

LIFE MATTERS – What Matters Most – Time

Ecclesiastes 8:6, “For every matter there is a time.” Correct timing is everything in life, and God’s timing is always perfect. **“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under the sun”**

[**Ecclesiastes 3:1**]. There is a predetermined season for everything and a fixed time for every occurrence.

So mankind is locked into a pattern of behaviour which is determined by certain inflexible universal laws or principles. Man is slave to nature’s clock, to the seasons and the earth’s calendar. But in spite of this, through his free will, he is able to use his time in whatever fashion he so desires. *Life offers you two precious gifts; one is time, the other, the freedom of choice – the freedom to buy with your time what you will.*

Time, is a very precious commodity. You can choose to spend it wisely, squander it, or invest it for a better future. But whatever you do with your time, you can’t ever get it back! Time matters immensely! Wise use of time isn’t about “doing things right,” it’s more about “doing the right things.”

Albert Schweitzer said, *“You must give time to your fellow man. Even if it’s a little thing, do something for others – something for which you get no reward but the privilege of doing it.”* Often, the best thing you can do with your time is to give it away. Sir Winston Churchill said, *“We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.”* Time is the primary currency of life, the communicator of worth and value. Someone once said, *“The time we give to others is really the rent we pay for our room on this earth.”* One of the greatest gifts we can give others is the gift of time. Taking the time to listen, to serve or contribute, communicates the true value you place on other people.

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift – that’s why it’s called “the present.” How do you spend this *present* from God? How do you see time? In the Western world the clock reigns supreme. We have clocks on our buildings, clocks on our street signs, clocks in our pockets and briefcases, clocks on our wrists, and clocks in every room in the house. In fact, because it is such a predominant feature, archaeologists digging up the remnants of our civilisation would probably assume that we worshipped the clock.

As a result, most people tend to see time as a limited resource – hurrying from task to task. Most of you are always rushing to get something done. *Busyness* has become a status symbol – it’s one of your highest core values. If you are busy you must be important. On the other hand, if you’re not busy, you’re almost embarrassed to admit it. So you talk about being busy; you complain about being busy; and you lament all you could be doing if you weren’t so busy! But in spite of this, you keep being busy. Your sense of self worth is caught up in your *busyness* – this is how you validate it. Consequently, you constantly feel frustrated and anxious. You would like to stop time, slow it down, or sometimes even rush it forward. But you feel helpless. Time just keeps marching on; minute by minute.

While on holiday last year I realised that I was measuring each day by how much I was able to fill it. And my busy diary testified of this. So it suddenly dawned on me that I could measure each day by how much I had empty it. It was an enlightening exercise. Doing the complete reverse helped me get my priorities right. I was able to do *first things first*; focus on *what matters most*; and generally spend more time *doing the right things*. In fact, as I directed my mind away from thoughts of business, or *busyness*, creative solutions to many issues popped out of my spirit [surfaced from my inner man]. Then instead of seeing each day as *half empty*, because I was filling it, I began to see each day as *half full* because I was emptying it. It’s amazing what a different view can do!

Proverbs 23:7 says, *“For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* You cannot “think in your heart” when you are always busy – you must be still! Therefore, you cannot become the person you want to be, or do the things you want to do, unless you first change your heart. And you cannot change your heart without meditating on God’s word. Meditation on the Word of God requires a substantial investment of your time. But the rewards are plentiful. It will cause you *to make your way prosperous and you will have good success* (**Joshua 1:8**).

Whatever reasoning you may apply to the issue of time itself, the main issue is this: How you view or perceive time will help to create expectations that can either work for you or against you. Therefore, you need to ensure that those expectations are both “real” and “realistic.” *Real* means comprehensible and *realistic* means sensible or attainable.

So at this point I’m going to ask you to ask yourself some very tough questions about your expectations and thinking patterns. And if you are honest with the answers, they will provide you with enough information about yourself to significantly change the balance of your life – through better use of your time. Here are the seven questions:

Ask yourself....

1. *How much of the time do I feel frustrated?* Frustration is a function of expectations and it eats up your time. So, if you are frustrated, take a hard look at your expectations. Do you expect to be able to do more than you can reasonably do?

Do you expect more results than are realistic for the time and effort you are putting in? Is your main frustration with your work or is it in the home? Is there a particular part of work or home life that is especially frustrating? Are you frustrated because you do not get the rewards or recognition that you’re expecting? Note whatever is causing your frustration will not change until *you* change your personal expectations in that activity, role or function.

2. *Do I constantly expect too much or too little of myself?* Do you find yourself wondering if the way you see yourself and your situation is really “realistic” – or is it a limiting view, keeping you from achieving what you could achieve? You must learn to keep the balance between *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (**Philippians 4:13**), and *“I should not think of myself more highly than I ought”* (**Romans 12:3**). Yes, the key is applying the correct measure of faith. But the bottom line is always: “Am I using my time in the wisest possible way?”

3. *Do I always think “Life will be better when...” and never enjoy the moment?* Do you find yourself living for the weekends, holidays or when you can take a break? Are you always dreaming of when your life will be better than it is now? If so, you may want to seriously think about what it is that keeps you from completely immersing yourself in [and enjoying] the present moment. What is it in your thinking, or make-up, that causes you to wish away the richness and wonder of experiencing life *as it is*? You are robbing yourself of the abundant life Jesus has secured for you.

When Jesus lay on the cross, He had a thief on either side (**Luke 23:39–43**). The one represented the “past” – he was bogged down by his sins. The other represented the “future.” He asked Jesus to remember him when His kingdom comes. But Jesus answered, *“Today you will be with Me in paradise.”* Your paradise is here *today* – this very moment! Immerse yourself in it and enjoy it!

4. Do interruptions and the unexpected irritate me? Are you living with the expectation that life should run smoothly, and move along exactly the way you've planned it – with no surprises and no interruptions? If so, you're not living in the real world! Consider this very carefully: Your attitude toward the unexpected is probably at the root of much [if not all] of your frustration in life. God did not promise you a "storm free" life, but rather, a "destruction free" life (**Matthew 7:24–27**). He didn't say in His word that no weapon would be formed against you, but that no weapon formed would prosper.

5. Do I feel good about myself only in proportion to the number of things I have checked off my "to-do" list? Checking off *to-do's* is a great source of satisfaction and it's certainly an efficient way of getting things done. However, do those checks somehow validate you as a human being? And how do you react if suddenly you are unable to do what's on your list? Or what if you have checked off everything that's on your list, but your attitude or manner when doing it has upset your family or co-workers? What is your response?

Remember – *doing* is not all there is in life. And, *doing* is not the most important or meaningful way to validate your personal worth. Being performance centred is a sure way of inviting stress into your life. Your self-esteem should be grounded and founded in the truth that God sees you as valuable and precious. You are His child – the apple of His eye (**Deuteronomy 32:10**)! Furthermore, God's love and grace is not conditional upon you performing or doing tasks.

6. Am I confident enough in my own abilities to do a few important things well? Or am I always trying to do more than is realistically possible? Are you using a machine gun approach because you're not confident you can hit the target with a rifle? Lack of confidence clouds your judgement and squanders your time. Hence, you begin to mistake busyness for success! You may even create a false sense of security, by making a crisis out of everything in order to solve it. You think that if you're incredibly busy, you must be valuable. But that's not true. Most crisis-oriented people have an "urgency addiction" and this brings about a lack of clarity around "what matters most." And they end up complicating their lives beyond reason.

Other such behaviour comes from fear. But according to God's infallible word, "*You do not have a spirit or attitude of fear*" (**2 Timothy 1:7**). Fear fragments your focus and you are then unable to give your priorities the time they need to breed success. Generally, it's better to focus your time on a few things that you do well. And remain in your "confidence zone" as much as you can.

7. Do I honestly believe that it is possible to create a satisfying family / work balance in my life? If you don't believe it's possible you will always be wasting your time and energies. Belief itself brings about direction and conviction. When Jesus said, "*Only believe,*" He was implying that this is where you should start. But if you are worn out by "pipe dream" promises or burned out by bad experiences – and now you don't truly believe it's possible to balance work and family – it's going to be an uphill struggle. Or maybe you do believe it's possible but not for you.

The good news is it is not an impossible dream; it is a *real* and attainable expectation.

It's a process of doing and also *becoming*! You will have to work *for* it, and work *at* it; but it's something you can trust in, and believe in. Why? It is because God's want's your life to be balanced and functional – not imbalanced and dysfunctional. This is especially so when it comes to family and work.