

“I Wish I Had the Time to...”

By Paul R. Blake

“I wish I had the time to...” How often have we found ourselves saying that? “There just aren’t enough hours in a day to do everything that needs doing.” Sound familiar? Is it really a matter of not having enough time?

God has given us enough time to do what is necessary as well as to enjoy a reasonable amount of leisure, but we have become poor stewards of what God has given for our use. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 6:12: “For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?” “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage” (5:18). “Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” (9:9-10). God has given us plenty of time to do what is important, plus some additional time to enjoy the fruit of our labors. If we find ourselves unable to do what is important, God is not at fault; the length of the day is not to be blamed, and the sweep of the clock hands is not accountable.

The Psalmist seemed very concerned about the shortness of the time we spend in this world when he wrote in Psalm 90:10, 12: “The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away... So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.” At the same time, he acknowledges it becomes our responsibility to use our time wisely. His answer is to make good choices in the use of our limited resource called time.

In Proverbs 4:7-13, Solomon wrote: “Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you. Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many. I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble. Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life.”

The lesson is clear: one who approaches life with wisdom lives a longer life. Not that wisdom confers longevity to the body (although wisdom can help one avoid self-destructive behaviors that shorten life), but rather, one’s time will be so well used that life becomes full of goodness and rich with spiritual blessings. At the end of life, he can reflect back on his days without regret and resentment over short days and missed opportunities. One can say with the apostle Paul, “I have finished the course,” and patiently await the world that is to come.

Paul told the Ephesians in 5:14-17: “Therefore He says: Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” By encouraging them to walk according to a rule or pattern, he was trying to get them to see that this was way to make best use of their time. In every case, the Bible writers emphasized that God’s will provides for us wisdom in the use of our limited time.

However, the Adversary has sent some seemingly benign thieves to rob us of our time. If the Devil can take enough time away from us to where we feel pressed, then he can easily move us to the next step: that of squeezing God’s will out of our schedules. Is it possible to identify these harmless appearing moment stealers? Yes, if we are honest with ourselves.

The Ponderous Priority Pulverizer. This monster makes mountains out of molehills, time-wise. He is endlessly fascinated with details and minutiae. Rather than considering the day's tasks in order of importance, he lists them in order of ease. His focus is on seeing to all of the little things naively hoping that the big things will take care of themselves.

The Pernicious Procrastinator. This time thief believes that if he can save duties until the very last second, then he will have much more time to do other things before the deadline arrives. Unfortunately, he pushes every duty forward to the deadline and spends in leisure the time necessary to properly complete the task. The most work he does in a day is to find more ways to extend his deadlines.

The Powerless Pushover. This time thief convinces people that they are nothing more than Ping-Pong balls being paddled back and forth by opposing forces. They have no strength or control over their lives, and so just wander throughout their days in a gloomy cloud of helplessness. The most strenuous thing they do in a day is to remind themselves that they will never get out of the hole they are in.

The Spasmodic Spastic. This little time critter hates consistency. The Spas-spas does what he wants, when he wants. Erratic is the kindest way to describe his loathing for being dependable and relied upon. He doesn't mind starting on his duties, but he won't stay with them on a regular basis.

The Waffling Wimp. This unobtrusive, shy creature teaches people that they do not have the skills needed to do their part. They have to be propped up and begged to get involved. Afraid to begin, they never finish. At the end of the day, they are exhausted from the onerous task of rationalizing away their fear of work.

The Flipping Flit. Never lighting in one place for any length of time, this time thief keeps moving from one task to another by quickly diverting his attention the moment he appears to be making headway. Worn out from rushing from one task to another, he believes himself to be tired from all of the work and wonders when he will get it all done.

The Opulent Overextender. This monster gets one to tie himself up in so many different things that he can do justice to none of them. As a result, the work doesn't get done and the person nearly kills himself not doing it. Give this person 25 hour day and an eight day week, and he would find something else to get involved in to keep him from getting anything done.

Entertainment Anaconda, Junket Junkie, & Television Tangler. These triplets were born to the unrighteous parents named Harold Hedonism and Adele Addiction. They keep one "living for the weekend." When attacked by these monsters, "girls jus' wanna have fun," and boys want to "parteeeeeeee." If the ways and means are not available to go out, then one genuflects to the thousand dollar Buddha-like idol in every American home: the television set. The amount of hours and lost productive time wasted on TV is an incalculable loss to both the individual and society.

How was it possible for our forebears to have worked 12 hour, six day weeks and still have time to worship God, study the Bible, relax on the front porch, write letters, talk to neighbors, read books, play checkers, take walks, and play with their children? The bottom line... they were wiser than we are! In spite of all of our knowledge, technology, and time saving devices, we have not learned how to "redeem the time." Even worse than the squandering of our money and our rising debt is the squandered time and over-extension of our obligations on it. May God grant us the time to repent.