

“Let Nothing Be Wasted”

“Gather the pieces that are left over. **Let nothing be wasted**” (John 6:12).¹

Our text this morning is a familiar one. “The Feeding of the 5,000” is, in fact, the only one of Jesus’ miracles that is recorded in each of the four Gospels. The event must have made quite an impression!

We’re actually going to study the miracle itself at another time. This morning, I’m going to focus on just four words that only John recorded. Each of the Gospel writers recorded Jesus’ instructions to the disciples to pick up the food that was left over, but only John recorded Jesus’ comment, “**Let nothing be wasted.**”

As I’ve pondered those four words, I’ve realized that they have much broader application than simply not to waste food, though that is certainly important. I’d like to think with you briefly about seven areas in which “Let Nothing Be Wasted” might be a word from God for us as we begin 2016. Each is worthy of much more attention than we can give in this moment, but perhaps you’ll be inspired to think further on your own

1. The Earth: Food & Water
2. The Earth: Electricity & Fuel
3. Resources: Time & Money
4. Resources: Health & Intellect
5. Experience: Mistakes & Triumphs
6. Experience: Sickness & Tragedy
7. Experience: God’s Faithfulness in Life and in Death

1. **The Earth: Food & Water.** Pope Francis has recently commented that wasting food is virtually the same thing “as stealing from the tables of those who are poor and hungry,” and I imagine that most of us would agree with that. But do you know one-third of all the food that is produced around the world is wasted? And do you know that in these United States, we waste more than that (40%)?²

Do you know that food waste is the single largest source of refuse in American landfills, and that, once buried in a landfill, discarded food decomposes anaerobically and creates methane, a greenhouse gas twenty-one times more potent than carbon dioxide? Some suggest that if you and I cut our food waste by half, it would have the same effect on global warming as taking half of our cars off the road. It seems to me that this ought to get our attention . . . but there’s more.

Do you know that 70% of all fresh water use in the world goes for agriculture? And do you know that 50% of all of that fresh water intended for agriculture is lost before it gets to the crops? In these United States, we lose more than that (60%).

Do you know that it takes 18 gallons of water to produce ONE apple and that it takes over 600 gallons of water to produce ONE hamburger? Do you know that it takes 1,600 gallons of water per ton of factory-farmed tomatoes and 17,000 gallons per ton of cauliflower to prepare that produce for market?³

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on January 10, 2016.

² www.takepart.com/article/2014/09/09/how-stop-food-waste

³ www.endfoodwastenow.org/index.php/issues/issues-water

All of this makes shopping at our local farmers' market make a lot more sense, and it helps to put Jesus' command about all that food on a Galilean hillside into a different context, too, doesn't it? But there's more.

2. **The Earth: Electricity & Fuel.** With respect to energy waste, do you know that power plants typically turn only about 30% of the energy they consume and produce into usable electricity? Do you know that the average automobile emits about three times its own weight in CO² every year? Do you know that flying uses more energy per mile traveled and emits much higher levels of CO² than does any other form of transportation?⁴

Have you ever seen the windows open in a house that had the heat turned up too high? Have you ever done that yourself? How about opening the windows to warm a house that was overcooled? And how many times have you changed the thermostat instead of adding or removing layers of clothing?

The average American consumes four times as much energy as the average person in the UK, and eight times as much energy as the average person in China.⁵ Lists of ways to save energy are not hard to come by. We could do it if we really wanted to. But there's more

3. **Resources: Time & Money.** For those who like to make New Year's resolutions, wasting waste less time and less money are frequently on those lists. Although we often note that time is a non-renewable resource, I wonder how seriously we really take that reality.

I suspect that a frighteningly high percentage of our television time is wasted time, as is a great deal of our Internet time and movie time and cell phone time. I'll attach a time study handout with the online version of this sermon so you can look more closely at what you do with your time . . . if you dare.

And there are nearly endless ways in which I suspect that we all waste money, whether we perceive ourselves to have much or little at our disposal (and did not even Rockefeller famously say that he needed "Just a little bit more"?). We buy bottled water when we could filter our own water. We buy famous brands when house brands would do just as well. We buy clothes, shoes, and jewelry that we don't need. We buy fancy coffee and prepared foods when less expensive things would do just as well.

We buy houses that are much too large and much too fancy. I know one fellow who built a magnificent 25,000 square foot house just for himself and his wife, and I know another who built a 40,000 square foot house just for himself and his wife. But houses don't have to be ginormous to be wasteful. I'll attach a budget worksheet with the online sermon, too.

4. **Resources: Health & Intellect.** I know I'm moving quickly, but let's continue our short survey. Most of us have lived long enough to realize what a treasure reasonable health and pain-free days really are. It has been famously said that "We spend our health to gain wealth and then we spend our wealth to regain our health" . . . but it is frequently the case that by the time we realize what a treasure health is, we've already missed the best of it.

Many studies have suggested that a very high percentage of the illnesses that plague us in the West are largely the result of what we have chosen to eat or drink or smoke or take into our bodies in some fashion, the exercise we have chosen not to do, and the behaviors, sexual and otherwise in which we have chosen to involve ourselves. The fact that we are largely responsible

⁴ http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/aboutcc/cause/wasting_energy_eff/

⁵ www.preachingtoday.com

for our own misery is painful news, but that responsibility also brings with it the possibility of change and improvement.

It seems to me that no matter how we understand the mind-body-spirit connection, it is still the case that you and I have absolutely no way to communicate with God except through the cells of our bodies. Our bodies are the only antennae we have with which to communicate with God, so we do well to keep those antennae tuned as best we can.

And those same TV shows, movies, games, and Internet sites that waste our time also waste our minds . . . and a mind is a terrible thing to waste. We're told by researchers that all of the visual images, all of the smells, and all of the sounds that we have ever experienced, whether consciously or unconsciously, are indelibly etched in our brains and can be accessed by the appropriate stimulus . . . forever. That thought alone ought to be sufficient to reorder much of what we do with our minds . . . but there's more

5. **Experience: Mistakes & Triumphs.** I don't know about, you, but I much prefer success experiences to failure experiences. At the same time, I think I probably learn more from failure experiences than I often do from success experiences.

The problem is that we only begin to learn from our mistakes and failures once we've admitted to ourselves and to others that we've made them. Taking responsibility for one's choices and behaviors is frequently unpleasant, but it is not so unpleasant as continuing to live a life of self-deception. Here's one author's list of why it's so important not to waste our mistakes:

- A. Mistakes teach us to clarify what we really value and how we want to live.
- B. Mistakes teach us to accept ourselves and that we can be imperfect and still be loved.
- C. Mistakes teach us to accept our limits and to face our fears.
- D. Mistakes teach us about ourselves and about the value of taking responsibility for our lives.
- E. Mistakes teach us what works and what doesn't.
- F. Mistakes teach us about integrity. Big mistakes often begin with failing to listen, avoiding necessary conflict, over-commitment, and breaking promises.
- G. Mistakes teach us that we are more than our mistakes and that our past does not have to predict or to determine our future.
- H. Our courage in the face of our own mistakes can inspire others to live differently.⁶

Sometimes it's hard to experience all these benefits from success and failure without the assistance of a wise and faith-full counselor or therapist. It was so in my own life, and I commend that journey to you as well. *Everybody* can benefit from wise counsel.

6. **Experience: Sickness & Tragedy.** I have no great desire to be on the class list for "Suffering 101," and I'll bet you don't, either. At the same time, I've long been challenged by Swiss physician Paul Tournier, who routinely told his patients, "As your physician, I'm going to do everything I can to help you experience healing from this illness. But you need to know that **I am also going to be praying that you do not get well until you have learned what this illness has to teach you.**" Examples could be multiplied nearly without end, but let me offer just two: one about sickness and one about tragedy

You're probably aware that the actor, Michael J. Fox, was stricken with Parkinson's disease about a decade ago at the peak of his career. In his 2013 book, *Lucky Man*, Fox noted

⁶ www.huffingtonpost.com/lisabeth-saunders-medlock-phd/dont-fear-failure-9-powerful-lessons-we-can-learn-from-our-mistakes_b_6058380.html

that “Coping with the relentless assault and the accumulating damage has not been easy. Nobody would ever choose to have this visited upon them.” And yet Fox also calls these years “the best ten years of my life—not in spite of my illness, but *because* of it.” Here’s how he put it:

If you were to rush into this room right now and announce that you had struck a deal . . . in which the ten years since my diagnosis could be magically taken away, traded in for ten more years as the person I was before—I would, without a moment's hesitation, tell you to take a hike. . . . I would never want to go back to that life—a sheltered, narrow existence fueled by fear and made livable only by insulation, isolation, and self-indulgence.⁷

I have friends who also live with difficult illnesses who say similar things, and you probably do, too. In fact, some of us in this room may be in that situation right now.

With respect to tragedy, you may or may not know that Friday was the sixtieth anniversary of the martyrdom of missionaries Nate Saint, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, Jim Elliott, and Peter Fleming by the Auca Indians of Ecuador, made more famous by the movie, *The End of the Spear*.⁸ Nate Saint’s son, Steve, has struggled mightily with God over his father’s death.

In 1986, thirty years ago and thirty years after that fateful day, Steve was on a fact-finding mission in West Africa for Missionary Aviation Fellowship. Steve had long been fascinated by the fabled desert city of Timbuktu, so he decided to try to visit the city while in that part of the world. He managed to hitch a ride to Timbuktu on a UNICEF plane, but he got stranded there, and his life was in significant danger.

“Suddenly I had a powerful desire to talk to my father,” Steve wrote, “but my father, Nate Saint, was dead. He was one of five missionary men killed by Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador in 1956. Thirty years later, my own faith was still uncertain. I was still troubled by why my father had had to die. I found myself saying on that troubled Timbuktu afternoon, ‘God, I’m in trouble here. Please keep me safe and show me a way to get back. Please reveal yourself and your love to me the way you did to my father.’

“There was no bolt of lightning, but I suddenly remembered that someone had told me of a tiny Christian church in this hostile Islamic fortress. After much questioning and searching, I found myself talking with Nouh Af Infa Yatara, and I asked him how he became a follower of Jesus.”

“One day when I was a small boy,” Nouh answered, “a friend and I tried to steal some carrots from the garden in this missionary compound where we now stand. We were daring, but we were also afraid, because we had been told that the white men ate little children. But Mr. Marshall, the missionary, didn’t eat us. He gave us the carrots, and he also gave us some cards with Bible verses on them. He said that if we learned the verses, he’d give us ink pens. When I showed my pen at school, the teacher knew I had been talking to a white man, which was forbidden, and he beat me severely.

“My parents threw me out and forbade anyone else to take me in. I was not allowed in school. When my mother saw that I had become a Christian, she tried to poison me. The poison didn’t hurt me, although my brother is still paralyzed from some of it he got by mistake. My life is still dangerous, even now.”

Steve asked Nouh, “Where did your courage come from?”

⁷ Michael J. Fox, *Lucky Man* (Hyperion, 2013), pp. 5-6.

⁸ Every Tribe Entertainment, 2005.

“Mr. Marshall couldn’t take me in without putting me in great danger,” Noh answered. “So he gave me books about other Christians who had suffered for their faith. My favorite book was about five young men who risked their lives to take God’s good news to stone-age Indians in the jungles of South America. The book said these men let themselves be speared to death, even though they had guns and could have killed their attackers! As a matter of fact, one of those men had your last name.”

“I know,” Steve said quietly. “*That man was my father.*”⁹

7. **Experience: God’s Faithfulness in Life & in Death.** I’ve told you before about Pastor Martin Rinkart, who served in the walled town of Eilenburg, Germany during the horrors of the Thirty Years War of 1618-1648. Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for the surrounding area where the fugitives suffered terribly from epidemic and famine. At the beginning of 1637, the year of the Great Pestilence, there were four ministers in Eilenburg. But one abandoned his post for healthier areas and could not be persuaded to return. Pastor Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the other two.

As the only pastor left, Pastor Martin often conducted services for as many as 40 to 50 persons *a day*—some 4,480 in all. In May of that year, his own wife died. By the end of the year, the refugees had to be buried in trenches without services. Yet, even while living in a world dominated by death, Pastor Martin wrote the words to what is now a familiar hymn as an expression of undaunted faith in God:¹⁰

*Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom this world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way,
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.*

Three hundred and thirty years later—in 1967—a young woman named Libby attended a revival meeting with her boyfriend, Tom. During the final commitment evening, both of them committed their lives to full-time Christian service. Beginning in 1970 and for the next thirty years, Tom and Libby Little served in Afghanistan, providing vision care to the people of Kabul through decades of seemingly endless wars and conflict.

In August, 2010, shortly after conducting a two-week medical camp in a remote valley of northwestern Afghanistan, Tom and his medical team were ambushed and killed. When she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for her husband, Libby said, “Although Tom was physically killed in 2010, he had already surrendered his life to God’s good purposes way back in 1967.”

For four decades, Tom Little had submitted himself to his divine Master. Because Tom had surrendered his life to Jesus in his youth, Tom Little had been “dead” long before that attack in 2010, and so he was able to live in danger without fear.¹¹ The Apostle Paul put it this way: “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

⁹ www.truthorfiction.com

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Now_Thank_We_All_Our_God

¹¹ Adapted from Alec Hill, “The Most Troubling Parable,” *Christianity Today* (July/August 2014).

Finally, as you may remember, Tony Snow was the third White House Press Secretary under President George W. Bush. He was already battling colon cancer when he assumed that job, and that battle required him to relinquish his post about eighteen months later. In January, 2008, a few months before his death, Tony was asked what he was learning through his struggle with cancer. He answered, “We all want lives of simple, predictable ease, smooth as far as the eye can see, but *God likes to go off-road.*”¹²

My friends, **nothing in your life will ever be wasted if every bit of it is offered completely to God.** As Christian philosopher, Dallas Willard, put it, “*For those who love God, nothing irredeemable can ever happen to you.*”¹³

My friends, it is, it has always been, and it will always be God’s purpose that NOTHING be wasted in this universe. That’s true for your life, too. But you’d better wear your helmet.

¹² Tony Snow, “The Up Side,” *Guideposts* (January 2008), 20.

¹³ Philip Yancey, “Where Is God When It Hurts?” *Christianity Today* (June 2007), 56.

Time Study for the Week of _____

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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(Continued on Back)

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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How I Spend My Time	Amount of Time	Time is Okay	Needs More	Needs Less	What I'm Going to Do About This
Church Activities					
Creative Activities					
Eating					
Educational Pursuits					
Exercise					
Paid Employment					
Personal Spiritual Growth					
Quality Time with Children					
Quality Time with Friends					
Quality Time with Mate					
Recreation					
Service/Ministry					
Sleeping					
Solitude					
Time Wasted					
Unstructured Time					

Our Family Budget for the Year _____

MONTHLY INCOME		
	Gross Income from _____ :	
	Gross Income from _____ :	
	Other Gross Income:	
	Total:	
MONTHLY EXPENSES	Last Year's Actual	This Year's Projected
Allowances & Pocket Money		
Auto Fuel		
Auto Repairs & Maintenance		
Auto Replacement/Payment		
Business Expenses		
Charitable Contributions		
Child Support		
Clothing (Including cleaning)		
Day Care		
Education Expenses		
Enrichment (camps & retreats)		
Food (at home)		
Food (away from home)		
Gifts (including Christmas)		
Home Repairs & Maintenance		
Household Furnishings		
Household Supplies		
Installment Payments		
Insurance, Health		
Insurance, Life & Property		
Internet Fees		
Lawn Care		
Loan Repayments		
Medical & Dental Expenses		
Misc. Expenses		
Mortgage/Rent		
Personal Care (beauty & toilet)		
Recreation & Entertainment		
Savings & Investments		
Tax Preparation		
Taxes, City/County		
Taxes, Federal		
Taxes, FICA		
Taxes, Intangible		
Taxes, State		
Telephone (Including mobile)		
Tithe		
Utilities (gas, water, electric)		
Vacation		
Total:		
Surplus or Deficit:		