**Capitol Hill Baptist Church**

**Stewarding Health, Wealth, and Happiness**

**Week 9**

**Stewarding Our Time**

**PRAYER**

**I. Introduction**

Time is a precious thing, isn’t it? The ultimate non-renewable resource. If you misuse your money, you can always earn it back. If you mess up your health, you can often seek treatment. If you squander your skills, you can always go back to school. But time? Time rolls on. It stops for no one. As Benjamin Franklin said, “lost time is never found again.”

What that means for us in this class is that stewardship of time is something to take very seriously. To quote Moses in Psalm 90, “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10).

What will you have to show for your years when you “fly away?”

We live in a culture that has a pretty messed up sense of what time is worth. If I can oversimplify, I think there are three basic views as to what time is for. First is the hedonist: time is about fun. A college classmate of mine wrote a book called “The Four Hour Work Week.” Sounds pretty amazing, doesn’t it? The hedonist is about bending time to maximize pleasure. “He who dies with the most toys, wins[[1]](#footnote-1).”

Second: time is about accomplishment. Productivity is everything. As Henry Ford wrote, “Work is the salvation of the human race, morally, physically, socially.” There’s certainly a Christianized version of that: you evaluate your time by how much you do for God. But as we saw last week in our class on rest, that purpose statement doesn’t quite square with the Bible. Starting with the Bible’s teaching on rest. We weren’t created merely to do, merely to accomplish. We were created to show off how amazing God is by imaging him. Part of imaging God is working to order this world and to fill it. But the main value is not the work product. The main point is the statement our work makes about who God is. So, as we discussed last week, rest is ultimately about enjoying God and not merely about recharging to get more done for him. God is not dependent on you to accomplish his purposes.

Of course, for so many in this world, there’s a third purpose statement: time is simply about survival. No luxury to sit back and consider what the point is; it’s just about making it to the next day, and the next, and on and on if we can.

So that’s the water we swim in. And to those assumptions the Bible has some important words to speak to us about what our time is for, *who* our time is for, and how we can steward it well. Let me give you a quick preview of where we’re going. We’ll start with who: who owns your time? Then we’ll look at his goals for your time. We’ll examine the ground rules he’s given for goals, the obstacles we need to get over. And finally finish with some practical wisdom for living this way. Let’s start with the who.

**II. The Master**

 If you’ve been in this class the last few weeks, you know the answer. **Who owns your time?** [wait for answers] That’s right, God does. 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Or earlier in the same book, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Humankind has come a long way toward making all sorts of things—but we have yet to create even one second of time. Time is a gift. But as with all gifts God gives, it comes with responsibility. Hebrews 4:13, “no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

God owns time. God has entrusted you with *your* time. You will one day give account to him for how you’ve spent it.

Before we continue on, let me stop here and ask you a question. **What are some implications of that fact, that God owns your time?**

**III. The Mission**

God will one day call us to account for how we’ve spent his time. What standard will he use? For that we can go back to that passage from 1 Corinthians I quoted just now. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God.*” Use your time to show off the goodness and wonder of God. How do you do that? By imaging and enjoying him. Show off how good he is by acting like him—in your productivity, in your creativity, in your husbanding, mothering, friending, rescuing. And enjoy him. Be amazed at him. Which of course is often what follows from imaging him. Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Your job for your time is to drum up as much delight in the goodness of the creator as you possibly can. That purpose is what governs your work, your sleep, your leisure, your eating, your time at church…everything you might do with your time. *Discover and display the goodness and glory of God.*

**IV. The Ground Rules**

OK. Got that. But where do you start? Imagine that you’ve got 20, 40, even 60 years ahead of you or more. To show off the goodness and glory of God. An immense, blank canvas you can use to paint a portrait of Almighty God. The array of option is dazzling. Think of the gazillions of ways you could spend that time. How can you possibly know what’s best?

Take Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 5. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (v. 15-16). Make the *best* use of the time. I’d say that’s not dazzling but paralyzing. Make the *best* use of the time? How on earth can I know what is *absolutely* the *best*?

Well, thankfully, as it turns out God’s not actually given you a blank canvas. More like a paint by number. He’s given us all kinds of guidance for how we can make the best use of the time, and it’s important to listen to what he’s said. Every command in Scripture is a step forward in helping us know what is the *best* use of the time. Which leads us to the first ground rule in Scripture for stewarding our time:

*1. Obey the Master*

God’s given you various responsibilities in your life by virtue of your circumstances, and each of them come with commands to obey. Commands that are life-giving—because they shine light on the path God has asked you to walk. They tell you how you can make the best use of the time.

So if you’ve got kids, there’s a whole host of commands about your responsibilities to them. Same goes with your friendships, your church membership, your role if you have one as a boss or an employee, your responsibilities as a citizen and neighbor. Some of these roles – like citizen and church member—will always be true. Others—like your career or your marital status—may change. And with that change comes more or less clarity with how you’re to spend your time.

So your job is not to figure out from scratch the absolute best way to spend your time. Instead, as we talked about in week 2, your job is to figure out how to be faithful to God’s commands in each area of your life. You’re the foot soldier, not the general. Does it really make sense to be in church every Sunday instead of giving time to that high-profile career you’ve got? Not your job. Your job is to obey. Does it really make sense to spend all that time with your own kids instead of all the other kids starving for love in this world? Again—not your job to figure that one out. Love your kids. And most likely you’ll have some time left over to love on other kids as well. But your job is to obey.

Thant’s our first ground rule – the freeing nature of God’s commands show us how he wants us to spend our time.

Next:

*2. The Master is in Control*

The thing about time is, there’s never enough of it, right? Actually…wrong. There’s precisely the amount of time that God has determined is best. Precisely the amount of time for you to do exactly what he’s asked you to do, not a moment less. Remember, the idea that there are 24 hours in a day and not 25 or 26—that’s God’s idea from before sin entered the world, and it was part of what he called “very good.” Our limits can feel maddening, but that’s simply because we’ve not learned to trust the one who ordained those limits.

*3. Time is Short*

Now, that might lead to a serious misunderstanding. God’s got it all covered, right? So why rush? But that smacks into another big theme in Scripture. Time is short. Urgency is huge. Listen to Psalm 39, “O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breadth!” (v. 4-5). Thus Moses’ prayer, “teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). If you’re much older than me, your gut probably tells you exactly what Moses is saying. If you’re much younger, you may need to take it on faith. But know this is true: we can never act as if time is on our side. Time is slipping away.

So then, put this together. Urgent priority to use our time to show off the goodness and glory of God, trusting the wisdom and constraints of his wise commands and providence. Before we get to a review of some of the obstacles that lie in the way of doing that, **any questions?**

**V. Obstacles**

OK. Urgent priority to use our time to show off the goodness and glory of God, trusting the wisdom and constraints of his wise commands and providence. What gets in the way? Four obstacles. We’ll start with one that’s all through the Proverbs:

1. Laziness[[2]](#footnote-2)

If you’ve spent much time in the book of Proverbs, you’re quite familiar with what it calls “the sluggard.” Here’s what Tim Challies writes, “As you study the sluggard throughout Proverbs you will see that he is a man who refuses to begin new ventures, a man who will not finish what he has begun, a man who will not face reality and, though it all, a man who is restless, helpless, and useless. His life is chaotic because his soul is chaotic[[3]](#footnote-3).”

Do you know someone who is lazy? Are *you* lazy?

I want to pick up something about the sluggard in that quote I just read because I find it so insightful. “His life is chaotic because his soul is chaotic.” How many people have tried to conquer laziness through better scheduling, better to-doing, better organization, better prioritization, better motivation—only to discover that the root of that laziness is far deeper? Laziness is more than an issue of self-discipline. Laziness is an issue of faith. God has told us two important things about time that the sluggard does not believe: that time is short, and that the rewards for using our time well are worth whatever they cost.

Remember, as we saw last week, the Biblical concepts of faith and rest converge through Scripture. In that sense, our job is to fight laziness with rest. Quite a concept, I realize. Fighting laziness with rest. Not the sluggard’s fake rest of escape and inactivity. But the real rest of faith in God’s promises. As Paul Maxwell has written, “laziness is not the reclusive passivity it pretends to be. It is active obedience to *someone*, to something other than Jesus Christ.” Learn to rest in God. Laziness comes when we don’t believe that anything we do really matters; rest in God’s promise that for the righteous, their deeds will last into eternity (Rev. 14:13). Laziness comes when we get frustrated by setbacks and finally give up; rest in God’s promise that he will use even those setbacks for our good (Romans 8:28). Laziness comes when we do not believe that God is worth serving; rest in God’s promise that if we taste him, we will discover that he truly is good (Psalm 34:8). Blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

But laziness can be subtle. I don’t think of myself as a lazy person. In fact, probably to my shame, being a hard worker is core to my identity. So I vividly remember a conversation with my wife back when I worked in business when I complained about the number of messages in my inbox. Now, I’m sure what she said was sweet and kind and gentle. But what I heard her say was, “I think you have so many messages in your inbox because you’re lazy.” I was offended, but the next day when I went to work, I realized she was right. A message came up, it wasn’t immediately obvious what to do with it, and so I skipped to the next one. Rinse, repeat, and you’ve got 400 messages in your inbox.

Now, I’m not here to preach inbox management. But I will say that decision-making is hard. Just talk to a new mom about how much of her exhaustion comes from interrupted sleep and how much is actually from the zillion uncertain decisions she needs to make every day. Very often, being a good steward of time means doing the harder thing first, making the decision even though you don’t know which path is best, and then moving on. But—and this is key—doing all that in faith. In faith that God is in control even if you make the wrong decision.

This kind of laziness is called passivity. And passivity isn’t simply a personality thing; it’s a sin thing. Passivity goes all the way back to the fall as Adam—our first father—stood by while Eve ate the fruit. We would all do well to wake up to the level of passivity that still resides in our sin natures.

That’s all obstacle number 1, laziness. But there’s a second obstacle to good time stewardship:

2. Busyness

You might think that busyness is the opposite of laziness, but it’s not. At least, not often. We can be busy with the wrong things. You’ve heard the expression, “don’t work harder, work smarter?” Well, that summarizes a lot of Biblical wisdom. For the Christian, working smarter means being busy with the things that matter in God’s economy.

Listen to how Rebecca Jones describes this: “We cross a line when we start parading our exhaustion, our circus, and our juggles. Broadcasting overbooked days makes us look ‘busier than thou,’ rendering us uninterruptible and unapproachable. Even the famed Proverbs 31 woman, who burnt her candles at both ends, still found time for people. And of course, Christ himself—who was often clawed-at and pressed-in-upon, who had to board a boat to speak to those on shore—was eminently interruptible. For him, people *were* the project[[4]](#footnote-4).”

We live in a city full of busy people—often, as Jones puts it, “busier than thou”—and yet people who from the perspective of eternity are wasting much of their time. So how can we protect our stewardship from wrong-headed busyness?

* First, keep in mind my earlier comments about your job of faithfulness in each of your God-given responsibilities. No matter the apparent importance of any particular responsibility, don’t allow busyness to crowd out any of those God-given responsibilities.
* Second—and this advice is not particularly Christian but it’s still useful—remember the ever-present threat of the urgent crowding out the importance. Each Friday morning, I schedule time to pray through a list of important, non-urgent priorities in my life. Each week, I plan out my work time based on my important, non-urgent priorities—and then try to protect that time. As some are fond of saying, those are the “big rocks” in my schedule However you do it, work to keep your main priorities in view and protect them from busyness.
* Third—ask yourself, of all the priorities in front of you, which must be done by *you*? God’s given us each unique skills and talents, constraints and opportunities. Some priorities are unique to you because you’re the only one who can do them. Only you can parent your kids. Only you can neighbor your neighbors. Other priorities might be a particularly good fit because of unique skills that you have, or the lack of various constraints—or even the *presence* of various constraints. As a pastor, I often have to decide of the many ways in which I could use my time to serve you, which are the things that *I* should do? The rest I need to delegate or just say no.

And what fits you best will likely change over time. As Ecclesiastes 3 says, “[God] has made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecc. 3:11). When you’re a student, you might find that what you have in abundance is time. Then as a young adult, you have energy and enthusiasm. Further along, you have valuable skills but less time. And then as you grow older, wisdom and flexibility. I remember Helen Young, a long-time member of our church, who had great skill in hospitality. Then after a stroke robbed her of many of her physical abilities, she began a ministry of writing encouraging notes. At her funeral, Mark Dever asked for a show of hands for those who had ever received one of those notes from Helen and nearly every hand went up. What a wonderful example of seeing priorities evolve with time as in God’s good providence, gifts and constraints shift and change.

* Fourth and finally—we can so quickly feel that busyness equates to importance, equates to value. But that’s just not true! We can show off the goodness of God in rest, in leisure, in work, in ministry. Until you understand how you can glorify God in *all* those uses of time, you will struggle to figure out the bestway to spend *any* of that time.

**Any questions?**

3. People-Pleasing

A third, and sometimes tragic obstacle to wise stewardship of time is the tendency so many of us have toward people-pleasing. Again, not a particularly Christian idea—but an idea with some very Christian answers. Mahatma Gandhi, for example, said this: “A ‘no’ uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a ‘yes’ merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble.” Or, getting back to Scripture, Galatians 1:10, “Am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

If you’re honest, how many items on your schedule are there either because you desire someone’s approval or fear someone’s disapproval? Or, more broadly, how much of your schedule stems from idolatry rather than a desire to follow Jesus? There is only One whose opinion really matters, only One whose priorities should ultimately shape your own, only One to whom you will give an account on the Last Day. To whatever extent your schedule is evidence of your desire to serve two masters, remember: you can’t. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24). True of money, and true of any other would-be usurper for the throne of your life. Take a few minutes this afternoon to look through your last two weeks of commitments and circle any that are evidence of people-pleasing—or other idolatries—in your life.

4. Thorns and Thistles

Those first three obstacles have their roots in our sin, and the fourth does as well—though in a different way. Sometimes what attacks stewardship of time is the fallen-ness of our world. The thorns and thistles God has allowed to grow up as part of the curse we brought on this world through our sin. “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:20-21).

No amount of wisdom in scheduling, skill in prioritization, or excellence in time management will successfully counter that God-ordained futility, at least not in this life. Sometimes, stuff happens. As Steve said last week, God is the only one who gets his to-do list done every day.

So what do you do with that? Similar to our lesson last week about sleep, let those thorns and thistles remind you that God is God, you are not, and that is a very good thing. God is about something much larger and grander than fun or productivity or accomplishment. God is about showing off how amazing he is by rescuing this fallen world and releasing it to glorious freedom. Even the futility of Ecclesiastes fits beautifully into that grand narrative.

So the next time your car breaks down on the way to that important meeting, or your toddler shreds a box of Kleenex all over the floor, or your brilliantly-planned romantic evening is rained out—remember that you cannot perfectly steward your time because you are not God. You live in a world subjected to futility and in that weakness God will gain more glory than if you were able to accomplish all the good you hoped to do.

**VI. Conclusion**

So what do you do with all this? Let me close with three thoughts:

1. First and most important, I hope this class has stuck in your brain the idea that your time is not your own. Any more than your money is your own. All you have belongs to God, and he has a purpose for your stewardship. If you take nothing else away from this class but this idea, and if it rattles around in your brain all week, it will do a lot of good. What are *God’s* purposes for your time?
2. Be deliberate in how you invest God’s time. My wife takes a few hours every year to work through some questions from Carolyn Mahaney’s to examine each area of responsibility in her life. They’re on the back of the handout. You might take some time at the beginning of your week, or your day, to pray through the commitments ahead of you—both to ask that God would accomplish his purposes through them and to consider whether they *are* aligned to his purposes. You’ll see on the back of your handout some questions from Tim Challies to help you be deliberate in your commitments. No matter how you do it, being deliberate is important. Proverbs 27:23, “Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds, for riches do not last forever.” If that’s true for your sheep, how much more for your time!
3. Trust in the sovereign goodness of God. You can tie yourself up in knots asking “am I making the absolute *best* use of the time”—and miss the whole point. The point is your faith, not your productivity. Are you living your life to show off the goodness of God? Then well done. Mission accomplished. In his sovereign goodness, he is orchestrating your life to be exactly the portrait of his glory that he intends.

Let’s pray.

1. Malcom Forbes [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. These obstacles are adapted from *Do More Better* by Tim Challies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tim Challies, *Do More Better*, page 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2018/april/lord-save-me-from-my-side-hustle.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)