

“Time Management”

Today we begin a series (in which), over the next three weeks, we'll be dealing with topics that, for every one of us, hit close to home. It's a series that touches on (not only) some of the most personal aspects of our lives, but also some of the most spiritual elements in our walk with God.

Over the next three Sundays, we're going to be dealing with four things. See if you can figure out what they are. The first is a commodity that is identical for all of us. No matter who we are, where we live, what we're doing, there's not one of us who has access to any more or less than anyone else. For all of us, it's all the same.

The second is a commodity that (for all of us) is different. Some of us have more. Some of us have less. But, for all of us (for each of us), it's one that carries the same level of responsibility, regardless of the amount we have.

The third is something that every one of us has, not in amounts more or less than anyone else, just different. What I have is not what you have. What you have is not the same as me. (It's not a matter of more or less.) But what I have and what you have is what you and I have been called to use. And how we use (what we have) and what we (do with) what we have is what counts.

The fourth is something we all have access to in equal amounts. It's a gift every one of us has been given. No matter who we are, no one is better off than the next. It's all the same. (But here's the deal.) How we use this gift and what we do with this gift, the part it plays in our lives, will determine what we do with and how we use (whether or not we are faithful) with the first three.

So, there it is. That's where we're going? Did you figure it out? In these next three weeks, we're dealing with four things. The first, something we all have in equal amounts? No matter who we are, it's all the same? It's our time. Every one of us, we all have the same amount.

The second, something we all have in differing amounts? What each of us has is not the same as the next? But all with the same level of responsibility? It's our money. Differing amounts, but we're all responsible.

The third, something we all have, but what we each have is different from what others have? But whatever we have is what we are called to use? It's our abilities. They're not the same. But we need to use them.

And the fourth, the gift we've all been given that determines how faithful (or not) we will be when it comes to the first three? It's the gift of prayer. It's the gift of prayer.

No matter who we are, where we're at in our walk with God, if prayer is not covering everything we do, the decisions we make when it comes to how we use our time, our money, and our abilities, we'll make decisions and we'll end up using what we have, but it will not end up in the same place. It'll not be the same. Prayer makes the difference. Prayer opens us up to what God wants to bring out.

That's where we're going in these next weeks. We'll be spending one week on each of the three topics – our time, our money, and our abilities. And we'll be surrounding each week, each of the topics, with prayer. More specifically, with a challenge to each of us, to take a good and a hard look at our lives, how we're using what we've been given, and to spend time praying, asking God what he would want us to do in relation to those three.

Now, (in case you're wondering), this isn't some random series we've chosen. It's not happening because we (ran out of things) to talk about and just thought it might be good. No, we're doing it in preparation (just like with the series) for four things.

One, in preparation for our annual Commitment Sundays, this year on November 16 & 23, when we'll each be given opportunity to make worship and financial commitments for the coming year. There'll be a mailing going out later this week that gives more of the details.

Two, in preparation for making commitments of our abilities as we consider how we might serve Christ and his Church, both here (at the base) and out there in the world. There'll be opportunity beginning next week to consider how it is you will serve.

Three, in preparation (as a congregation) for “40 Days of Prayer.” It’s a time, beginning on Sunday, November 23, and continuing until January 1 (of the new year), when we’ll be seeking God’s will not only for our own lives individually, but also for our shared life together. You’ll be hearing more about that throughout this month.

And four, we’re doing this series on stewardship (and here’s the bottom line), because how we live as stewards of the things God has given to us ends up having a direct connection with and (impact upon) how faithful we are as disciples of Jesus...and that’s the goal.

Let’s get into it. Today it’s all about time: “Time Management.” I said there are four things in these next weeks; a series designed to prepare us for four opportunities coming up. Today I want to give you four basic biblical principles for the proper use of our time. This is nothing new. It’s all very simple. But it can make a tremendous difference, if you take it (and apply it) in your faith-walk with Christ.

Four things; here’s the first. Number one, “If you don’t manage your time, someone or (something else) will.” “If you don’t manage your time, someone or (something else) will.”

Let’s do a little exercise. I want you to do this with the person next to you. For each of us, it’s all the same. It’s no different. Turn to the person next to you and tell them that they have 24 hours each day. Go ahead (tell them), “You have 24 hours each day.”

Alright, now turn to them again and tell that they have seven days in each week. “You have seven days each week.” Go ahead.

Now, one more time, this time, tell them they have 52 weeks each year. “You have 52 weeks each year.”

Alright, we all get it. 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, 52 weeks in a year. It’s the same for all of us. The trouble is (with time), it’s one of those things, you can’t save it; you can only spend it. You can’t put it in the bank (and store it up) for when you need it. All you can do is to spend (what you have) when you have it.

By the time this day is over, that’s what will have happened. We will all have spent the 1,440 minutes we were given. Every one of us, no exceptions, the 86,400 seconds we had (for this day) will all be gone.

We’re all good at spending time. When this day is over, we will all have spent everything we had. The stewardship question is, “What did you do with time you had? What was accomplished in the time you spent?”

Now, I don’t want to get into the detail of how it is each of us spends our time. What you do with yours is probably a lot different than what I do with mine. Our lives are different. We go in different directions.

Some of us have kids; others don’t. Some of us are in school, others are working. Fulltime jobs, retired, it’s not the same. (It’s different.) So it naturally follows that the way we spend our time will be different, as well.

What’s not different (and what is the same) is the fact that we all have the same amount. When it’s over, it’s over. And what you did (or didn’t do) with the time you had is over as well.

I don’t want to get into the detail of what you are doing with your time. But I’d challenge you in this (next week) to take a good look at how you spend it and, in so doing, ask yourself if that’s what God would have you doing?

Now, I know that’s not easy, because so much of what we do is because of the situation we’re in. (That was our first lesson.) “There’s a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

I don’t want you to hear that it’s wrong (as a Mom or a Dad) to spend time with your kids. (It’s not.) Maybe what God wants you to hear is that you need to spend more? And it’s certainly not wrong (as a breadwinner in your family) to get up and go to work. But is it dominating your life? Is it getting in the way of things that are more important?

That’s the question. You be the judge. It’s not my call. You decide whether it fits, (what God wants) and what matters, or not. But don’t fool yourself and just blow it off as if it doesn’t matter. It does matter. Because once it’s gone, it’s gone. If you don’t manage your time, someone or (something else) will.”

Number two: “You cannot turn back the clock on time.” “You cannot turn back the clock on time.”

There are two things about time that are troubling. The one is that you can’t save it; you can only spend it. Once it’s gone, it’s gone. The other is that we have this idea (when it comes to time) that there will always be more. There’ll always be more.

“So what if I didn’t get to it today. There’s always tomorrow. And what’s the big deal if it doesn’t happen tomorrow? There’s always another tomorrow.” And on and on it goes. And off and off (things that are important) get put.

There's a word for that. Do you know what they call it? It's called "procrastination." Do you know what I call it? I call it closing our eyes, being foolish, pretending that something matters, (that it's important in our lives), that we really want it, when it's not and we really don't.

If it matters, it matters, and we do it. If it doesn't matter, we don't do it. But to put it off when it matters, to keep on kicking it down the road, when we know it's important? That's foolish. But it happens all the time.

Now, I'm not standing up here today telling you anything you don't already know. Nor am I saying that this is your problem and not mine. (I'm as guilty as the rest.) What I am doing (and what I hope you hear) is that you cannot turn back the clock on time.

More than 28 years in the ministry, I've heard more than my share of confessions, people looking back on their time and wishing they could have it back. Things they did, they wish they hadn't. Things they didn't do, they wish they had. It works both ways.

In both cases, it's this idea that when it comes to the stewardship of our time, we (approach it) like it's an endless commodity; like there will always be more. So we put off using our time in the ways we should because we have this false notion, this misguided idea, this unrealistic concept that we can do everything we want to do and still have time for the rest.

The reality is that it's simply not true. It's one of the devil's greatest deceptions, that there's always more time. It's not true. There's only so much. (Jesus talked about it all the time.) You only have what you have. And when it's gone, it's gone. Daylight Saving time or not, you cannot turn back the clock on time.

Number three: "Every time we say 'Yes,' we're also saying 'No.'" "Every time we say 'Yes,' we're also saying 'No.'"

I made the mistake last week of filling my schedule with too many things. It was one of those weeks when there was just a lot going on. There were meetings. There were appointments. People called and wanted to talk, stopped in, and it was all good. It was all good.

What happened was that every time someone asked for some of my time, I said "Yes." I said, "Sure, no problem. Let's meet. Let's get together, make time." The trouble was that (as a result) all of the things that needed to happen didn't happen. They were put off. And so in making time for this, I ended up with not enough time for that.

I won't ask to raise your hands if that's ever happened to you. My guess is, there wouldn't be enough hands in this room to raise. It happens. What needs to happen so that it doesn't happen is that we need to give ourselves permission to say "No." It's OK to say "No." Turn to the person next to you and say "No." Go ahead, say it.

I'll bet that felt good! For some of you, that's all you needed today; you can go home. (On your way out, don't forget your offering.) Never mind. That's next week. Forget I said it!

It's true. Every time we say "yes" to something (at the same time), we're saying "no" to something else. You can't have it both ways.

Again, I don't want to get into the detail. You need to figure it out. But I could give you a long list of things we end up saying "yes" to that (finally) end up getting in the way of things that are more important.

We commit ourselves to Sunday morning sports, think we're doing our kids a favor, so we say "yes." Meanwhile, we've said "no" to coming to church. We go the gym every day, make time for that, but run out of time to read our Bibles or to pray. We work long hours and never tuck our kids into bed. We plan for retirement, look forward to the time when we'll have more. Meanwhile, we're not focused on the time we have.

Now, that's a very short list, and (again) don't get the wrong idea. I'm as susceptible as the next. (It's not just you.) But if it hits and if it hurts and starts feeling personal, then maybe there's a reason, and maybe it's time to take a step back and reassess how you spend your time?

How about this? Here's an assignment. When you go home today, make a list of things that really matter in your life. Not what you're already doing, but if you were doing nothing, how would you choose to fill your time. And start with the things that count. Your faith. Your family. Your relationship with God. And go from there.

Start by saying "yes" to those things, to the things that are most important, before filling up all of your time with things that aren't. You can't have it both ways. We either schedule God in, or we schedule God out. "Every time we say 'Yes,' we're also saying 'No.'"

Number four (and this is where we'll close), "If you don't take time to listen, you'll never be able to hear." "If you don't take time to listen, you'll never be able to hear."

That's where we started this morning. We said we're going to be talking about three things, about our time, our money, and our abilities; and we're going to be challenging you (the fourth) to spend time praying (in these next weeks) about how it is you're doing, about what God would want you to do with the things you've been given.

Now, obviously, we've all developed habits and patterns and already committed ourselves (in a variety of ways) to using the time, the abilities and the money we have. I don't want you to ignore what you're already doing. Maybe what you're doing is exactly what God wants. I'm not saying it's not.

My challenge to you this morning (and throughout these next weeks), regardless of where you're at in those areas of your life, is to commit yourself to praying each day, asking God if there's anything he wants you to change.

In fact, if nothing else comes from today's message and all you hear is a challenge to pray each day, then it's all good. But don't make the mistake of thinking (even for a moment) that you can faithfully use your time, your abilities, and (even your money), without spending time in prayer. You can't. You won't. You need to make time.

Let's pray. Lord, God, we thank you for the gifts you've given, for the time we have in this life to live for you. We pray that you would help us to see where it is we need to change. To set priorities, to set boundaries, to give ourselves permission to say 'no' to the things that finally don't matter, so that we can always, in every case, be ready to say 'yes' to you. Guide us in these next weeks as we listen...in Jesus' name. Amen.