

# CHURCH AND MY TIME

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*"Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically." (Romans 12:3-11)*

In this passage the Bible makes it clear that all Christians have things that they can use to serve God, and we can classify them as the four T's: time, talent, touch and treasure. We are called to work hard and enthusiastically, as by serving we ourselves will be served and blessed. We all have different gifts but we can give of our four T's.

Time: what is it, how do we use it, and how can we use it better in serving the church? Using our time well makes it possible for us to use our talents, treasure and touch to bless others. Conversely, if we do not use our time wisely we may not be able to use our gifts at all.

Time can be defined as 'a continued sequence of existence and events that occurs in an apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present, to the future.' It has also been defined as the fourth dimension, the other three being linear dimensions, i.e. length, width, breadth. Time is one of the seven fundamental physical quantities in SI units, and the basic unit of time is the second. This is defined as the time for 9,192,631,770 cycles of the radiation that corresponds to the transition between two electron spin energy levels of Caesium 133.

Some religions see time as cyclical, but Christianity sees time as linear: time starts with the creation of the universe by God, and ends when the Earth ends at the return of Jesus Christ. Time has a beginning and an end for creation, but God exists outside of time: God has always existed and always will exist, He is eternal and immutable. For humans, living in time, this has some consequences:

Time only goes one way. The past will not return, we can only live in the present, and we cannot know the future unless God supernaturally reveals it.

- What we do now can change the future, but we cannot change the past.
- Every person, no matter their sex, age, race, where they live, education, financial or social situation, gets the same amount of time in a day, 24 hours or 86,400 seconds. Nobody gets more, nobody gets less. Once the time has passed you cannot get it back, and you cannot save time for later. That doesn't mean that one cannot use time more effectively by planning what you do with it, or use it for.
- How long we will each live is not known to us, only to God. It is imperative that we use the time we have wisely, because none of us know how long we have left.
- Time proceeds at the same rate, but our perception of it can differ greatly. When we are young time can seem to go on quite slowly, but as we get older it seems to go much quicker.

## How does this relate to church?

*"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)*

As Christians, church life should be a fundamental part of our existence, both as individuals and also as families. We need to attend our local church and be involved in the life of this church, and this will require the use of time on our part. It takes time to read our Bibles and pray on our own at home. It takes time to attend church meetings on Sundays and Tuesdays. It takes time to attend Ignite and Pulse, Life Groups, New Horizons or Dare, attend music practices or prepare lessons for JC. We also need to find time for other things, like eating, sleeping, working, going to school, playing, doing household chores, looking after children: how do we fit it all in?

The story of Jethro and Moses in Exodus 18:13-27 illustrates that time management is important if we are to do the best that we can in our Christian life. Moses was not making the best use of his time, and needed to change his priorities and re-organise how he used his time. Once he had done that, he

could be much more effective in serving God. The correct use of time involves being honest about how we currently use our time, the setting of priorities in accordance with how God would want us to use our time, planning to make the changes required happen, and application to bring them about.

- What do you currently spend your time on? It is very easy to spend a lot of time doing not very much, or doing the wrong things. It is useful to do an audit of where your time goes to during an average day. For a day or two write down how much time you spend on various daily activities, such as eating, getting dressed, going to work, watching TV, surfing the internet, exercising, daydreaming. Look at the results. There are things we have to do, like going to work or school, eating, sleeping and personal care, but activities we do not have to do. Is there time that could be better spent?
  - Think about the priorities in your life. What things are important and have to be done, what are things it is nice to do, and what things do not really matter? If we are committed to church these activities will be near the top of the priority list. What current uses of time could you reduce to provide more time to spend on important things? We have to acknowledge that we cannot do everything that we might want to do.
  - "If you want a job doing, ask a busy person," is a truism, but has some sense in it. Busy people have no more minutes in a day than anyone else but they tend to be better organised so can use their time better to get more things done.
  - Ask God for guidance as to what your priorities should be. There is a limit to what one can usefully do in church, you cannot serve in every area, but do not use that as an excuse to not serve at all. Seek advice from the Elders or Pastors if you are unsure or having problems about deciding where to spend your time serving at church.
  - Make sure you have enough time for family activities. Children learn from example: if we are parents, we need to make sure that we are spending time with our children. It is our job as parents to bring them up and parent them, not the job of the TV or internet, and this takes time. The best thing that we can give our children is not the latest iPhone but our time (even if the child's opinion of the matter is different!) This is not always easy, especially if we have full time jobs, but we need to ensure that we have time for this. Attending church meetings as a family is part of this because children learn from what they see their parents do, more than what their parents say. Make sure that your children's time is involved in church: they are not in your care for very long so this is not a decision that can be put off, you are responsible for how they use their time.
  - Ensure time for adequate exercise and time for oneself in the day. Caring for others requires that we also care for ourselves, and we should not feel guilty about time spent on our personal recreational activities.
  - Priorities change with time, and we should adjust them as required. If you are a new parent your time priorities will change drastically from when you did not have children. You may have to stop some activities due to lack of time, do not feel guilty about it, normal life will eventually return.
  - Having identified your priorities and the time you have, make plans to bring about the changes you want. Avoid procrastination. It is very easy to put things off, hoping that eventually you will find time to do them: often you never will. Time spent planning how to use your time effectively is rarely time wasted. Have a diary, either a physical paper one, or electronic one on a device. Keep it up to date with events that are upcoming, and regularly review it. This will avoid surprises and enable you to plan ahead.
  - A weekly family meeting is a great time to discuss what is coming up for everyone in the week ahead and plan what is going to happen. It also gives everyone in the family a chance to discuss what is happening in the week ahead and to pray for issues that may arise. Failure to plan is to plan to fail.
  - Having made the plans, put them into operation. Start with small things first, gradual change will allow you to respond to circumstances that may arise as you change things. Once you succeed in small things it is easier to change larger things.
  - Aim to be on time to church events. We all have times when things go wrong, and we can all be late occasionally, but there is no excuse for being habitually late. We can all get up earlier in the morning or set off for church ten minutes early to arrive on time. Being late means that life is more difficult for those serving in the church and is very disrespectful for the efforts of those persons who prepare the event. It also means that we may miss out on what God has for us at the meeting. If King Charles was going to attend HCC one Sunday everybody would be there early to get a good seat. We should show Jesus the same degree of respect and be there on time for when the service starts.
  - Enjoy something in each day. No day is ever coming back, but there are usually things that we can enjoy or take satisfaction in every day, even if it is just that great feeling when you leave work after a really horrible day. Try not to dwell unduly on bad times in the past: learn from the experience but do not allow the past to dominate your present or future. We cannot change the past; we need to leave it with God and concentrate on the present and the future that He has for us.
- Our time on this earth is a gift from God, and we need to use it wisely so that we can serve Him, and serve the church. If we use our time effectively we will be able to bless others with our talents, touch and treasure: we are blessed to be a blessing.