

## Stewardship of Time (February 2020)

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So far in my Kizuna essays about stewardship, I've emphasized money and possessions. And that makes sense: if we think about the literal meaning of the word, "stewardship" focuses on responsibly caring for the money and possessions of the owner.

But it's also good to remember that *everything* belongs to God, and every aspect of our lives is a gift from God. So that means more than money and possessions. It also means, among other things, time.

Most of us have experienced how strange and mysterious time is. An hour in a boring situation seems to last ten times as long, while a wonderful week of vacation seems to be over in just a few minutes. Childhood seems far away—or maybe it seems very close. Memories of the distant past can suddenly take over the present. Sometimes it's not the past that occupies us, but the future—to the point that we don't know how to be content in the present, but are always anxious for the next thing to happen.

The Bible calls us to be good stewards of our time. There is always a feeling of urgency in the Bible. That is because God is not far away but close to us—always calling to us, always trying to get our attention, always trying to give us more chances to repent, to believe, and to change our lives, before it is too late. The Bible won't let us forget that death is at the far end of every human life. But we never know how soon death will come.

Jesus told this warning parable against those who put their confidence in their money and possessions while wasting their limited time on earth:

"The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16–21)

The foolish rich man thought he had infinite time to enjoy his many possessions. But as it turned out, he was poor toward God and out of time. We don't want to find ourselves in the same situation!

That's why the apostles encourage Christians to pay attention to how we use our time. For instance, Paul writes in Ephesians 5:15–16, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time." And James says in 4:14, "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."

How do we make the best use of our time?

As always, we should begin with prayer and study of Scripture. We need to open our hearts to God so He can show us where we are stuck and unfaithful. God will show us how we have put our trust in the wrong things, so He can teach us to put our trust in Him instead.

Let me give just one example of this. One common feature I notice in both Japanese and American culture is an obsession with busyness. People are so busy all the time! We define ourselves by our work, so we work all the time. Our jobs demand it of us—or maybe we demand it of ourselves. Maybe we are afraid of being alone with our thoughts. Maybe we are afraid of being judged by other people if we're not busy all the time. Maybe we have no idea who we are apart from our work.

It's a very powerful cultural habit, and very difficult to resist. But we Christians have the resources to resist. What are these resources?

First of all, we are not defined by our work! Work is good, and God often blesses it. But it is not our identity. Our identity is: Children of God our Father. Baptized into Christ's name. Temples of the Holy Spirit. This is more important than anything we will ever do, including our work.

Second, we are not saved by keeping busy! We are saved by the grace of Christ alone. He died on the cross for everybody—including sinners, including people who didn't know or believe in him, including even lazy people! In a world that judges people by their busyness and accomplishments, this might seem shocking. But if we feel trapped by our work and the demand of busyness, then it is a huge relief to know that salvation doesn't depend on these things.

Third, we are called to be generous. Work can be a way to show generosity. But it can also be a way to compete against other people and try to get ahead of them. It can make us unwilling to take time for worship or service to people in need, since that means less

time for work. But Christian people are free to give of their time to things other than work.

Every minute of our life is a gift from God. Let's open our hearts to God, so He can show us how to give every minute back to Him in faith and love!