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“What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

The Stewardship of Time

Central Truth: Using your time wisely is an act of Christian stewardship.

L228. Date: January 1994. **Text:** I Chronicles 29:15; Psalms 39:4-7; 90:12; Ephesians 5:14-16; Colossians 4:5, 6. **Topic:** Stewardship: Of Time.

Suppose a bank called and reported that someone had opened an account in your name. The balance at the moment was \$1,440. Under the rules of the account, you would have to spend the entire \$1,440 today. Any portion not spent would be lost. Tomorrow and each day thereafter for the rest of your life, \$1,440 would be deposited to your account. But the only portion you could use would be what was spent on the day of deposit. The rest would be lost. What would you do when you hung up the telephone?

God has deposited 1,440 minutes for you in the bank of time. Any of today's minutes that you do not spend in purposeful activity will be lost. What will you do with your time? That question is so important that we have given this study the title “The Stewardship of Time.” Do you sense a need for such a study? I do.

The Brevity of Time

“Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (I Chronicles 29:15).

We can say “Amen” to that text on the basis of our personal experience. How often have you said, “How time flies!” or, “Where did the time go”? We are servants to the passing of time.

All of our life span on earth is *“as a shadow”* according to our text. Even if a person lives to be one hundred years old, that is but a brief interval

in the scope of time. David wrote, “Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee” (Psalm 39:5). We mark time by seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries, and millennia. But the Bible says a full thousand years of our reckoning of time is “as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4).

We are creatures of time, but God is above and beyond time. His years never fail (Hebrews 1:12). He never grows old or weary, and there is no change in Him. Though He is unaffected by time, He holds us responsible for what we do with the time He allots us on the earth. We are stewards of time as well as of possessions, for time is a precious possession in itself.

Time is fleeting. “There is none abiding” (I Chronicles 29:15). From the moment of birth we are moving toward the day of death. We are as a wind that passes away and does not come again (Psalm 78:39). It has always seemed so to humans. The book of Job was probably the first book of the Bible to be written. It has this statement: “My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle” (Job 7:6). James says that our days are like a vapor of smoke, a mist on a spring morning, which appears momentarily and then vanishes permanently (James 4:14). Peter writes that our days are like the grass whose flowers bloom forth only to wilt away (I Peter 1:24).

The Value of Time

If we are to be good stewards of our time, we must be aware of its brevity. We must “redeem the time” by using every hour to its best possible purpose. Read Psalm 39:4-7 and note what it says about our stewardship of time.

First, time shows our frailty. The psalmist says we are frail, our lives are but a handbreath, our age is as nothing, and we are as temporary as a vapor. Job said we “ *dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crusted before the moth*” (Job 4:19). How frail we are before the onward movement of time! A part of our frailty is the sickness, sorrow, and suffering experienced here in our time-limited bodies. Thank God, there is a great inheritance awaiting beyond time.

Second, time is God's gift to us, for He “made my days” (verse 5). Time is a part of God's creative work. He separated light from darkness and made the sun and moon. He distinguished day from night and established the seasons. He determined the number of days we have upon the earth. He has entrusted time to us and holds us accountable for how we use it the same as He holds us accountable for the way we use our wealth. What are you doing

with your time? How much is given to things that please God and how much to please yourself? Be warned that one day you will account to Him for how you used the gift of time which He entrusted to you.

Third, time involves much more than earthly concerns. The goal of our generation seems to be to possess more and more material wealth. But when a person has more than he needs for living, he is no better off than any other person. He dies, and another takes control of what he has gained. Jesus gave a parable of a rich man who, when he had amassed a fortune, decided to retire and enjoy the fruit of his labor. The tragic thing was that he died that very night and left all his wealth to others. Jesus said that man was a fool because he thought only of time but not of eternity (Luke 12:16-21). Do not spend your time fretting about food, clothing, and shelter. Jesus said your heavenly Father knows you have need of all those things. He will supply them when you give first concern for the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:25-34).

Fourth, time shows our responsibility toward God (Psalm 39:7). God gave a span of time to you. You should give back to Him what time you have left. *“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth”* (Ecclesiastes 12:1). It would be wonderful if you had done that. But whatever your age today, turn your mind to your Maker. Resolve to be conscious of Him and of His gift of time to you each day you live from now on. Just as God gives you wealth and you are responsible for its use, so He has given you time and you are responsible for its use. Be a good steward of your valuable time.

Redeeming the Time

Here is a key statement on the stewardship of time: *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Psalm 90:12). It is expanded in the New Testament statement, *“Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:15, 16). To *“redeem”* the time means to make the best use of your time, to make the most of each opportunity, even in difficult times. That is true stewardship of time.

To redeem the time, you must consider its limits. You must recognize that there is a number (limit) to your days. That will enable you to exercise a discerning mind and to know how to use each day to its fullest extent. Remember James 4:14. It rebukes people who make their long-range plans without considering the uncertainty and brevity of life.

What needs to be done, do today. Do not delay until tomorrow.

Tomorrow may never come to your sight. The limits of time demand that you make the best use of your time each day. Do not live under self-made pressure which causes stress, but work joyfully and faithfully each day the Lord gives you.

Use your time wisely. A discerning mind will help you know the duties of each day. There are so many “good” things which call for our attention and effort that we may miss the “best” in our hectic schedules. Begin each day (or conclude the day before) with a list of things to be done. Set them in order of priority and make wise use of your time. Do not attempt to work faster; just work smarter.

Live out your time holily. What does it mean to “*walk circumspectly*” (Ephesians 5:15)? One who is circumspect examines carefully all the issues. To “*walk circumspectly*” is to follow a life-style that considers all things and chooses the right, a life-style that is approved by God and by good people. A circumspect life is holy. A Christian steward seeks to make all of life count for God.

Consider the example of Manasseh, king of Judah. For almost half a century he lived like a pagan. Late in life he repented and sought the Lord. During the last few years of his reign he tried to undo the evil he had brought upon the land, but it was too late. His son, who followed him to the throne, was more wicked than his father. God's prophet announced that judgment would come upon the nation because of Manasseh's sins, and even the revival under King Josiah would not prevent it. There was a man who was not a good steward of his time. He and his whole nation suffered the consequences.

Investing the Time

Colossians 4:5, 6 gives two suggestions on how you can “redeem the time.” It recommends seizing every opportunity and using your time for the best possible advantage. Here is how.

First, if you would invest your time wisely, use it for evangelism. “*Walk in wisdom toward them that are without*” (verse 5). Prudent behavior toward unbelievers is wise. Christian wisdom can rule our contacts with the unsaved and open the door for us to share the faith of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said our one great mission in life is to be witnesses of Him at home, in neighboring areas, among strangers and foreigners, and all over the world (Acts 1:8). Luke reports that those early Christians took the opportunity so seriously that they did not cease to teach and preach Jesus Christ, whether they were in a private home or a public place. You never

waste the time you spend speaking of Jesus. Much of the time speaking of other things is wasted.

Second, if you would invest your time wisely, use it for instruction.

“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). God takes note when His people speak of Him to their peers. It pleases Him so much that He plans something special for them on the day He gathers them to himself (Malachi 3:16). It is our privilege to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and build up one another in the faith.

I met a Baptist preacher in Russia whose father and mother were both deaf and mute. Yet, he had the ability to hear clearly and speak distinctly. He said, “I think God gave me hearing and speech that I might be His witness.” Wouldn't it be wonderful if each of us thought, “God has given me the power of speech that I might speak of Him”? He did!

Think of your time as a tangible thing. Picture it slowly slipping away, like water leaking from a bucket, when you are not using it wisely. God has claimed one day in seven for himself and called it “The Lord's Day.” But He holds you responsible for how you use all seven days. God is concerned about the time you spend at work, in worship, in recreation, on vacation, and all the rest of your hours. Invest your time wisely for the glory of God and the good of people around you.

Questions for discussion

1. What is time?
2. Why can lost time never be regained?
3. How can you be a good steward of your time on weekdays?
4. How can you be a good steward of your time on Sunday?
5. What does the Bible say about the brevity of our time?
6. In what sense is our time a gift from God?
7. How can you “redeem the time”?
8. In what way is a holy lifestyle a good stewardship of time?
9. How can you use your time for evangelism?
10. How can you invest your time better for the glory of God?