

Time Management, Part II

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Introduction.

- A. As most of you are aware, we're about two-thirds of the way through our three-week program of Saturday Bible studies, this time on challenges facing the family. As always, these studies have been excellent. I myself have gotten a lot out of them, and for those of you who haven't made it to one yet, let me encourage you to come to our final session this Saturday. I know that you too will find it brings you closer to God.
- B. In particular, I found my interest piqued after the first one, in which Josh discussed the challenges that the modern family faces in terms of time management. I thought Josh did a great job in exploring that topic, but simply because the Bible has so much to say about how we should use our time, the format of one hour-long study kept him from exploring everything. He told me, in fact, that he had to cut a lot to get the length down.
- C. I got a lot out of that discussion, and just sitting there listening to Josh, I was coming up with all kinds of passages I couldn't bring up in the interests of time. As a result, I decided it would be useful to address the topic in this sermon as well. For those of you who weren't at that particular Saturday study, though, don't worry. Because the Scriptural coverage of this topic is so extensive, you'll be able to follow me just fine.
- D. In fact, with or without reference to that study, this is a spiritual concept that we very much need to consider. Many Americans today live lives that they would describe as crazy, hectic, and out of control. They spend their lives rushing hither and yon, frantically crossing off item after item on an endless to-do list that seems to grow faster than they can work through it. Not only is that a miserable way to live, but it also tends to distract us from what's truly important. Let's re-center ourselves this morning, as we look at time management, Part II.

I. Priorities.

- A. From the word's perspective, the first thing that we need to do to manage our time better is to **LOOK AT OUR TIME USE**. This follows along with the principle expressed in Luke 6:43-44. Just as we can know a tree by its fruits, so we can know ourselves by looking at the fruit we bear, by seeing what we do with our time. Unless we have been enslaved or drafted or otherwise deprived of free will, the way we spend our time tells us what's important to us. Note: this isn't what we SAY is important to us. This is what actually IS important to us.
- B. Lots of folks object to that. They say, "All these other things are more important to me than what I spend my time doing." Friends, that's self-deception. If some other use of our time were truly more important to us, we'd do that instead of doing what we do now. We can even continue doing things we hate because of our priorities. For instance, if we continue in a job we despise so we can make the mortgage payment every month, that tells us that keeping a roof over our heads is important enough that we're willing to suffer to do it.
- C. Because of this, time management is really about priority management. It's about making sure that we spend our days doing what we should be doing. Logically, then, we have to ask just what we should be doing. In figuring that out, the best thing we can do is **FOLLOW GOD'S PRIORITIES**. If we try to work our priority list out on our own, we're just going to get mixed up and miserable. That's why Solomon advises what he does in Proverbs 3:5-6. This passage contains a powerful promise. If we acknowledge God in all our ways, that is, if we consider what God wants in every moment of our lives, then He'll make our paths straight. Listening to Him will give us the easiest road through our lives, and the only road to heaven.
- D. One of the things that people who defend their sin like to say is, "God doesn't want me to be unhappy." Actually, although that doesn't mean what they think it means, they're absolutely right. God doesn't want us to be unhappy. That's why He gave us this book full of instructions on how to live a wise and contented life. The problem comes when we think that doing something OTHER than what God tells us to do is what will bring us happiness. That's why people usually talk about how God wants them to be happy: they think they can be happy by doing something the Bible forbids. That's never true. It is impossible for sin to bring us lasting happiness. Only as we arrange our priorities with what God tells us is wise and righteous can we find joy.
- E. There are many things that Scripture lists as inspired priorities. I'm just going to hit four of the big ones this morning. The first, obviously, is **CHRIST**. We see just how big a priority this was to the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:7-9. Paul understood the lure of earthly achievement. In some ways, it's legitimate to describe Paul, in his previous life as Saul, as the Barack Obama of his time. At a very young age, he rose to the highest positions his nation had to offer. Everything that the Jews of 2000 years ago respected, Saul was. And when Paul weighed those things in the scale against the excellence of having Jesus, he saw they were worthless.
- F. That isn't any less true for us. If we take all the other things in our lives, the things we have, the things we want, the things we could be, and we put them up against Christ, they don't stand a chance. It's not that those other things can't be important and good in their own right. It's that Jesus is incomparably more important. Christ is the Way. He is the straight path that God has given us to walk that we were talking about earlier. If we keep our feet on that path, we cannot go wrong. If we leave it, we cannot go right.

- G. Even though all those things are true, Christ is not the only priority that Scripture mentions. It also identifies **WORK** as something that must be important in our lives. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. Even in an earthly sense, Christians must be workers rather than sit-arounds. Just like a lawn mower will gum up if it's left with gas in the tank and not used, we will gum up if we're idle. It's not good for us, either physically, mentally, or spiritually. Even if we're retired or otherwise unemployed, we need something to work toward and keep us busy. In addition to benefiting from the process of work itself, we also accomplish two important goals identified in this passage. First, it's important to our interactions with outsiders. If Christians were content to do nothing and live off of the government dole, most other Americans would hold us in contempt, and that contempt would transfer to the God we serve. Second, when we work, we provide for ourselves, so that we lack for nothing. Just like Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3, we work so we can eat. Notice, though, all the things that Paul DOESN'T identify as goals for work. He doesn't say that we work to heap up riches, or work to buy stuff to impress our neighbors, or work to accumulate earthly power. Those aren't goals that the Scripture endorses, and we need to be careful to avoid them, even as we prioritize work.
- H. Likewise, we need to prioritize **FAMILY**, especially if we're in the midst of raising children. We see a very telling point about this in Proverbs 29:15. As all of us know, children don't start out civilized, with the possible exception of Colin Andrews. Instead, children start out like little wild animals who desire nothing more than short-term wish fulfillment. If left to themselves, they will not improve. Instead, they will grow up to become large wild animals who follow whatever whim takes them. Our prisons are full of exactly that kind of people, and they bring shame to any mother who has a sense of shame left. If we want to avoid raising a wild animal, it takes time, effort, and training. That's not easy, but it is what God expects. Our children have to be a priority, and so do our other family relationships, like the ones with our parents and our spouses.
- I. Finally, the Scripture teaches that **REST** needs to be a priority too. This may come as a surprise to many of us, but the book of Ecclesiastes especially is filled with instructions to kick back and enjoy life. Look, for instance, at Ecclesiastes 2:24. Just as God designed us to work, so too He designed us to rest and enjoy the things that we have worked for. When we never have the chance to step away from the rush for an hour, or a day, or a week, that's not any closer to God's original intent than a life of all rest and no work is. This is not a culturally popular notion. American life is all about discipline and achievement and excess. Philosophically, we believe that an empty moment is a wasted moment. In reality, that's not true. Just like fields need to lie fallow in order to produce a better harvest next year, sometimes we need to do nothing so that we can be more productive when we are working. If we're wise, we'll follow God's priorities for rest and enjoyment too.

II. Priorities in Our Lives.

- A. All right, so Scripture gives us all these priorities. With a little bit of digging, we could come up with some more too. However, unless we listen to the Biblical injunctions about how to ORDER our priorities, this exercise has been worthless. In that light, we first need to remember to **PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST**. Perhaps the best Biblical take on this appears in Luke 10:38-42. In this story, I suspect that many of us are naturally much more in sympathy with Martha than Mary. We want her to get her lazy self in gear and help Martha get everything ready. What we need to see, though, is that it's OK if the food is getting cold if we're sitting at the feet of Jesus. We need to schedule our lives around Christ first. If we can fit other things in around Him, that's fine. If we can't fit those things in, we need to be willing to let them go. To our workaholic, overachieving friends in the world, I'm sure this would seem like a weird way to live. How can we just seek the kingdom first, shrug our shoulders, and say everything else will work out? The truth is, we can because it will. Nobody who has ever put God at the top has been forsaken or disappointed. If we have the faith and the trust in Him to live like that, we can be sure that our lives will be fine too.
- B. Once we've got that out of the way, once we've got all the other parts of our lives orbiting around the Son, we also need to **REMEMBER BALANCE**. We see a very elegant expression of this idea in Ecclesiastes 4:5-6. We get the first part of this right quick. Too much time spent resting will ruin us. The next part, though, tells us that just as too much resting is a bad thing, so is too little. To rephrase this in modern terms, better one hand full of money with time to enjoy it, than two hands full of money with a rush-rush lifestyle that stresses us out. Better one hand full of activities for our kids, with the chance for them to enjoy being kids, than two hands full of activities that run us and them ragged trying to keep up. For many of us, this Scriptural injunction means that we need to give some thought to downsizing our lives. Every moment of every day does not need to be filled with meaningful activity, if all that activity is robbing us of our joy. Maybe we need to get a smaller house, so that we can actually afford to spend some time IN the house. Maybe we need not to be working so hard on turning our children into a combination of Michael Jordan and Albert Einstein. Maybe we just need to draw a line in the sand somewhere behind us and say, "Enough. I'm not doing any more than that."
- C. Of course, cutting out leisure time isn't the only possible problem. I myself have no trouble at all getting so into whatever hymn I'm writing or computer game I'm playing that I neglect my wife, and that's a tendency I have to work on. Our particular problems may vary, but with our time, we need to look for balance.

Conclusion. However, no life can be balanced if that life excludes God. Come to Him today, and find what you lack.