

St. Augustine gets the credit for coining the proverb: “Those who sing pray twice.” The Apostle Paul would approve. Sing once. Pray twice. That’s a real time saver, and time is what Paul urges us to save: *Ephesians 5:15–16 (NRSV) Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.*

Paul isn’t inviting us to embrace superior time management techniques; he isn’t asking the Ephesians to get more done in less time. He recognizes how hard it can be to live a Christian life. Our desire to do God’s will can get lost in temptation’s allure. We don’t mean to make a fool of ourselves, but hard times can work up quite a thirst, and if we are not practicing our faith daily – reading the Bible, praying, we can quench that thirst in ways that we later regret.

To help us apply this wisdom to our lives, we’re going to make the most of the time with a song in our hearts.

Make the Most of the Time

Few things bring as much delight to a Presbyterian as a good bargain. We want to get our money’s worth, but if we can get more than our money’s worth? There is “joy, joy, joy down in our hearts!”

So when we hosted Presbytery last year, we rejoiced! We served a fine meal for the Presbytery rate of \$8 per plate, and thanks to some sage shoppers, we prepared that fine meal for \$4 per plate. “Joy, joy, joy down in our hearts!”

Each week, we are blessed by these colorful and creative arrangements. A few years ago, our flower team evaluated what we were getting for what we were paying and resolved that we could do better, and have we ever! Thanks to a sage shopper, we fill our sanctuary with beauty every week, and we get more than our money’s worth.

That’s the kind of attitude Paul has in mind when he urges us to “*make the most of the time, because the days are evil.*” We’re on the lookout for an opportunity;

an opportunity to rejoice, an opportunity to do the right thing, an opportunity to give thanks; and when we see that opportunity, we seize that opportunity; we make the most of it.

This doesn't mean that we live a sheltered existence filled with pious clichés. *“The days are evil,”* and we can be supremely realistic and accurate in our assessment, but we don't let that reality drag us down. We keep our spirits up by recognizing where evil is at work and at the same time recognizing that God is also at work and making the most of the holy moments God sends our way.

A quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer that made the Facebook rounds this week expresses this “make the most of the time” attitude well: “Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will.””

Ephesians 5:15–16 (NRSV) Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Keep your spirit up! Be on the lookout for the opportunities God will send your way to do the right thing, to give thanks, and rejoice with a song in your heart!

— A Song in Your Heart

“The one who sings prays twice.” Ephesians 5:18–19 (NRSV) Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.

Music occurs in time. In fact, one of the great challenges of music is to sing in time. A whole note is a whole note; a half note is a half note; a quarter note is a quarter note; but if the time is different it changes everything. We experienced that with our opening song from Cameroon.

We change everything by keeping a song in our hearts that's in a different time, in God's time which is always present to us any time. In God's time, our song rises above the temptation to react to what happens; we react without thinking and

“With A Song in Our Hearts”

make fools of ourselves. Instead, we keep a song in our hearts that’s in God’s time; we respond to what happens; we think; we pray; we “[make] the most of the time” by *Ephesians 5:20 (NRSV) giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Again, living with an attitude of gratitude doesn’t mean denying the reality of what has happened. It does mean that we draw upon the resources of our faith that we develop through our daily spiritual practice of doing our devotions – reading the Bible, using a devotional like “These Days” or www.d365.org, and saying our prayers. *Psalm 119:9 (NRSV) How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word.* That’s true when we’re “young-at-heart” as well! We give thanks at all times and for all things, because we are learning to sing in God’s time; we are learning to listen for the music God whispers, because good times, bad times, all times are in the hands of the Maestro.

Our teaching presbyter, Steve Shussett, shared the following story and its one of my favorites: it illustrates the ancient wisdom to reserve judgment; to remain in the present moment; to mitigate undue stress and worry; to avoid panic; and to have the courage to move forward regardless with a song in our hearts.

Once upon a time, an old farmer lived in a valley with his son, a handsome and dutiful youth. They lived a peaceful life despite a lack of material possessions. They were very happy. So much so, that neighbors began to get envious and wanted to understand the secret of their happiness.

One day, the old man used all his savings to buy a young and beautiful horse. The very same day he bought it, the horse jumped the fence and escaped into the hills. The neighbors came to express their concern, "Oh, that's too bad. How are you going to work the fields now?"

The farmer replied, "Good thing? Bad thing? Who knows?"

In a few days, his horse came back from the hills and brought eight fine horses with him. The neighbors again gathered around, "Oh, how lucky! Now you can do much more work than ever before!" they said.

The farmer replied, "Good thing? Bad thing? Who knows?"

The next day, the farmer's son fell off one of the new horses and broke his leg. "Such misfortune," said the neighbors. The leg healed crookedly and left the son with a permanent limp and endless pain. The neighbors were concerned again, "Now that he is incapacitated, he can't help you around, that's too bad."

The farmer replied, "Good thing? Bad thing? Who knows?"

Soon, the news came that war has broken out, and all the young men were required to join the army. The villagers were sad because they knew that many of the young men will not come back. The farmer's son could not be drafted because of his broken leg. His neighbors were envious: "How lucky! You get to keep your only son!"

The farmer replied, "Good thing? Bad thing? Who knows?"

And the narrative goes on...

Everything that seems on the surface to be an evil may be a good in disguise. And everything that seems good on the surface may really be an evil. So we are wise when we leave it to God to decide what is good fortune and what misfortune, and thank him that all things turn out for good with those who love him.

“The one who sings prays twice.” Sing in God’s time. Live with an attitude of gratitude. Make the most of the time with a song in your heart. Amen.