

Douglas Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church

Life is precious. Life is also fragile. Each week the news brings us stories. This past week was no exception. On a MBTA bus in Boston, a nine-month-old boy that appeared to have been badly beaten died in spite of efforts to save him. An 18-year-old young man who lost both of his parents in ethnic violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, came to the United States with his siblings and was finally granted political asylum a few months ago. Last week he was gunned down in the doorway of his home in a Boston neighborhood. Each week the obituaries note the deaths of people as young as a few days or weeks to people in every decade of life. Most are unknown to us, though we are especially saddened to learn of children, teenagers, and those whose lives end much sooner than we believe they should. Each week other people die who are more well known whom we have heard of or seen in our wider culture, this week it was folks such as attorney Jonnie Cochran, Frank Perdue, the tough man who made a tender chicken, and of course, Terri Schiavo.

Schiavo died after being the center of a media and political storm that overwhelmed **what should have been a private and personal tragedy of a family divided over end of life issues. All of us should now be aware of the critical importance of writing a living will, designating someone to be our health care proxy, and making our wishes clearly known to those in our inner circle.** If you have not done this, regardless of your age, you should do it this week. Remember this sad saga began for Terri Schiavo when she was just 26.

Of course, we all know that Pope John Paul II, who has been the leader of the Roman Catholic Church for more than 25 years, died yesterday. Born in Poland in 1920, his mother died when he was 9, his only brother when he was 12, and his father when he was 21. During World War II he was active in an underground Christian democratic group that helped Jews escape the Nazis. He was elected Pope October 16, 1978 when I was beginning my first year of high school. He came to Boston the following year as part of a visit to the United States. A very intelligent man, fluent in 8 languages, he visited more than 100 countries during his papacy. He worked to build a moral foundation in the world while playing a crucial role in the over throw of communism in his native country and in Europe. He worked for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation in his personal life and in the world. When a Turkish gunman shot him in 1981 in St. Peter's Square, the pope was in the hospital for three months. Later he visited and spoke with his attacker in

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prison. He opposed economic sanctions against Cuba, Libya, Iran, and Iraq saying they hurt people and were politically ineffective. He also apologized to women, Jews, and Muslims for wrongs done by the Roman Catholic Church. He was as President Bush said, "a good and faithful servant of God." **He was some one who made the most of his life.** Even by how he chose to face his death he demonstrated that there is a time to let go, especially for Christians who have faith and hope that death is not the end.

Life is precious, it is fragile, and none of us knows how long our life may last.

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus,

"Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Paul is encouraging us to be careful and wise about how we live our life.

Christians believe we only have one chance at life, Hebrews 9:27 says,

"It is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment."

We get one chance at life and one chance at each day. Once it is gone it is gone forever.

Psalm 90:12 says, *"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."*

A bumper sticker read, *"Life is too precious to waste."*

Tragically the world is filled with the sad and terrible stories of people who have wasted their lives. More than once I have read or seen a story and said to myself, *"What a waste of a life."* Sometimes the climax of a person ruining or squandering his or her own life includes taking the lives of other people as well. Not every life that is thrown away is done so dramatically and in a hail of gunfire as occurred in Wisconsin and Minnesota in recent weeks. Life can also be wasted in ways that are unseen and incremental, just as termites can eat away at a house for undetected for months until the destruction and damage is devastating. More frequently, a life is wasted an hour, a day, a week, a month, a year at a time. The cumulative impact of our choices over time significantly shapes the life we experience. No one wants to spend their life climbing a ladder they think leads to success only to discover upon reaching the top that it is leaning against the wrong wall.

"Be careful how you live," Paul says. The opposite of careful is careless. The Greek here means - *"don't stumble through life, don't just drift through life."* The word translated *"live"* can also be *"walk"* so be careful how you live or walk. Don't trip and

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fall. Live as wise people, don't be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is for your life.

How do we make the most of our life? How do we invest our life so that when it is over regardless of our age, we can die feeling we have made the most of our opportunity and that we made the best use of the air we've breathed, the food we've eaten, and the space we've taken up? **Making the most of our life begins with understanding that our life does not belong to us it belongs to God. The question is then, what does God want from my life?** Reading through the Bible it is clear - **God wants our whole life.** Nowhere does the Bible teach that you can be a Christian and live your life any way you want. Like the old song, God wants "*All of Me.*" God doesn't want 10% of our life or 50% or even 99% - God wants all of you and all of me. Romans 6:13 (NLT) says, "*Give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God.*"

C.S. Lewis wrote, "*The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important.*" If Christianity is true, it deserves absolutely everything we've got. If it's not true, we should all be home in bed! The only thing Christianity cannot be is moderately important. It's either all or nothing. It's either true, and that determines the rest of our life, or we should forget it and do whatever we want.

Some people may say, "I don't know what God wants me to do." The Bible makes it pretty clear. Deuteronomy 10:12 (NCV) says, "*This is what the Lord wants you to do: Respect the Lord and do what he has told you to do. Love him. Serve the Lord with your whole being.*" God wants our whole being and our whole life. Sometimes folks look at their life like a pie – I have my family slice, my work slice, my social slice my golf slice, my finances, my recreation, my retirement and my spiritual life, as if my spiritual life is one slice of the pie. Wrong. God wants control of the whole pie, not just one slice out of ten.

There are many good things that can push God, the best thing, out of first place in our life. Money, play, hobbies, family, friends, career, maintaining good health – God knows we need these things, God just doesn't want any of them to come before our relationship with and commitment to God. God says in the Ten Commandments, "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" Any time we have something in our life that is #1 that's not God, that's called an idol. If we put God first in our life, God will help us to

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align our other priorities in their proper places. Proverbs 3:6, which is a favorite of many people, says, *“In all your ways acknowledge the Lord, and the Lord will make straight your paths.”* Trying to live a part-time Christian life is not the path to contentment. God wants all of us.

What does it take to give our selves completely to God and not to waste our life? What does it take to develop myself to my fullest potential? It's a word that causes many of us to groan – **discipline**. Proverbs 10:17 says, *“Whoever practices discipline, is on the way to life.”* You cannot be a disciple of Jesus without discipline. The two words go together – disciple and discipline. Paul wrote to Timothy (NASB), *“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”* **Discipline is simply delayed gratification. It is doing first things first, doing the difficult now to enjoy the benefits later.** Some of you are very disciplined in your work. You plan your day, are always on time, and conscientious in your work habits. Some of you are very disciplined when it comes to your physical workouts. Others never miss a favorite TV show and of course some of us never miss a meal. All of us are disciplined in areas where we want to be. The things that we get done are the things that are most important to us. Imagine if we were as disciplined in having a daily quiet time as we are in never missing a meal. Imagine if we were as disciplined in serving others as we are in getting up and going to work or school each day. What if we were as disciplined in attending worship as we are watching a favorite TV show.

Since you're here the morning of Daylight Savings Time, you probably are!

Another word for discipline is “habits.” There is a sense in which we are the sum total of our habits. If we habitually tell the truth, we have integrity. If you are habitually faithful to our 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 major goals of the 40 Days of Purpose, which we kick off later this week, is to help us develop some new spiritual habits if they aren't already part of our life.

In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul, speaking like a spiritual coach, urges Timothy, *“Train yourself in godliness.”* The word for *“train”* or *“exercise”* is the same word from which we get *“gymnasium.”* Just as there are exercises that help keep us physically fit, there are exercises we can do to keep spiritually fit. One is the discipline of **Letting Go**. That means you let go of things because you can't keep adding things to your schedule without

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letting go of something else. Hebrews 12:1 teaches us, *“Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”* We are told to lay aside or strip off two things that hold us back from fulfilling our God given potential - “sins” and “weights.” Sins are breaking one of the commandments of God. A weight is something that’s not necessarily wrong; it’s just not necessary. There are thousands of different weights, and to grow spiritually, we must learn how to say, “no.” We can’t say yes to every opportunity. Often we have to say no to some very good things in order to have time for the best things. The enemy of the best isn’t usually the worst, but the good. If we’re going to make more space for God in our life, we have to cut some good stuff out, not just sin, but good stuff.

As a pastor I am concerned about how over scheduled and over crowded so many of our lives are today. And in the next 40 days we’re going to ask many of you to add three new habits to your schedule. A daily devotional reading of about 15 minutes a day, which will help you understand God’s purposes for your life; a weekly meeting in a small group for six weeks that will help you understand God’s purpose for your life and enable you to get to know some new friends; and weekly verse to memorize that may take five minutes. In order to do these things you need to decide now what you’re going to let go of during the 40 Days of Purpose. Any time we take on a new activity we should look at our calendar and say, “What am I not going to do?” at the same time. Any time we take on a new habit, skill, or commitment we should ask, “What am I not going to do?” This is true both individually and as a congregation. It is not healthy or wise or possible to keep adding things, options, or ministries without letting go of other things, options, or ministries. We cannot do everything. We cannot have it all. Maybe you’ll have to give up an hour of TV a week during the 40 Days. Instead of watching re-runs of “Friends” you can go to a group and make friends.

I had a call from a reporter during Holy Week who was doing a story on “What TV Show would God watch.” I told her I had to confess there was not a single TV program or show that I watch – although I have been known to watch an occasional sporting event. My answer to her question was I thought God would turn the television off, and go for a walk on the beach, or go do something for someone else like reading to a child.

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Working out is great and makes us feel and look better but spiritual exercise is even more important because our bodies are going to decay and die no matter how well we take care of them. Paul says (1 Timothy 4:8), *“Physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”*

The average person lives 25,550 days. So it is wise to take 40 days to think about and reflect on how we will use whatever time we may have left. People are not equally talented or gifted. Some people are smarter, stronger, more artistic, scientific, or musically inclined, more persistent, determined or emotionally resilient than others, but we all have the same amount of time. 60 seconds a minute, 60 minutes an hour, 24 hours a day. What makes a huge difference is what we do with time. One person observed, *“Don't be fooled by the calendar. There are only as many days in the year as we make use of. One person gets a week's value out of a year while another person gets a full year's value out of a week”* (Charles Richards).

As we take care of each day, the calendar will take care of the years. Today's choices and actions will determine tomorrow's achievements. If you're killing or wasting time today, you're killing your future tomorrow. Whenever I hear someone talk about killing time, I know they are not yet fulfilling their potential because they haven't yet figured out what God's wants them to do and what life's all about. Because once you do that, there is always more to do than there is time to do it.

Why should we give ourselves completely to God and make the effort to grow spiritually? Why should I let go of some good things in my life to make time for God? The simple answer to that is because of the cross. Because Jesus was willing to give up heaven and equality with God to come to earth as a human being and to die a terrible death on the cross so that our sins may be forgiven, he was resurrected so that we'd know the power of God, so we'd know the amazing love God has for us, and have eternal life that begins when we ask Jesus to be the Leader and Savior of our life. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, *“He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”*

If you want to make the most of your life and not to waste it, live for Jesus who died for you. Too many people go through life always looking to the next thing

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thinking that will bring purpose or significance. In the process they miss what God wants them to do and they miss out on contentment. A woman wrote,

“First I was dying to finish high school and start college.

And then I was dying to finish college and start working.

And then I was dying to marry and have children.

And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough for school so I could return to work.

And then I was dying to retire.

And now, I am dying...and suddenly I realize I forgot to live.”

We don't want to forget to live.

Let's pray: Gracious God we already know you are going to do some amazing things in our midst when we begin the 40 Days of Purpose. Lives are going to be changed, families are going to be saved, friendships are going to be formed, miracles are going to happen. Thank you for the people who have opened up their homes to host a group. Open up all our hearts to invited friends who don't have a personal relationship with you to come to our group. God we don't want to be casual Christians, part-time believers, or luke-warm servants. Holy and Merciful God, help me to give myself to you completely, totally, and without reservation. Holy Spirit help me to discipline myself and train myself in developing the habits, the disciplines I need to grow spiritually. Help me to let go of things that don't really matter, and put you first in my life. I thank you that Jesus died for me, help me always to live for him. In your name I pray, amen.

Closing prayer:

“Look to this day For yesterday is only a dream,

And tomorrow is only a vision, But today well-lived,

Makes every yesterday a dream of happiness And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.”

Ancient Sanskrit poem.