

STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

Isaiah 40:27-31

Galatians 6:1–10

9 Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

It is human nature to grow weary of things, all sorts of things. Things that excited us become humdrum, boring. The thing we so longed for maybe raised our spirits for a while but that interest soon passed.

We all know that children get tired of toys. The excitement of the “must have” toy for Christmas might have gone by Hogmanay. A family in Ratho last week were trying to rehome a hamster complete with cage and accessories because their child had “lost all interest in it.” The child had probably pestered the parents for long enough to get the hamster. It might have been a better life lesson to encourage the child not to lose interest and to learn responsibility for a pet.

But rehoming charities, animal rescue centres, the Dogs’ Trust, Lothian Cat Rescue are all working flat out to deal with the thousands of pets that people of all ages have lost interest in. Some animals go there for genuine reasons but the majority because people have become weary in looking after them. The novelty has worn off, they have moved on to something else in life. The weeks following Christmas are their busiest time.

Paul understood human nature well. Even Christians were growing weary of doing good. And he is talking here mainly about doing good in the church, within the church community, carrying one another’s burdens and taking opportunities to do good works.

“Doing good” is at the root of stewardship in the church. The Church of Scotland describes Christian stewardship as **a way of living in which we recognise that everything belongs to God. We are stewards of all that God has given us including our time, our abilities, our possessions and our money.**

God blesses us in many ways – with time and abilities and possessions and money – and he expects us to use these blessings for the good of others, not to keep all that he gives us for ourselves.

The Kirk Session and Board discuss these things regularly and once a year the whole church is called to review its stewardship in one area. This year, this Sunday, we are considering the stewardship of time.

As Christians we understand that the money and possessions we have are a gift from God and need to be used wisely. Paul echoed Psalm 24 when he said in 1 Corinthians 10:26 – ***“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”*** Nothing belongs to us, we are simply stewards.

Our skills and talents are a gift from God and need to be used wisely.

Time is also a gift from God and needs to be used wisely.

We are good at frittering away time! Some people are greater procrastinators than others. The author Joseph Heller said ***“Procrastination is the thief of time.”***

Ephesians 5:15 – **Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord’s will is.**

Understand what the Lord’s will is in relation to how you live, how you use your time.

Don Whitney, an American Baptist pastor and Professor of Biblical Spirituality said ***“If people threw away their money as thoughtlessly as they throw away their time, we would think them insane. Yet time is infinitely more precious than money because money can’t buy time.”***

Adapting a verse from 1 Corinthians 6 might give us a theology of time – God might say **“Your time is not your own. You were bought with a price. So glorify me with your time.”**

A well known saying tells us that “lost time can never be found.” So there is no point in regretting past time, however we spent it. But we can ask God to help us use the time that lies ahead more wisely.

Of course, the way we use our time should not be all about toil and striving. There is a time for recreation and holidays and creativity. There is a time for relaxing with a book or a crossword or a jigsaw puzzle or whatever it is you do to unwind. So in all that I might say about spending time usefully, remember that “down time” is absolutely necessary. We will certainly weary of doing good if we see no respite, no let up, no relaxation.

We should also consider it important that we spend time in fellowship with our church family. We should support social events, events that bring us together to enjoy one another’s company, to get to know each other better, to have deeper and more meaningful conversations than is possible on a Sunday morning.

Some of my best memories of church when my children were younger were weekends away, all ages together, sharing meals and activities and friendship. I know you have done this here in the past and I have been to Ardeonaig a couple of times with some of you.

On a smaller scale we can enjoy church outings to the beach in June, games nights, shared breakfasts, lunches, perhaps cinema nights. These activities are especially important to draw in and support people who have few family members locally. Some people love when we get to September and things start up again after the summer break because they value opportunities to join together and may have found greater loneliness during the quieter summer months.

Having looked at time for ourselves, for relaxation, for fellowship and friendship, we move on to giving time to serve.

This is maybe the more familiar concept of stewardship. The church asks us to give our money, give our talents and skills, give of our time.

We tend to think of the roles that need to be filled and the offices of the church that require time –

Elders and board members, office bearers such as session clerk and treasurer, secretaries, leaders of children and young people, church officers, musicians and singers, caretakers and DIY people, cleaners and cooks and bakers, overseers of child protection and vulnerable adults, flower arrangers, prayer ministry leaders and prayer warriors who pray faithfully in their homes every day, house group hosts and leaders, pastoral care people, social committee people, outreach co-ordinators, projection and sound experts, carers of babies and toddlers, I'm sure there are more!

You can see that there is a considerable overlap between stewardship of talents and stewardship of time. We need to look at our talents, the skills we can offer and the time we can commit.

I believe that everyone can do something, everyone should do something although I will add a caveat in a moment.

We are fortunate that most of our roles here are covered most of the time although some people are doing too many things and having to give a great deal of time to the work of the church. More willing hands lead to a wider sharing of the responsibilities.

The church is guilty of giving people jobs to do and leaving them to do it for ten or twenty or thirty years or more! This means that –

People can be reluctant to volunteer because they see no exit strategy

People can grow weary in the task and lose their sparkle and enthusiasm

Other people are denied the chance to offer their time and skills which is a loss for them and for the church.

Some people will feel today that God is prompting them to offer more time in serving others. I would stress, at this point, that time serving others is not, of course, necessarily within the church. We give of our time in many ways outside the church in

helping with charity work, children's work, people with disability and so on. The church is wherever Christ's people are serving, seeking the lost, sharing the good news, binding up wounds. What is God saying to you?

Some people might feel today that God is prompting them to give up time in one area of activity and do something else with that time. We might genuinely become stale and unmotivated in a role we have had for a long time and would be refreshed by a change. What is God saying to you?

There are times when we genuinely feel tired and weary, maybe even burnt out, times when we want to sit in a pew on Sunday and do nothing else. Times when we don't even want to sit in a pew – I shared with you before that a friend had been doing so much in her church that she suddenly stopped everything, took a six month sabbatical from church altogether and then came back refreshed to take up new tasks. Perhaps there are situations at home, at work, in our families, that cause stress and God is saying **"Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."** Time for yourself, time for rest, time for being in God's presence. What is God saying to you?

Some people might feel today that they are in the right place doing the right things and committing the right amount of time to serving and to the church. And that is good.

If you want to know what God is saying to you, you need to take time to listen. You need to spend time in prayer.

And the church as a whole needs to consider where it should direct its time and energy and resources. What are the priorities for the Kirk Session? How can we make our outreach and mission more effective?

Two weeks ago, at the Harvest Thanksgiving service, we looked at Matthew 9 where Jesus instructed his followers to pray to God for more workers to bring in the harvest. This morning I feel that God wants us to pray about our priorities as a church, our priorities as individual Christians. He wants us to pray so that he can speak to us and guide us and inspire and bless us. Before Jesus spent time doing anything significant – preaching, healing, performing miracles, going to the cross – he took himself off from the crowd to pray to his Father in heaven. That is the model for us.

The prayer room is available to anyone or any groups who would like to use it. Some people meet there regularly on Monday evenings for prayer. You could bring one or two friends or a group of people at any time to pray for an hour, for longer. A group of women have already asked if they can use the prayer room for 24/7 prayer – constant prayer over a 24 hour period – no specific agenda – seeking God's blessing, his guidance, his presence.

Arrangements can be made to make the prayer room available for people who want to use it, just come with dates and times, the room is only used occasionally for different purposes. It would be wonderful if waves of prayer rose from our church in the weeks

and months ahead as we seek God. I feel that God wants us to honour him in this way. Will you have time to set aside to pray?

The Session gave a small committee the task of making a bookmark for this Sunday in order to encourage us in our prayers about our use of time – the prayer is based on Ephesians 5:16 -

Living Lord Jesus, we are bound by time but you are not.

Break through we pray and renew and redeem our use of your time for these are desperate days. Inhabit our actions, our thinking and our opportunities.

Help us be alert to your presence in every moment.

For every day and all we are is yours.

AMEN