, spend the remaining time on list number two, because these are the goals and aspirations that give that little extra zest to life. Why do all this? One reason is because well-arranged time is a sure mark of a well-arranged mind.

Seize the day by doing it now. Procrastination is the thief of time; don't rob yourself of life. We must fill our hands with something meaningful to do, then do it with all our might right now. Jesus once invited a man to follow him who answered, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But "Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach" (Luke 2:59-60). At another time, God became very upset with His people Israel because they said of His prophet that what he said, his warnings, etc., were for a long time off, thus postponing their submission (Ezekiel 12:17ff).

Listen, if we have children to train—let's train them now; if we have an obligation to discharge—let's discharge it now; if we have work to do—let's do it now; if we have a soul to win—let's win him now; if we have a wrong to right—let's correct it now; if we have a confession to make—let's confess it now; and if we have a preparation to make—let's make it now!

It's said that a king once sent for his jester and presented him with a staff, saying, "Take this staff, and keep it until you find a bigger fool than yourself." Lying on his deathbed many years later, the king again sent for his jester. "I am going away," the king said. "Where?" asked the jester. "To another country," replied the king. "What provision has your majesty made for this journey and for living in the country where you're going?" "None," was his answer. The jester handed the king the staff. "Take it," he said, "because I've found a bigger fool than myself, for I only trifle with the things of time, while you trifle with things of eternity."

Seize the day while we may so that there will be no regrets when at last we must face the grave.

Conclusion

We must seize the day because life is short, opportunity knocks once, time is too precious to waste, and in so doing we lay hold on eternity; we seize the day first by not using the excuse that we don't have time, then by preparing for opportunities, making use of each moment, clarifying our priorities, and not procrastinating!

In Christ is the only place where one can be assured that his time will not be wasted; there's no doubt that no matter how hard we work, as long as we're outside of Christ, time is utterly wasted.

So if you've been putting off reconciling yourself to God, whether you're a non-Christian or a fallen Christian, you need to be warned that it's later than it has ever been before. An old couple had a grandfather clock that struck each hour. Something went wrong with it one day, and it struck 8 when it should have struck 4...and 4 when it should have struck 8, and so on. That night at 11 o'clock, it really went crazy and struck 16. The old man jumped out of bed, shook his wife and said, "Wake up old lady, it's later than it's ever been before!" That's our exhortation for you to take to heart today if you aren't in a reconciled state with God: "It's later than it's ever been before!"

[Leland Byars, 1997.]
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