

## ~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

Nearly everyone agrees that "time flies!"

"There just aren't enough hours in the day!" is a common complaint.

Yet each of us receives an equal "income" of this valuable commodity--168 hours a week--whether we are a person of prominence or a little-known John Doe.

The difference is how we spend it. None of us would throw away bits of money--dimes, nickels, pennies--but all of us are guilty of throwing away five minutes here or a quarter of an hour there in our ordinary day.

Or we are prodigal in the exchange of our valuable time for "junk"--a day cluttered with meaningless activity done at a flurry-scurry pace. Like the man running up an escalator, we have "so many things to do"--items to buy, gadgets to fix, places to be. And we forget the vast difference between a busy day and a productive day.

Most of us would agree that time--or the lack of it--is not our problem. Rather, it is how we spend our time. The stewardship of our time needs some careful inventory and some clear-cut steps toward improvement.

When we turn to the Scriptures we find that they say much about why we should be time-conscious:

(1) Men need to be saved before it is too late: "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

(2) Whitened fields may be lost if not harvested in time: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?...Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

(3) The "time is short" and the end of the age is near: "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober..." (1 Peter 4:7).

(4) Our lives and ministries pass rapidly: "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding..." (1 Chronicles 29:15).

(5) We are going to be held accountable for our time spent on earth: "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

Those Scriptures tell us why we should be conscious of time. Scriptures directly teaching us how to be better stewards of our time are more difficult to find. But in the Gospel narratives of the busy life of Jesus we have a perfect example of the proper use of time. Christ's active ministry lasted only three and a half short years. Yet on the eve of His death He could say with confidence to His Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4).

Mark, in his brief Gospel giving us a picture of Christ the Servant, rushes the reader through the fast-moving, terribly crowded, yet extremely successful, ministry of Jesus, and concludes the account with an apt and restful description of Christ sitting down--mission completed--at the right hand of the Father.

From one of those action-packed sequences of our Lord's early ministry as Mark relates it (chapter 1), we can pick out six basic principles from Jesus' example that will help us utilize our time more efficiently.

### 1. Define Your Goals

Our Lord, according to Mark, "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel" (1:14)--literally, "evangelizing." Later when His disciples informed Him that "all men seek for Thee," He clearly stated the goal of His ministry as the deciding guideline for that day's work: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (1:37-38).

What are your goals--short-range and long? Einstein appropriately observed, "Perfection of means and confusion of goals characterize our age." We need to decide our goals now so that we shall not drift later!

## 2. Pursue Your Priorities

Notice that even with a whole city looking for Him, Jesus said, "Let us go into the next towns" (Mark 1:38). He knew how to say no to the urgent in order to accomplish the important. He deliberately slighted the good in order to get to the best. In short, He disciplined Himself to pursue His priority goals.

The one underlying factor in good time management more important than all others is self-discipline. Before you can manage your time you must first manage yourself. All of us are used to thinking that there are millions of things important to the reaching of our lifetime goals. The fact is that few of them are.

The dilemma of priorities is real. It is all too easy to let the urgent crowd out the important, and the important the imperative, until the important and the imperative are postponed or omitted altogether.

I am reminded of a motto I read in a home: "Permit neither thy business nor thy hobby to make of thee a stranger to thy children, for the precious gift a man giveth his family is his time."

## 3. Utilize Your Delays

Jesus waited thirty long years for His ministry to begin. On one occasion Jesus had to wait at a well while His disciples went into the city to buy lunch. Jesus utilized this time of waiting to fulfill God's will for His ministry (John 4:1-42).

Why should we squander the many bits and pieces of free time that punctuate every day? Waiting for his release from internment camp during World War II, Rev. John Olsen wrote a systematic theology and many other books--a legacy to the Vietnamese church that will never be forgotten. While in charge of the Dalat School for missionaries' children, Herbert and Lydia Jackson used the time when the children were taking siestas to train several tribal youths as Christian workers. They became leaders of their tribal church.

All of us begin each day with the same 1,440 minutes. Periodically throughout each day we need to ask ourselves, "What is the best use of my time right now?" Gradually that question will make us better stewards, not just of our days but even of our minutes.

## 4. Discern God's Timing

Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Jesus does not use *chronos*, a Greek word simply indicating a space of time, long or short, but *kairos*, a word implying a divinely given opportunity, a fateful and decisive point, with strong emphasis on the fact that it is ordained of God and filled with content.

Christ's meeting of the sons of Zebedee by the Sea of Galilee was no chance encounter. Neither was His confrontation with the demoniac in the synagogue, nor His visit to the home of Peter's mother-in-law. Each was an event brought into His life by God's perfect timing.

We, too, if we are discerning, can transform seeming spaces of time into fruitful seasons for harvest: the hour on the plane next to a spiritually needy person, the moments spent waiting to be called into an office for a scheduled appointment, the brief back-fence conversation with a neighbor.

## 5. Delegate Some Work

"And Jesus said unto them Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). In the midst of His ministry to the masses Christ was training men and delegating to them a share in His evangelistic outreach. Although He was the God-Man, He still saw the need to delegate work to others.

To make time we must either eliminate unessential activities, speed them up or delegate some to others. Analyze your day and write down a list of things others could have done for you. See how you can multiply your efforts and your effectiveness through others.

## 6. Take Time Out

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, [Jesus] went out, and departed into a solitary place,

**Time--A Most Valuable Resource By Thomas H. Stebbins**

and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). Later on Christ was to say to His disciples, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while" (6:31).

I have seen empty, discouraged Christians regain their radiance and glow after a good time for meditation, prayer and the hearing of God's Word. In addition to time for quiet meditation and prayer, we need time for rest and recreation. A mature person refuses to become a slave to his work. At appropriate times he can detach himself and with a sense of liberation give himself to the recreation of his body, mind and soul.

Even the Puritan pastor Benjamin Colman, back in 1707 when leisure was considered a luxury, wrote, "We daily need some respite and diversion, without which we dull our powers. It spoils the bow to always keep it bent."

Time is the most valuable thing any of us have. Therefore it behooves us to follow Christ's example in the stewardship of our time.