

Sermon Title: Redeem the Time, Feedback Loop, Week One

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Sermon Questions:

Do you tend to think of the world as a place that is good or evil? Why does Paul call the world evil?

What does Paul mean when he calls us to "make the best use of (redeem) the time" (Eph. 5:16)?

What are ways that screens can be a trap to you?

What does it look like to live like an exile (1 Pet. 1:1) and ambassador (Eph. 6:20) in your daily life?

What is one to three ways in the top ten list you can do to take a digital fast?

<https://newlifetucson.com/digitalfast/>

Transcript

We live in a challenging world, a challenging time. There's all sorts of challenges in front of us. I wanna present to you an option. A, B or C are gonna be the options in front of you. What's the most challenging issue of our day?

What's the most challenging thing that's facing us in our day? I wanna just ask you that question. I'm gonna give you three options and think through which of those you would choose first. Economic challenges. Economic challenges.

We live in a challenging time economically. Right after we finish here today, I'm going down to Costco to get the cheapest gas I can because even there it's ridiculously expensive. I was informed by my wife we've doubled our monthly budget already for gas. It's crazy, right? It doesn't take a long time to talk to a young person to realize that employers are not hiring at the same rates they've hired before.

We have \$18 trillion of consumer debt in our country. \$18 trillion. It's an economically challenging time. That's door A. Door B, political divisiveness.

Oh, boy. Do we live in a politically divided and divisive time or what? Just within the last few years, a poll was done that asked people if that the. Whatever party you're a part of, do you think the other party is a clear and present danger to our country? Two thirds of Americans said yes.

Two thirds. You see that the rates of people who are willing to have their children marry

someone who votes on the other side, people who are young adults who are considering marriage partners, unwilling to consider. It's a politically divided time. Economic hardship. Door A, political divisiveness.

Door b or door 3. Door C. Let's try not to mix those. Mental health issues. Mental health issues. Mental health issues abound.

Anxiety rates, depression rates. Just among teens. In the last decade, boys, their mental health. Sorry. Depression rates have skyrocketed 145%.

Sorry. 165%. Girls, 145%. Massive increases in depression in mental health issues. So which is it?

Door A, economic issues. Door B, political divisiveness. Door C, mental health issues. Going to argue that there's a through line through all of those. And it's that little device in our pockets, that rectangular square, that screen that we carry around everywhere with us.

That device is the gateway through our spending. That device is the gateway through which we are outraged and enraged by. By other people divided. That device is the issue that draws us in and pulls us into cycles of anxiety and depression. That's why we're launching this five week sermon series called Feedback Loop.

We engage with and consider the challenge of our times, one of the most pressing challenges of our time. The reality of the pervasive screen that's pulling us in and having a massive impact individually and culturally. Now, to start, I want to take us to Ephesians 5. Before I do so, I want to just lay out the challenge for us in this way. The challenge for us is to live wisely in an unwise world, to choose wisdom instead of foolishness, and to choose the light of Jesus Christ instead of the light of our screen.

So let's open up to Ephesians 5 and we'll start in verse one. Therefore, Paul says, be imitators of God as beloved children. Be imitators as beloved children. Paul has been transitioning in his book. Paul writes the book of Ephesians to the people at Ephesus.

And he's. He's writing to a people that are, well, frankly, very similar to us. Ephesus was a port town, a wealthy town. Tons of money came through Ephesus. It was an extremely pagan town.

Using today's terminology, you could call it a secular town. There's all sorts of forms of worship, all types of people that are drawn into this port city. It's a place of greed, a place of lust, a place of immorality, a place of temptation. It's a place very similar to the place that we live ourselves. And Paul spends the first half of this book urging the church at Ephesus to remember who they are.

You are children of God, he says. You are heirs of the gospel of grace. And he reminds them again and again, don't forget who you are in this confusing world. Don't lose sight of who you are. And then the second half of the book switches, where he takes that powerful truth that he's accumulated over those three chapters and he begins to apply it into their lives.

This, then, is how you live in this world. And so he's going to tell us that the reality for us in this world is that we have to know who we are in Jesus Christ to fight against the current of the world. We are salmon swimming upstreams. We are those who are fighting the cultural tide and have to push back against it. And so he begins by saying, therefore, as imitators of God, as beloved children, you are imitating God because you're his children.

You look like him, you reflect him in this world. And then he's going to place in front of us the challenge of the world. Starting in Verse six, He says this, let no one deceive you with empty words. For because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Therefore, do not become partners with them. For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what's pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

He's picking up language here that is very similar to the language that Jesus picks up from the Old Testament, from the prophets saying, who call Israel to be the light of the world? Jesus now says, you are the light of the world. If you are my follower, you are the light in a dark world. The world is dead, it needs life. The world is dark, it needs light.

You bring the light of Jesus Christ into your world. And now he tells us how to do that. Down to verse 15. He says this. Look carefully then how you walk.

Not as unwise, but as wise.

In other words, it takes wisdom to walk with Christ in this world. The natural pull of the world Paul assumes, Christianity assumes is foolishness. If we are not intentional, we will walk in foolishness, we will walk in darkness. So walk with wisdom, Paul says. Then he says this in verse 16, making the best use of the time.

Because the days are evil. That little final phrase can be shocking to us. The days are evil. Evil, yeah. The world, the days.

It drifts into darkness. It is evil. It drags us into darkness if we follow its patterns. And so Paul

says, make the best use of the time. In fact, literally in Greek it says, redeem the time.

You have to seize the time. You have to pay for the time. You have to atone for the time and drag it from the dark into the light.

Actually, just not long before Paul was, when Horace, the Roman philosopher, came up with that little phrase, you know, *carpe diem*, seize the day. This is the Christian version of it. Seize the day, not for personal gain, but for the glory of God. Grab hold of it. Allow days, hours to slip into days, days to slip into weeks, weeks to slip into months.

Seize it before it slips through your hands. Annie Dillard, the author, once said this. How we spend our days is how we spend our lives. It's true, isn't it? The Christian life is an obedience in the same direction, a faithfulness lived out day by day, walking the path of Christ to the of God in our lives.

We're to stack one faithful day on the other. And it's so easy not to, isn't it? I think back to my sophomore year in college. Lewis was the name of the dorm. Lewis 2.

I don't know if Bond just came out. Goldeneye. I don't know. I mean, I'm aging myself, I know, but the video game, or if that just like, just struck my world. But man, we were dragged into the Hole of GoldenEye.

Like there's just like perpetual ongoing tournaments on our floor. And when we weren't doing that, my roommate and I were in our room often playing a baseball game. Dragged it. And here's what Paul's saying. That is not neutral.

You're wasting your days. You're frittering them away. You're letting them be spent in selfishness and laziness and gluttony. Don't let the days take you away. It's not neutral.

You will be dragged into darkness.

There's an American theologian and pastor a couple hundred years ago by the name of Jonathan Edwards who wrote a list of resolutions. One of his resolutions was this. Resolved never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I can. Resolve never to lose a moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way that I can. That is Ephesians 5:16, redeeming the time for the glory of God.

And we live in an age in which the time is dragged from us. In 2007, a little device called the iPhone was created. A remarkable tool. Technology can be an amazing thing. It can be used for good.

It has been used for good. It will be used for good. But let's not pretend as though on its own, to its own devices, it will drag us into holiness. It drags us into patterns of self destructiveness. By 2010-2015, the lives, the social lives of American had shifted from face to face interactions to online.

And there have been massive consequences for us. Massive consequences for us.

That device intended to hold you to it as long as possible.

There's an engineer by the name of Aza Raskin, he's the founder, I mean the inventor of the Infinite Scroll. Do you know that when you first. I know this is hard to believe. Also aging myself. When you first got on Instagram, you could scroll through and they would say, no more posts.

Good luck on that one, guys. It will scroll until infinity. The Infinite Scroll. Now not just on Facebook and Instagram and TikTok, but also YouTube and Netflix. Anything it won't.

You want to give it more Time, it'll keep feeding you. Aza Raskin recently said this because he has had great dismay over the invention that he created. He said this behind every screen on your phone, there are generally like 1,000 engineers who have worked on this thing to try to make it maximally addicting. That's not the word of one person. This is what at least two lawsuits have found against Google and Meta, that they have intentionally structured that device to pull you in.

Found guilty twice this year. They are intentionally trying to make those their devices, social media, as addicting as possible. And here's the reality. We have to fight against it. We have to.

Peter tells us as he begins his epistle, we are exiles in this world. We always have been. It's not a new thing. Christians, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're an exile in this world. The world is Babylon, and we are exiles in it from a different kingdom with a different allegiance.

Paul talks about it this way over in Romans 12. He explains to us that we will all be formed. The question is, how will we be formed? He says this, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. You are going to be formed.

Paul says. You're not going to stay the same. Not a person here will be the same person a year from today than you were today. And that's a good thing. Praise God for that.

The question is, how will you be formed? Will you be conformed to the world? Will you allow yourself to let the world form you into its image? Or will you be transformed by Jesus Christ, the light of the world, into his image, to being an imitator of him in this world. You're called for

transformation.

We're called to be different, to stand out. And if we get pulled into this world, we are worthless. Jesus, right before he talks about us being the light of the world. City on the hill in the Sermon on the Mountains, he says, you are salt. But if the salt has lost its saltiness, it's good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Christians, if we have lost our saltiness, if we have lost the transformation of Jesus Christ in our life, what good are we to this world if we are being formed, conformed by this world and manipulated by it? What good are we? We are called to be light. We are called to be salt. I remember the first time I went to Las Vegas.

My sister was on a traveling softball team. I don't remember how old I was, maybe 12. Let's say we went there for A tournament. And we did all the Vegas things. We watched, like the pirate show out there.

We did the little, you know, the.

You know what I'm saying? I'm sorry. The thing where you go like this. Somebody roller coaster. Thank you.

For goodness sake.

I'm being conformed to the world. Sorry. The roller coaster thing. And then parents take us into a casino and my dad and mom are, are like, okay, let's just. Why don't you just observe?

It's our first time at casino. We're just like, whoa, what is this? Like, take a look. Tell me the first time you see a clock in this place. Tell me the first time you see a window in this place.

Look at, look at those in front of the slot machines and look at how often they move, how often they look at another person around them. Because this place is meant to draw you in, suck you in. Look at the grandness of Las Vegas. Where did the money come from?

Your phone is a Las Vegas casino. Every one of us carries it around. The same technology, the same engineering used to lure and to trap people in a casino is the same technology that is in our phone that's luring us and trapping us in it. It's not neutral, and it's having massive impact. The house always wins.

It's wild, isn't it? Anybody here ever spent a dollar on Google or Facebook or Instagram? We don't pay for it. Why are they free? And why are their founders billionaires?

Cause we're the product.

The house always wins.

And the ripple effects are massive. There's a pandemic of depression and anxiety. ADHD increasing across the board. Teens with addictive screen behaviors are two to three times more likely to suicidal thoughts and serious mental health challenges. Heavy screen usage is linked to higher depression and cognitive decline.

For seniors, One in three seniors experiences and says they experience loneliness. It's not just the screens in our pockets. It's also the screens in our home that we never turn off.

And it has its outcome. Envy, greed, shallow friendships, divisiveness, distorted truth, rage. You see, every time we're on Instagram and TikTok, we're not just scrolling. We're comparing. And comparison becomes envy.

And envy turns into greed. Every time we're on YouTube or Netflix, we're not just watching. We're numbing, becoming numb to the presence of God in our lives and others. Every time we pull up Amazon and Etsy, we're not just browsing, we're feeding our desire and comfort. And desire leads to greed and selfishness.

We Open up Fortnite or Minecraft or wordle. We're not just escaping. We're trying to win in fake life and avoid real life. Sometimes we pull up X or Reddit, Fox News or msnbc. We're not just staying informed.

We're being formed by outrage and fear on dating apps like Tinder. We're not just connecting, we're reducing people. We turn image bearers into options on DraftKings. We're not just risking, we're feeding on our greed. And on and on it goes.

No screen is neutral. Every swipe shapes us, every buzz controls us, every click forms us. And Paul responds. Look carefully how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time.

Sometimes it's easier to see if we pull ourselves out and we look out of our fishbowl into somebody else's fishbowl. So drop yourself into Ephesus around the time of Paul's writing. Okay, you've just landed in the port city of Ephesus. To the north of the city is the beautiful temple to the goddess Artemis, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world.

People would come from hundreds, even thousands of miles to visit the temple to the goddess Artemis. And oh, by the way, the temple prostitutes and the lust and the greed and the licentiousness that all occurred there. Flanking the city, a Roman colosseum or gladiatorial

matches for the entertainment of people killed human beings, murdered them.

Do you go? Do you just dip your toe in? No, stay away, you'd say, what are you doing?

As it is in Ephesus, may it so be in America. May we not be drawn into temptation.

Verse 17. Closing the passage in Ephesians, Paul says, and therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Our age is filled with foolishness, and the will of the Lord is clear. It's clear. This is not Paul's.

Not talking about some secret, hidden will of the Lord. No, this is the fruits of the Spirit. To live with justice and mercy and grace and compassion and humility and wisdom. We are ambassadors in this world. Paul says, a chapter later.

We're not just exiles. We are those who proclaim in this world the hope, the light, the saltiness of Jesus. In a world that has lost its taste. We bring the flavor, the savor of Jesus Christ to it. So how are we going to spend our time?

Are we going to be light or are we going to be pulled into the light of our screens? Are we going to be conformed to the world or Transformed by Jesus Christ have just one point of application, 10 options within that one point, and that's this. I want to invite us. This is a five week sermon series. So it's actually going to invite us to a one month digital fast.

Now before your heart like stops and you know, you think I'm asking us to take out hammers and break your phone or something, you know. No, no, no. I recognize we can't turn back time. I'm not asking us to be Luddites. In fact, we.

We know for a fact that there's a difference in the different realities of what we access on our phone. A text, an email, even visiting a website does not nearly have the same addictive behavior as jumping on a social media app, on a shopping app, on a gambling app, dropping into an X or dropping into TikTok or whatever it is and letting the. The infinite scroll take us down its river. And here's the reality. I don't want us.

The hope here is to walk in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be imitators of Christ in his grace. So I do not want to layer on legalism or judgmentalism in this, but I do want us to walk freely. So here's the invitation to step into a one month fast. So what I'm about to say is like the most ironic thing ever. All right, I'm gonna put a QR code up on the screen.

I know it still is 20, 26, guys. It's gonna take you to newlifetuscon.com digitalfast now, why would you do this? One is there's gonna be some tools on that site. Second, it's gonna offer you some options. Third, you just get to participate in a community.

You get to raise your hand and say, I'm swimming upstream. Anybody swimming upstream with me. It's something that hopefully you'll find encouragement through. We'll send a weekly email. I know, again, a little ironic weekly email of some resources for you to grow in this.

We need to be transformed and we can't do it passively. So I invite you into that. Let me take us to 10 options for us to consider on this digital fashion. You might have your own options. Don't feel bound by these.

If you haven't done anything, don't try to do 10 at once. That's probably too much. I've been trying to implement a few of these that I hadn't implemented before. Here's 10. This is actually taken from Battle Creek Church.

Great. I really appreciated some of their resources. And this is One of them. First, remove apps that pull you in for the next month. What would it look like to say to just be honest with yourself?

Man, that one takes more time than I really want it to. I'm just going to delete it. Just start with a month. Delete it for a month. Second, turn on grayscale mode.

I know, that's kind of an odd one. My sister's been doing that for years. I tried it for the first time this week. It's actually kind of cool. The turning in grayscale drops the addictiveness level of your phone.

If you don't know how to do any of these things, just Google them. I know. Ironic.

I'm sorry, guys. We're still fish in the fishbowl. Number three, move everything off your home screen. Just make it harder to get to put it in a folder somewhere. Number four, turn off non essential notifications.

Okay, this is the one that was hardest for me this week. I had turned off several notifications, but I left on, like, sports and, like, news notifications and man, the FOMO in me. Holy moly. I'm like, what's going on?

Who are the chiefs gonna draft? Who's juve gonna pick up in the portal? Like, itchy. I'm like, whoa, whoa, John, turn off notifications. Number five, charge your phone outside your bedroom.

Make your bedroom. Don't make it the last thing you look at at night and the first thing you look at in the morning. Six, set up daily phone free zones. We did this a few years ago at our home over dinner. That is just.

I don't have the capacity to have the phone at the dinner table and not respond to the buzz. So it needed to go away. Number seven, log out of distracting accounts. Meaning make it harder for yourself to get back in every single time you have to log in, right? Don't let it remember your password.

Oh, I have to log in. Do you really want to go in? How much do you want? Is it just a finger thing or do you want to actually go in? Number eight, turn off cellular data for certain apps only.

Let them work on WI Fi. Force yourself when you're out and about not to be on it. Number nine, I love this one. Use a real Bible or a real book.

I love the Bible app. Praise God for the people who who put out the Bible app for free. It's an amazing thing. I'm grateful for it. But here's the reality.

For me, at least my best times with the Lord has to be with a physical Bible. I don't have the capacity. I'm too weak. Number 10, set a text. Sabbath or rhythm.

Maybe a window. One day a week, 24 hour period where you're just gonna keep that puppy to the side. I get it. Everyone's different. This is not law.

I want you to hear this as freedom. Actually, we are called to be entranced by, drawn by the light of Christ and not the light of our screen. To be conformed to Jesus Christ and his image, not be conformed to the world. Be transformed as the people of God and to be salt and light in this world. So let us walk forward in freedom and in hope.

So we have the opportunity now, as we close the service, to turn to a time of communion together, to come to the Lord and to say, you are all I need. You are all I want. And whether you're watching online or you're here with us in person, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, if you have given your life to him, I invite you to the Lord's table. You can come up front. We have two tables here in the front.

We have two tables in the back with gluten free options in this back corner over here. Let us come to the Lord who is indeed our hope and our salvation.