

starters for Sunday

Moderators' Worship Notes: Very Rev John Chalmers

Stewardship Season

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev John Chalmers, Principle Clerk, for his thoughts on the stewardship of time.

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Introduction

Christian Stewardship is a fundamental part of Christian Discipleship. It is concerned with the gifts of God and the way we use these gifts. It is concerned with the love and commitment of God to the world and its people, and with our response to God's love and God's commitment.

Worship has a pivotal role in any consideration of Christian Stewardship in the life of the Church. In worship we give thanks for the gifts of God; we confess our failure to use these gifts as God expects them to be used; we explore the pages of the Bible and engage in theological reflection on God's giving and our response; we offer to God our time, our talent and our money to advance the kingdom.

Three former Moderators of the General Assembly kindly agreed to take us on a journey through some of their personal thoughts about the stewardship of time. They offer us prayers, sermon notes and hymn suggestions, however it is up to the reader to adapt these as he/she sees appropriate.

I wish to express my gratitude to the contributors for their time and assistance in writing this material which can be found on the Church of Scotland [Starters for Sunday pages](#) and on the [Resourcing Mission](#) website, where additional archive material can also be found.

Edith Scott

Acting Team Leader – Stewardship and Finance



[Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8](#)

A Time for Everything

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

a time to rend, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

In a world in which we talk about “wasting time” or “marking time” this old scripture from the Wisdom tradition reminds us that there is nothing more significant or precious than time. It’s not for wasting or simply marking. We have discovered wonderful ways of measuring time, all of which depend on the regularity of the created order and within that created order this scripture reminds us that nothing is superfluous. These verses are nothing if it they are not honest about acknowledging the vast breadth of the ways in which we spend our time and we are challenged to consider if there really is a time and place for everything.

[Luke 4: 1-13](#)

The Temptation of Jesus

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” And



the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’” And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, ‘He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

This passage is usually the starter for Lent and it allows the church to explore the subtle and not so subtle ways in which the spiritual life can be challenged. The temptations offer easy ways instead of the rigorous application of integrity and truth. In the context of the stewardship of time this passage, however, is chosen as way of highlighting the value of “timeout” and the value of time set aside for resolution and planning. Too many people would perhaps think that, the time that Jesus spends in the wilderness during his 40 day fast would look like time wasting or self-indulgence; instead it is an illustration of the way in which time can be used to attend to our inner life and prepare us for the business of life.

[Psalm 46: 1-11](#)

God is our refuge and strength,
 a very present help in trouble.
 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
 though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
 though its waters roar and foam,
 though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy habitation of the Most High.
 God is in the midst of the city, it shall not be moved;
 God will help it when the morning dawns.
 The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
 he utters his voice, the earth melts.



*The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.”
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge*

Where a Psalm is required this one is chosen to emphasise two things: The first, that God is of such a character and personality that God stands outside of time. The imagery of the Psalm gives to God an authority and a presence which stands over everything which belongs to this transitory existence. The second, is the way in which this Psalm emphasises the importance of waiting on God, of being still and knowing – “waiting” can sometimes feel like time wasted, but in this context that is very far from the truth.



Sermon Ideas

Kipling's idea that we have to "fill every minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run" leaves us with the notion that life has to be filled with constant activity and if we are not "doing" things with our time then we are allowing the sand to flow wastefully through the hour glass. An examination of the way in which we use our time must not over-emphasise "doing" over "being". We are, in fact, human beings and not human doings. So, while preaching on the stewardship time may be a route to encouraging people to use some of their time for the purposes of church activity, it is also about encouraging people to use their time to attend to the very real needs of the inner life. Without the one there will be mixed motives for the other; without time for rest and renewal, reflection and planning how will we begin to use our time fruitfully or know how God wants us to use the precious minutes of everyday.

It is the balanced life that works – the life that gives time to every facet of life and the Ecclesiastes lesson can be used to unpack some of the aspects of private and public life to which an appropriate balance has to be applied.

No one who reads the Gospel accounts of Jesus' public ministry doubts that his was a frenetically busy life. Everywhere he went he was pinned down by crowds. From early morning till late in the evening people in all sorts of need were tracking him down - seeking out his help. They placed on him the highest expectations and with high expectation comes extraordinary pressure. A careful reading of the Gospels, however, also reveals that Jesus knew the wisdom of having "timeout" from the hustle and bustle. Built in to his busy life, were times alone with God for rest and renewal - time to balance the equation of life. Time to attend to his being.

The 40 days at the start of his ministry represent an investment of time to establish the spiritual values that would underpin his public ministry.

Then throughout his active ministry - early in the morning, late in the evening, on retreat at his friend's house in Bethany etc., Jesus found time to rest and meditate and pray. These were the times when he found the strength he needed for the challenges of his public ministry.

Beyond the frenetic activity of modern life and beyond the constant need to check our connections on social media there is a need to take time to attend to our own well-being and this may be the most important use of the time that God has given us.



The sermon could explore questions such as:

- What good are we to others if we are totally self-absorbed?
- What good are we if we are burnt-out by constant activity?
- What would a balanced use of our time look like to God?

A useful illustration for the sermon might be the story found in Antonio Valentin's biography of Leonardo da Vinci, where he tells of a time when the great artist was at work in Milan on his painting of the Last Supper. Da Vinci spent many hours meditating in the chapel of the monastery where he was working.

The monks resented these "idle periods" and accused the artist of wasting time.

But da Vinci defended these periods of reflection by saying, "When I pause the longest, I make the most telling strokes with my brush."

The sermon could come back to the text by reflecting on the thought that the story of Christ's temptation was not about planning easy ways to bring about the Kingdom – stones into bread, somersaults from the temple roof or pacts with the devil might bolster his short-term popularity, but would do nothing for the long-term good of the Kingdom. So it is, that the time we spend on hard thinking, deep praying and longer term planning is often more productive than the time we spend on frantic doing.

There is also an opportunity to think about the importance that so many organisations place on time management - the principles of which are thoroughly Biblical. Time management embodies the need for rest, reflection and resolve. This is the pattern of Jesus life – his time of directed activity, properly punctuated by time for sacred reflection and inner resolution.

An end point might be to ask people how often they have promised themselves the time and space for such a balanced portfolio in life and encouraging them to realise that there is no time like NOW to start. And that time waiting on God is never time wasted.



All Age Talk

One idea would be to find a member of the congregation who, sometime in the past, has been presented with a watch or a clock to mark their retirement. The idea would be to feature that member and note their long service and the beautiful gift that they had received.

Then there is the opportunity to say something about the origin of such gifts. At one time it was more common for people to spend the whole of their life in one occupation working for the one employer. In effect they had given their whole life in service to the company and their time had not been their own, however, in retirement their time would be their own so the engraved watch or clock signified them being given their time back.

Then it can be pointed out that actually all time is in God's hands and that, while we will have all kinds of obligations to different people and groups, the precious gift of our time is one that we all have to look after and make the most of.

Prayers

“Slow Me Down, Lord” a prayer of Wilfred Arlan Peterson

Slow me down, Lord!

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time.

Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the ever-lasting hills.

Break the tension of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory.

Help me to know the magical, restoring power of sleep.

Teach me the art of taking minute vacations – of slowing down to look at a flower, to pat a dog, or to read a few lines from a good book.

Let me look up into the branches of the towering oak, and know that it grew great and strong, because it grew slowly and well.



Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

For the gift of time we give you thanks this day:

That today brings with it the promise of new things to learn and discover

That each new day allows us space to develop our relationship with you and with those who are our nearest and dearest

That in this hour of worship we have time to consider the needs of others and to immerse ourselves in the unconditional love that is ours through the grace of Christ our saviour.

For these and all your mercies we give you thanks.

Hear us now as we focus our prayers on the way we use our time:

That we may learn to balance our commitments;

making time for ourselves, our family, our church community and our service to others

That as well as attending to our material and physical well-being,
we may set aside time for our spiritual development and well-being

That when we are rocked and buffeted by the stresses and strains of life

that we make time to be gentle on ourselves

and time to be renewed in the depth of our being

Remind us today that among all the gifts you sought to give to your disciples the greatest was the gift of your peace.

Peace to calm the anxious mind

Peace to still the worried heart

Peace to heal the broken spirit

Peace among communities and peace across a divided world

As we pray for that peace across all of these fronts – remind us that peace will only come –

when we make more time to listen and less time for talk

when make more time for love and less time for hate

when we make more time for peace and less time for war

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Musical Suggestions

CH4 540	I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
CH4 547	What a Friend We Have in Jesus
CH4 566	When I Receive the Peace of Christ
CH4 655	For Your Generous Providing
CH4 468	Son of God, Eternal Saviour
CH4 165	Praise to the Lord for the Joys of the Earth
CH4 727	In the Bulb There is a Flower
CH4 641	Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God
CH4 189	Be Still
CH4 754	Be Still and Know That I am God



Further Advice

For any advice or ideas on Stewardship Programmes for your church, please contact:

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Additional Resources

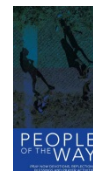
Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Very Rev John Chalmers for providing us with this material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

