

Time

4th April 2004

Like sands in the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.

32 years since our first child was born. Seems like yesterday.

We got the news of his birth 9 days later. The adoption agency rang. Pick him up tomorrow. That 24 hours was the longest day of our lives. Stark contrast to the next day, when we had a baby in the house for the first time.

Time? Where did it go? Baby arrives: time evaporates.

One day we were watching TV, weeding the garden, reading novels. The next day our TV is on but no-one's watching, the garden is reverting to natural bushland, and the library is settling down to gather dust for the next decade.

In our experience, nothing changes our understanding of time more than having children. And it's true of grandchildren too. When there's a child in the house, there is just so much TO DO! And not enough time to do it all.

Where does the time go?

Ken's asked me to talk about TIME. And the best use of time. Paul, writing to the Colossian Christians says (in 4:5) "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time."

The KJV says "redeeming the time." Steve will agree that's actually a more literal translation of the Greek. I like "redeeming" in relation to time. *Making the most* is pretty good, but when you "redeem" something you usually have to pay a price to restore it. Like paying a ransom. Like buying someone out of slavery. Jesus on the Cross redeems us, buys our lives back from the Devil. If we are to be good stewards of our time, it may require the some effort, the payment of some price. Making the most of our time can be hard work.

A few facts about TIME.

An apparently secret fact: Each day you have as much time as anyone else.

Busy, organised, achieving, successful people have 24 hours just like the rest of us. They have 60 seconds in the minute, just like the rest of us. In fact, nobody has any more time than you do!

God gives you exactly the right amount of time to do whatever he wants you to do in it.

Impossible to believe that it could be otherwise. God asks us to do something, he gives us the resources. If God is driving our enterprise, he grants all the time necessary to accomplish his goals.

Time is not a commodity. You can't save it, buy it, spend it, divide it, give it away.

This is a great modern myth. We did not always believe in time in this way. Only a bit over a hundred years that the only clock in town was the one the town hall. And every one of these town hall clocks was different. Local time was the standard. Clocks were

not synchronised. Reminded by the silo clock in Geelong—never right. But then, “right” was locally defined.

The day was the standard measure. In the 20th century it became the hour. Today we measure in minutes and seconds. If a computer does not respond to our mouse click in seconds we reach for the warm boot buttons. Israelis make jokes about their impatience. What is the shortest interval of time in the world? Used to be the nanosecond. One-thousand millionth part of a second. According to Israelis this is not the shortest time interval any more. The shortest time interval in Israel now is the gap between when the light turns green and the guy behind you starts tooting his horn.

It's not TIME that has changed. It is how we use it. What we do with it.

You can slow it down, but at huge cost. Go faster and increase your mass.

Einstein showed us that as you approach the speed of light, two things happen. First your mass increases towards infinity. A phenomenon I find happens without the need to speed up too much, especially after one of Judy's roast dinners. And then also as you get heavier and heavier, time slows down towards zero.

So it is possible to slow time down, but you'd be so fat and heavy you couldn't do anything with it.

Of course, it's clear some people think you can slow time down by driving very fast. Unfortunately, exceeding the speed limit all the way from here to Warrnambool only slows time down by a nanosecond. Which isn't much of a saving. And the speeding fines are too much of a downside.

There is no such thing as time in heaven. It is a universal idea, restricted merely to the universe.

God is eternal. Actually NOT forever and ever, A-men. But beyond time altogether. God may be the God of History, but only in the human dimension. When Paul tells the Ephesian Christians in EPH 1:4 that Jesus Christ “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” I believe he is talking about a God who existed before time itself existed.

Einstein demonstrated that time is a variable, a mere dimension within our multi-dimensional universe. If God is God then He cannot be bound by time. God is outside of time. That's what eternity means.

Not easy for us, because we live in a time-bound world. We live in four dimensions, height, length, breadth and time. It's hard for us to imagine any other kind of reality. Yet, any modern student of quantum physics soon realises that this is just one kind of reality. Heaven will be different. Not just different from what we imagine: but different from what we CAN imagine.

OK. Very interesting, but does it help me to get things done? How can I stop running out of time? How can I be a good steward of this resource God has given me?

Actually, at this point, I ran out of time in sermon preparation, so I have no idea. Say the benediction. Let's go home.

No, no, I DO have some suggestions that I have found helpful.

A chemistry teacher put a bucket on the table in front of the class. Then she put a half a bucket of water beside it. Then what appeared to be nearly the same volume of sand. Then a small pile of gravel and finally five big rocks.

The assignment today is to put all these things into the bucket. How should we go about it?

Well, of course, this was a very smart class, and they knew right away, but they also liked their chemistry teacher enough to humour her, so they didn't answer.

She took the 5 big rocks and put them in the bucket. They appeared to fill the bucket right up.

Is the bucket full? She asked. *No.* And she took the gravel/sand/water and poured them in.

What is the secret of squeezing a lot into a small space? Answer: Put the big rocks in first.

If we want to squeeze a lot into the 24 hours a day that God gives us, we need to put our big rocks in first.

What are your big rocks?

This is a matter for serious prayer. Surely, we need to be doing the things God wants us to do. If we are sure that God will provide the time resources for the things he wants done, then let's be sure we are doing what God wants done. We need to ask *Am I in the centre of God's will for my life?*

The next thing is Balance. That's why the story has FIVE big rocks. That's why Ecclesiastes says there is a time for this, and a time for that. We need to live balanced lives, not lives filled with single obsessions. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. So does all play and no work. And so does only work and play.

Human beings need to do things that build our confidence in our competence. We need to learn. Set aside time for Life long learning.

Humans need to play too. We need physical exercise. Take time to stay fit.

Humans need to be socially connected. To have relationships. To talk to others. To do things with other people. To be around other humans. Put meetings in your diary and go to them.

Humans need to be useful to someone else. Get a job.

Humans need to rest. Get 8 hours sleep a night. Put your feet up every now and then. Get in the spa. Take a hot bath.

This won't happen, just by agreeing. If you want a full life, you need to identify your five big rocks and then put them in your bucket first. This takes some effort. You'll probably need a diary, or a calendar in the kitchen. Then you need to write in the times for your 5 big rocks. Just like a budget. A Time Budget.

Then you need to do things when you said you would. Regardless of the fact that you just realised your favourite TV show clashes with your plan to go for a brisk walk, or you noticed there was some unfinished Chocolate in the fridge, or you just remembered that you promised your spouse that you'd test the comfort rating of the sofa in the lounge room.

Many of us have tried to do this sort of thing over the years with varying degrees of success. Our experiences resonate with the advice of Gordon MacDonald writing in "Ordering Your Private World." he has a list of "Laws of unmanaged time."

One of them is, *Unmanaged time flows towards my weaknesses*. In other words, if we don't manage our time, we'll end up spending most of our time doing things we're not good at. Our work on discovering our Spiritual Gifts helps us to see the sort of things we are good at. These are the things we should give most of our time to. Play to our strengths.

This is my management principle too, by the way. When I allocate work to my staff, I give them stuff they are good at. They do well. They feel good about. And I try to employ people around me who are good at the things that I am not good at. So I can concentrate on the things I am best at.

Another Law of Unmanaged Time, according to MacDonald is *Unmanaged Time Surrenders to the demands of all emergencies*. This is another way to describe the tyranny of the urgent.

I love this example, MacDonald gives. P 107-108.

Managing our time resource is pretty much like managing other resources. Organising our use of time is not much different from organising our use of money.

1st, You need to know what you're trying to achieve. What does God want you to do with your time? What are your 5 big rocks?

2nd, you need some simple tools. A diary, or a calendar, or a schedule.

3rd, you need to accept the discipline.

This does not mean you have to be a clock-watcher. That is obsessive. Managing money does not mean knowing every moment exactly how much change is in your pocket or purse. Managing our time does not mean knowing what the time is at any moment. As matter of fact, I haven't worn a watch for over 10 years which might be distressing to Peter Beever who could have otherwise sold me a nice Seiko, but I don't need a watch. On the other hand, I carry a diary with me nearly all the time, and have for almost all of my adult life. If life seems to be getting a bit out of balance, I schedule things in. Judy and I like to go to the movies together, but it's easy to let this get pushed out by other things. Looks like it will start to go into the diary. Then it will happen.

Finally, Mary and Martha.

Read Lloyd Ogilvie, Commentary on Luke:

I've always regretted all the controversy over Mary and Martha, those two sisters who were Jesus' beloved friends. Bible students can't help taking sides on which one is more admirable, the spiritual type or the practical one. But they both have excellent qualities, and I thank God for Marthas and Marys, then and now. It seems to me that the story really deals with our goals in life. What has our attention most of the time? Martha is focused on her own goal. She is so busy being gracious and polite and a good hostess that she has no time to be with the Lord.

Martha's social proprieties kept her from focusing her attention on Jesus and His agenda for her life.

You and I can lose sight of who we are and whose we are very easily. The good things in life—family, job, community service, even good works—can begin to choke out God's life in us. As we make God and His presence in our lives our primary focus, we find He is the key to everything.

A-men.