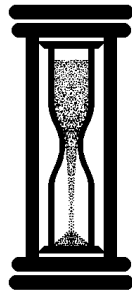


THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE



Is it Slipping Through Your Fingers?

"THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE" DAVE KRAFT

The hourglass of time is running. You can't stop it, reverse it or demand a replay. What you can do is to wisely invest what you have. Your skill at making the most of your limited supply of time can make the difference between being a winner or a loser in the Christian life as it pertains to being the best you can be for the Lord. I have some good news for you! Being skillful in wisely using your time is something that can be learned. Class has begun, take your seat, here we go!

Do you ever find yourself coming late to meetings or commitments? Do you experience that you are often in a hurry...eating, driving, talking fast...honking at your own tail light as it were? I was once in a jewelry shop and saw a sign on the counter that said, "Don't rush me, the hurrier I go the behinder I get."

If you can identify with any of the above, perhaps you need to take a long and prayerful look at the **Time of Your Life**. Do you ever say, "Oh, if I only had more time" or "I'd like to, but I just don't have the time"?

There are two facts we need to know: 1) we all have the same amount of time, and 2) we have all the time we need to do what God wants us to do. When we make excuses about not having enough time, it means we are either doing the wrong things or we are doing the right things in the wrong way. Lack of time is never the problem, but the wise investment of our time is!

How sad to note that many who never knowingly "throw their life away" are letting it slip through their fingers like grains of sand because they haven't decided what is really important in life and what would be the best investment of the finite amount of time they have at their disposal.

WHAT IS TIME?

Time is immensely valuable and utterly irretrievable. Without controversy it is the most precious asset you have. You can lose money and regain it, you can lose your health and regain it; but when an hour is past, it is gone forever and can never be retrieved. We all have the same amount of time. The only variable is how we invest it. Whatever our station in life, our clocks all run at the same rate and we all have 168 hours a week...no more, no less. Sir Walter Scott said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of."

From **Psalm 90:12** we learn that proper use of time can be learned, we should be conscious of time, and that each day is important. **Eph 5:15-18** further teaches us that there is a relationship between our use of time and understanding and doing the will of God. It is pointed out in **Eccl. 9:11** that what makes the significant difference is taking advantage of the **time** and opportunities we are afforded.

"I have just a minute, only sixty seconds in it
Forced upon me, can't refuse it
Didn't seek it, didn't choose it
I must suffer if I lose it
Give account if I abuse it
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it."

Anonymous

My friend David Bertch heard of a professor who figured out the days of his life and then daily put a number up, dropping it by one each day, to remind him how many days he had left. I read that Philip of Macedonia had a slave that reminded him daily with the words, "Remember, Philip, one day you must die."

There are four key steps in the wise investment of your time:

1. Goals - **Where** you want to go
2. Plans - **What** you are going to do to get there
3. Priorities - **How** you will arrange your activities
4. Schedules - **When** you are going to accomplish your activities

Let's take them one at a time and see what is involved.

GOALS

If you don't care where you are going, any road will take you there. If you aim for nothing, you will hit it every time. I have a book on my shelf which I bought just for the title: "If You Don't Know Where You Are Going You Might Wind Up Somewhere Else!" H. G. Wells often wrote the last chapter of a novel first to keep the plot from going astray. Setting goals amounts to writing the closing chapter of a part of your life to keep your life from going astray. Do you know where you want to be one year from now, five years from now, when you die? You don't achieve true biblical success by operating out of your hip pocket. One thing has become clear as I have studied the life of Jesus and Paul and that is that they had goals they were working toward. Ref. John 17:4, II Timothy 4:8, Phil 3:13,14.

Goals can be divided into **time frames**: life goals, long-range goals (5 years or longer), intermediate goals (1 year), short-range goals (daily and weekly); as well as into **areas of life**: personal, spiritual, mental, physical, social, family, ministry. One person planned goals around the four areas in Luke 2:52: mental, social, spiritual, physical.

I have used the Luke 2:52 model for years with very satisfying results. Here are some practical tips on **writing out goals** (and they should be written out, not carried around in your head.) Write **SMART** goals: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime frame.

For example, you may want to lose some weight. "I want to lose some weight" is not a goal because it isn't **SMART**. It is more of a vague wish or desire. To turn "I want to lose some weight" into a **SMART** goal, it may look like this: I want to lose two pounds a week for four months and weigh 160 pounds by June 1. Now your wish has become a **SMART** goal. It is specific (two pounds a week); it is measurable (a scale will tell you if you did it or not); it is attainable (numerous diet books say two pounds a week is achievable by most people); it is realistic (some goals can be attainable but not realistic because of the cost incurred); and you have a time frame (four months, weighing 160 by June 1.)

Ron Blue in his excellent book Master Your Money makes the unbelievable observation that less than 3% of Americans have any long-term goals. No wonder so many get to the end of their lives disappointed and disillusioned as they consider what have they accomplished that is truly significant.

Howard Hendricks, a professor at Dallas Seminary remarked that the thing he feared most for his students was not that they would fail, but that they would be **successful at the wrong things!**

Why don't we set goals and, by God's grace, doggedly pursue them? There are at least four reasons why we don't: 1) fear of failure; 2) we think it takes a great deal of time we don't have; 3) we don't know what goals to set; 4) we don't know how to set goals. I can't stress enough the necessity of overcoming these barriers and joyfully entering the world of goal setting. It is of paramount importance in stewarding what God has entrusted you with. People of achievement you and I have met or read about practice goal setting. Here are some practical benefits of joining the goal-setter club:

Goal Setting...

1. Helps simplify the decision-making process
2. Helps crystallize thinking
3. Provides personal motivation and persistence
4. Provides direction and purpose
5. Provides a system of measurement so one may enjoy the feeling of accomplishment

Predicate your goals on your own behavior rather than hoped-for behavior from others. Let your mind soar. Write out your goals in detail. State your goals positively. Make sure your goals include behavioral changes. Make your goals personal. Are you motivated to start the process? I certainly hope so!

PLANS

Now we come to your plans that will facilitate reaching those goals. Goals, without specific plans, are like a fishing line without a hook. You will never get anywhere and certainly never have a big catch.

You will want to write down certain activities you will participate in to help you reach your goals. Planning is nothing more than attempting to decide in advance what you will do or not do in the next minutes, hours, days, months or years. Planning is a process. As each major step is taken, an evaluation must take place. This is why there needs to be a re-evaluation or feedback designed into all our planning. I take a few minutes at the beginning and end of each day to review my plans, as well as evaluate them periodically during the day.

Plans need to be specific, but not set in concrete as circumstances may change that will entail an alteration in the plans to make them more realistic. The key is adjusting, not abandoning, our plans when the unexpected occurs.

Planning takes time and should begin as far in advance as possible. Fail to plan, plan to fail...it's just that simple. I'm constantly making lists of things/activities to do that are geared toward helping me reach those goals which I have prayerfully and thoughtfully developed.

Going back to the weight loss program, some of your plans/action items might include: Devise a low-calorie diet; design and start a regular exercise program; read a book on staying fit for life; talk with several people who have been successful at losing weight and find out how they did it; create a chart to keep track of how you're doing. You get the picture...specific action items...steps you will take which are directly related to your goal of weighing 160 by the first of June.

Now you have a **SMART** goal...some written, specific steps to take to aid you in reaching your goal. It is now time to prioritize these actions items.

PRIORITIES

Charles Jones, in his stimulating book Life is Tremendous, tells the story of Charles Schwab:

"Charles Schwab, then president of Bethlehem Steel, granted an interview to Ivy Lee, an extraordinary management consultant. Lee told Schwab that his consulting firm could uncover opportunities for improvement of the company's operations. Schwab said he already knew of more things that should be done than he and his staff could get to. What was needed was not more knowing, but more going.

"If you can show us a way to get more things done, Schwab said, I'll be glad to listen to you. And if it works, I'll pay you whatever you ask, within reason. Lee answered, 'If that is what you want, I will show you a method that will increase your personal management efficiency and that of anyone else who applies it by at least fifty percent.'

"He handed Schwab a blank piece of paper and said, 'Write down the most important things you have to do tomorrow.' Schwab did as requested. It took about five minutes. Lee then said, 'Now, number them in the order of their true importance.' This took a little longer because Schwab wanted to be sure of what he was doing. Finally, Lee instructed: 'The first thing tomorrow morning, start working on item # 1 and stay with it until it is completed. Then take item #2 the same way. Then #3, and so on. Don't worry if you don't complete everything on the schedule. At least you will have completed the most important projects before getting to the less important ones. If you can't finish all that you planned to do tomorrow with this system, there's no other way you would have finished. And without this system you probably would have taken much longer to complete what you set out to do without taking care of things in the order of their real value to you and your company.

"Do this every working day, Lee went on. After you have convinced yourself of the value of this system, have your men try it. Try it as long as you like and then send me your check for whatever you think the idea is worth.' In a few weeks Charles Schwab sent Ivy Lee a check for \$25,000. Schwab reportedly stated that his lesson was the most profitable one he learned in his business career."

In this story you see both the planning and prioritizing steps involved in investing your time. Does this whet your appetite for what can be achieved by planning and prioritizing those plans to help you successfully reach your God-given goals?

It was said of a businessman that he has an uncanny ability to segregate the essential from the unessential. Can you do that? It is a skill that can be learned and your sanity and success might very well depend on it. Prioritizing is simply doing first things first. Your list of plans should be large and comprehensive. Then comes the task of selection, rejection and concentration on the top items on the list, as we saw illustrated in the story of Charles Schwab. Two things are important here: decision and discipline.

In October of 1987 it was my privilege to hear Dr. Ted Engstrom, former leader of World Vision and Youth for Christ, when I attended the Congress on the Bible in Washington, DC. I attended his workshop on time management where he shared a truth that I shall never forget. He asked us, at some time, to take out a piece of paper and write down all the things that are **really important** to us and to the Lord and **do it**. Then, take another piece of paper and write down a list of things that are **not important** to us and to the Lord and...don't do it. Simple, yet profound.

I strongly believe that our two biggest problems in managing our time are, 1) **deciding** what is really important, and 2) **disciplining** ourselves to concentrate on the important. My experience from teaching and dialoging with many people through the years is that the biggest battles are fought in the areas of **deciding** and **disciplining**. Make a list of your planned activities designed to help you reach your goals, then prioritize and fine-tune them by asking questions:

1. **Who** - you can delegate
2. **What** - you can simplify
3. **When** - you can postpone

4. **Why** - you can eliminate
5. **Where** - you can combine
6. **How** - you can improve

Some additional questions to ask:

1. How urgent is it? Should it be done right now? Today?
2. How important is it? Very? Quite? Somewhat? Not so much?
3. How often must it be done? Daily? Weekly? Sometimes?
4. Is **this** the best way to do it?

Prioritizing is a matter of constantly reevaluating your plans and rethinking the importance and order in which you tackle them. Circumstances change, so you must be flexible in ascertaining what should be done next and how vital it is to accomplishing your goals. A person can be efficient but not effective. It is effectiveness that gets us somewhere, not efficiency. Busyness is no substitute for results. Efficiency means **doing things right**, but effectiveness means **doing the right things**. (Remember Professor Hendricks fearing his students would be successful at the wrong things.)

Here is a humorous but sobering account of busyness with no effectiveness: "I've gone for a drink and sharpened my pencils, searched through my desk for forgotten utensils, reset my watch and adjusted my chair, loosened my tie and straightened my hair, filled my pen and tested the blotter, gone for another drink of water, adjusted the calendar, raised the blinds, sorted erasers of different kinds, now down to work I can finally sit, oops, too late, it's time to quit" Leonard A. Paris.

We can laugh, but I have had conversations with people who reach the end of more days than they would care to remember feeling like the portrayal in the above-quoted poem. We must learn to leave lesser things undone so we can do greater things, better things, the best things, as Paul mentions in Phil. 1:10.

Nathan Hale said, "I can't do everything, but I can do some things and what I can do, I should do and what I should do I will do, by the Grace of God."

If we are to achieve our goals, we must concentrate on our priorities and not get sidetracked chasing rabbits that lead us down unproductive trails.

SCHEDULES

We come to the last in our four-fold process. We have set our goals, planned activities to help us reach those goals, are in the process of prioritizing them and eliminating the unnecessary or unproductive.

REMEMBER THAT...

Goals entail **where** I want to go

Planning entails **what** I am going to do to get there

Priorities entail **how** I am going to arrange my activities

Scheduling entails **when** I am going to do what I do to get there

Scheduling is putting into a time sequence your priorities of activities. Your week should be so arranged/scheduled with a time for the various activities you have selected to help you reach your goals. This is where the rubber hits the road, for it is here that the battle is actually won or lost. One can have good goals, sound plans for reaching them and things in their proper priority, but if there is not a practical schedule with discipline (as Engstrom said with his "do it") and motivation to put all this into motion, it is just so much pie-in-the-sky words on paper that, in practice, amount to nothing.

When all is said and done (and written, may we add) a lot more is usually said than done. Don't tell me about your labor pains, show me the baby. I don't want to see your goals and plans and well-thought through priorities. **When are you going to do it?** Quite often I hear procrastinators say, when asked for something they have promised to do: "Well, it's on my do list." It could be on your do list for ten years! When are you going to get it off your list and actually do it? The greatest waste of time is the waste of time in getting started. Plans need to be scheduled and then done as scheduled. (Plan your work and work your plan.) I have a little triad I like to use: 1) Write it down, 2) Read what I write, and 3) **DO** what I read.

One great help in learning to manage your time more effectively is identifying how you waste time. Here is a list for your scrutiny. What bad habits do you need to change?

HINDRANCES TO PROPER USE OF TIME

1. Too much "furniture" in the room; Schedule packed too tightly; Plan with a margin; Keep 20% of any day unplanned to accommodate the unexpected.
2. The failure of many plans can be laid at the door of fuzzy goals.
3. Learn to say **NO** (the inability to say no is the death of priorities).
4. Procrastination is the father of failure. Duty is to do the thing we need to do at the time we should do it, whether we feel like it or not. The way to get things done is to tackle the hard jobs first.
5. Failure to delegate...those who want to do it all themselves vs. those who get someone else to help them.
6. Not setting deadlines...both time and days (work expands to fill the time available - Parkinson's first law)
7. Underestimating the length of time a task will take (it generally takes longer than you think)
8. Failure to allow time for planning and evaluating (changes are needed)

Well, there it is...some solid, practical help in effectively using **THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE**. Now, don't just file this away. **DO IT**, and you will reach a new level of satisfaction and enjoyment. It is not what you know that will change your life, it is what you **DO** with what you know.