

Redeeming Our Time

Ephesians 5:15–16 — buying back the hours through the lens of Dallas Willard's Scandal of the Kingdom

DISCIPLESHIP SCHOOL • SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Redeeming Our Time

Ephesians 5:15–16 — an Author & Audience study through the lens of Dallas Willard's *Scandal of the Kingdom*, with practical ways to buy back our days.

By Shane Gunn • Septuagint (LXX), Greek NT & ESV

Greek NT (v.15–16): Βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε, μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ' ὡς σοφοί, ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν.

15 “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” — **Ephesians 5:15–16 (ESV)**

Greek NT (Col 4:5): Ἐν σοφίᾳ περιπατεῖτε πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω, τὸν καιρὸν ἐξαγοραζόμενοι.

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.” — **Colossians 4:5 (ESV)**

LXX Psalm 89:12 (MT 90:12): τοῦ ἀριθμεῖν τὴν δεξιάν σου οὕτως γνώρισον καὶ τοὺς πεπαιδευμένους τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐν σοφίᾳ.

“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” — **Psalm 90:12 (ESV)**

LXX note: the Greek renders the line as a prayer that God would make known his right hand and those instructed in heart by wisdom — a slightly different emphasis, but the same plea: let the brevity of our days teach us how to live.

Paul is writing from prison to the churches of Ephesus and Colossae. The verb ἐξαγοράζω is a marketplace word — you buy a slave out of the auction house. Time, Paul says, is being sold. Disciples are the ones who keep showing up with coin in hand.

A WORD ON “TIME” — KAIROS VS. CHRONOS

Paul does not say *chronos* (clock time, ticking seconds). He says *καιρός* (*kairos*) — the **appointed moment, the opportunity, the season ripe for decision**. Chronos is the river; kairos is the stepping-stone. You cannot redeem the river. You can only step on the stone in front of you.

“Redeeming” — ἐξαγοραζόμενοι (*exagorazomenoi*): middle-voice participle from *ex-* (“out of”) + *agorazō* (“to buy at the *agora*, the marketplace”). Literally: *buying out for yourselves*. Same verb Paul uses for Christ buying us out from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13; 4:5). To redeem the time is to imitate the redemption we received — to pay the price to pull this hour out of the slave market of the age and hand it to God.

This is why “time management” books will not quite help. Paul is not asking us to optimize chronos. He is asking us to recognize *kairos*, and then to *pay* — in attention, in love, in obedience — to lift it out of the hands of evil days.

POINT 1 — THE AUTHOR’S VIEW (PAUL’S PURPOSE)

Paul writes Ephesians as a circular letter to Gentile believers who are learning, for the first time, what it looks like to walk (*peripateō*) as those raised with Christ (Eph 2:6). The verb “walk” anchors the second half of the letter: walk in love (5:2), walk as children of light (5:8), walk carefully (5:15). The command to redeem the time is one brush-stroke in a whole portrait of a new way of being human.

Paul places this command deliberately. Just before it: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead” (5:14). Just after it: “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (5:17), then the filling of the Spirit and the household codes (5:18ff). The logic runs: **wake up** → **walk wisely** → **buy back the hours** → **be filled with the Spirit** → **live this out at home and at work**.

Greek NT (Eph 5:14): Ἐγείρε, ὁ καθεύδων, καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐπιφάσει σοι ὁ Χριστός.

Ephesians 5:14 (ESV): “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Paul’s editorial point: redeeming time is *resurrection behavior*. Only awake people buy back hours. The sleeping do not even know the auction is happening.

POINT 2 — THE AUDIENCE’S VIEW (FIRST-CENTURY EARS)

The Ephesian and Colossian believers heard “redeem the time” very differently than we do. For them:

- **The *agora* was a real place.** Ephesus had a massive commercial agora and a state agora. Every hearer had stood in one that week, watched a slave sold, watched a debt settled. *Exagorazō* was not a metaphor first — it was a scene.
- **“The days are evil” was not pessimism — it was diagnosis.** Ephesus was a city of Artemis’ temple, magic scrolls (Acts 19:19), emperor cult, and trade-guild feasts bound to idolatry. Every ordinary day tried to buy the disciple back into the old economy. Paul names the undertow.
- **Time was communal, not private.** First-century people did not “own” their schedule. Masters, patrons, households, and guilds claimed their hours. Paul’s command lands as scandal: *even a slave or a wife or a tenant can redeem the time* — because the kingdom reaches into hours other people think they own.
- **Kairos was a god in the marketplace.** Greeks personified *Kairos* as a winged young man with a forelock you had to grab as he passed — because he was bald behind. You could not catch him after. The hearer heard Paul saying: grab it now, or you will not grab it at all.

So the audience hears a working-class command addressed to real lives: the auction is loud, the days pull you toward idols, your hours are not your own, and the moment does not wait. *Buy it out.*

Willard argued that Jesus’ central message — “the kingdom of God is at hand” — is a scandal because it insists the realm of God is *available right now, in this hour*. That means every minute is kingdom territory, or it is lost ground. For Willard, “redeeming the time” is not a discipline we tack onto a Christian life; it *is* the Christian life, seen in its native element.

Willard’s famous counsel to a young pastor who asked how to be spiritually healthy:

“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.” Pressed for more, he added: *“There is nothing else. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day.”* Hurry is not a schedule; it is a heart-state that cannot love, cannot listen, cannot obey. A hurried soul cannot redeem an hour — it can only spend one.

The scandal, in four moves:

1. **The kingdom is already here.** You do not have to arrange your life to reach it someday; you step into it with your next decision.
2. **Kingdom life happens in small hours.** Willard: “The greatest moments of your life will most likely go unnoticed by the world.” Redemption is retail, not wholesale.
3. **The disciplines are not for the heroic.** Solitude, silence, Sabbath, prayer, fasting, service — these are not monk-work. They are *ordinary practices* that train an ordinary person to be present to God in ordinary time.
4. **You are becoming someone right now.** “The most important thing about you is not the things that you do, but the person that you are becoming.” Every redeemed minute is a chisel stroke.

Willard would say: the days are not evil because they are full of bad events. The days are evil because they are full of *forces that form you into someone you did not choose to be* — noise, speed, consumption, outrage, scrolling. To redeem the time is to step off that assembly line and apprentice yourself to Jesus in the hour you are actually in.

These are not techniques for getting more done. They are apprentice-habits for becoming a different kind of person. Pick one. Start this week.

1. Keep a real Sabbath.

One 24-hour stretch, weekly, of non-productive rest and worship. No errands, no inbox, no hustle. The Sabbath is God's way of saying the world runs without you — and you are allowed to be a person, not an engine. *Gen 2:2–3; Mark 2:27.*

2. Consecrate the first minutes of the day.

Before the phone, a Psalm. Before the inbox, the Lord's Prayer. Even five honest minutes reframe the twenty-three hours that follow. *Ps 5:3 — "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice."*

3. Practice daily silence and solitude.

Willard called solitude the "most radical" discipline because it removes us from human reinforcement. Ten minutes a day, alone, with nothing to produce, is an act of war on hurry. *Mark 1:35; Matt 6:6.*

4. Ruthlessly eliminate hurry.

Drive the speed limit. Choose the longest checkout line on purpose. Leave earlier so you arrive unhurried. Say "I have time" out loud to someone who needs you today — and mean it. Hurry lies; slowness tells the truth about what matters.

5. Monotask — do one thing at a time.

When you eat, eat. When you pray, pray. When you listen to your spouse or your child, close the laptop. Multitasking is a modern superstition; presence is a kingdom practice. *Eccl 9:10.*

6. Fast from the phone.

A weekly digital sabbath (a few hours, or a full day) loosens the grip of the algorithm. The average adult gives 3–4 hours a day to a screen; to redeem even one of those hours per week is to buy back 52 hours a year for God and neighbor.

7. Memorize Scripture for the idle moments.

Waiting rooms, red lights, the walk to the mailbox — these are the hours the world most easily steals. Fill them with a memorized Psalm, the Lord’s Prayer, Romans 8, or the Beatitudes. *Ps 119:11; Col 3:16.*

8. Do a nightly examen.

Five minutes before sleep: *Where did I meet God today? Where did I miss him? What will I do differently tomorrow?* The examen turns days into *lessons* rather than a blur. *Ps 4:4; 139:23–24.*

9. Give time away on purpose.

Call the widow. Visit the shut-in. Sit with the grieving. Help the neighbor move. Time given to people is never lost; it is the very coin with which we “buy out” an hour from the evil day. *Gal 6:10; Jas 1:27.*

10. Plan like James 4:15.

When you schedule next week, next month, next year, say honestly: *“If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”* Planning is good; presuming is not. Hold the calendar with an open hand, and God will fill it with kairos moments you could not have penciled in.

AUTHOR’S LENS (PAUL)

Redeeming time is resurrection behavior. Awake people walk wisely; sleeping people drift. The command sits between “rise from the dead” and “be filled with the Spirit” for a reason.

AUDIENCE’S LENS (EPHESUS)

The agora is loud, the idols are near, and the hours are not your own. Every day tries to buy you back into the old life. Disciples go to the auction block with the price of attention, love, and obedience.

WILLARD’S LENS (KINGDOM)

The kingdom is available now, in this hour. Hurry is the enemy. The disciplines are how ordinary people become unhurried enough to hear God and love neighbor in the minutes they actually have.

OUR LENS (PLEASANT SPRINGS)

We live in a county with real farms, real pews, and real phones. The auction for our hours is running right now. What will we pay, this week, to pull one day of this life out of the slave market and hand it to the Father?

Why kairos matters most — four reasons from the text itself:

1. Kairos cannot be stored. Unlike barns, hours do not hold. The farmer of Luke 12 tried to lay up grain; Paul tells Ephesus to lay up *obedient moments*. “*Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:2).

2. Kairos is the place God speaks. God does not usually shout across years; he whispers across minutes. Miss the minute, miss the word.

3. Kairos forms the soul. Willard: “We live at the mercy of our ideas.” Ideas form in the hours we do not guard. Redeem the hour, and you redeem the heart.

4. Kairos is shared. The moments we give away in love are the ones most permanently kept. Time handed to a soul becomes eternal; time hoarded for ourselves evaporates.

POINT 7 — A ONE-WEEK EXPERIMENT

Before the next class, commit to a single week of living this text. Do not try all ten practices. Choose three:

Pleasant Springs “Buy-Back the Week” Starter:

- **One morning consecration** — five minutes of Psalm + Lord’s Prayer, before the phone, every day.
- **One Sabbath** — twenty-four hours without the inbox and without a to-do list.
- **One gift of time** — a deliberate visit, call, or meal given to a person the Lord lays on your heart.

At the end of the week, journal one paragraph: *What did I notice about God, about myself, and about the days when I stopped letting them spend me?*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 5:14–18 aloud. Where does “redeem the time” sit between “awake, O sleeper” and “be filled with the Spirit”? What does that placement change about the command?
2. Paul says “the days are evil.” Name one specific force in *your* week that is actively trying to buy your hours back into the old life. How would you pay to pull one hour out of it?
3. Willard said hurry is the great enemy. Where does hurry show up in your life as a heart-condition (not just a schedule)? What would “ruthlessly eliminate” it actually look like on Monday morning?
4. Which of the ten practical ways lands hardest on you — as invitation or as indictment? Why?
5. Of the three “Buy-Back the Week” starters, which one will you actually do? Who will you tell, so you will follow through?
6. Whose *kairos* has the Father been putting in your path — a person, a season, a door — that you have been treating like *chronos*? What changes today?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father of all our days, you have measured our hours and still given us enough for every good work. Forgive us for sleeping through the auction while the evil days spent us cheaply. Awake us, Lord Jesus. Teach us to walk as the wise, to name the moments you set before us, and to pay the price of attention, love, and obedience to pull this day into your kingdom. Fill us with your Spirit, so that the slow minutes — the cradle, the hospital bed, the kitchen table, the quiet chair — would be the very places we meet you. Number our days, and give us a heart of wisdom, until the last kairos is spent and we are at home with you. Through Jesus, who redeemed us in the fullness of time. Amen.

Pleasant Springs Church — Discipleship School