

The Gift of Time & the Evil of Distraction

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” – Ephesians 5:15-16.

That’s one of my favorite – and least favorite – passages in the Bible. I love it because I cherish its wisdom. Yet I hate how it condemns me.

Ever since I was a child, I’ve loved the feeling of *satisfaction* that comes with accomplishing a worthy task. Whether sweeping a floor or writing a term paper, knowing that I conquered the task has always left me with a warm glow.

Yet one of my most frustrating and frequent temptations has been the urge to delay accomplishing the tasks awaiting me.

On the whole, I’m not significantly tempted by complete *sloth*. I’ve always found it harder to be inactive than to be busy doing *something*.

The challenge is to focus on doing what I *should* do – completing the task to which I’ve committed myself. Often it seems as though *any other task* would be preferable to *this* one – even when “this one” is a task I generally enjoy.

The grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence – and in my eyes, mending the fence seems irresistible when it’s time to mow the grass.

I was convicted concerning my difficulty in focusing on the task at hand while reading a biography of John Calvin last week.

Calvin, of course, was a brilliant scholar and preacher – truly a shining light of the Reformation. He wrote commentaries on most of the Bible, penned enough letters and tracts to fill several thick volumes, and produced three full revisions of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – a theological treatise that has continuously called the church to reformation since 1536.

The book I read bills itself as a “portrait” of Calvin. It’s a slim volume of about 120 pages that attempts not to comprehensively catalogue Calvin’s life, but to provide an overall feel for his character and his passion.

It was a captivating book, renewing my appreciation for a man who never desired the prominence he gained or the influence he exercised.

Reading about Calvin’s life and work, I was struck anew by his passion for the work God gave to him. John Calvin regarded every hour of the day as a gift given by God. So he filled those hours to overflowing. He mastered at least four languages, tirelessly studied Scripture and the writings of the church fathers, wrote an average of five sermons per week, performed dozens of weddings and baptisms each year, visited the sick and those struggling with sin, led the elders of the church, and engaged in extensive correspondence.

Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor at Geneva, wrote that Calvin protested his friends’ counsel that he should set aside his work while in his sickbed. Dismayed, Calvin asked them, “Would you have the Lord to find me idle?”

When I’m sick, I can hardly focus my mind enough to study. Calvin spent his days of sickness writing deeply insightful commentaries on the Bible. Wow.

In some ways, it’s ironic that I find myself so easily distracted. Since my high school days, I’ve tried to “make the best use of the time.” It’s common to find me reading something while walking from one place to another. I’ve outlined sermons while riding in the car. Grace learned early to overlook my habit of constantly carrying a book, in case I should find a few spare moments.

My temptation is not to embrace *inactivity*, but to fall into *unfocused* activity. When I should be writing, I find myself checking up on the news. When I should be studying a sermon text, my mind darts off on a chore that must be done or ponders what to buy Grace for our anniversary. (*Anyone have a good idea?*)

Sometimes the distraction is a good thing. I always consider it a joy and a privilege when a member of the congregation stops by my office! Nor do I grumble when one of my children pops in to say hello.

Other people are not the problem. It’s the distractions I find *for myself* – allowing my heart and mind to drift away from the task at hand.

I’m convinced that such distractions are a plot of our Enemy. Satan hates it when we work faithfully with the time and gifts God has given to us. He knows that our faithfulness in work causes us to reflect

God, whose work is always faithful and profitable. So Satan does whatever he can to distract us from the tasks God has entrusted to us, aiming to distort God's image *in* us.

Satan also knows that time is a gift from God. We're taught in **1 Pet. 4:10**, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." If Satan can get us to squander such a precious gift as time, he can steal a bit of glory from God and a bit of power from the Kingdom.

God has called us to something better.

He has called us to *resist* Satan – refusing to give in to his evil plots. And He has given us the power to win! "Resist the devil and *he will flee* from you," James says (Jas. 4:7). After all, He who is in us is *far* greater than Satan or the things of the world with which he would distract us (1 John 4:4).

I'm not saying that we should never relax – that each waking hour must be carefully productive. It's a Godly thing to enjoy times of rest and refreshment (Ps. 127:2). We (especially we husbands!) must take time to nourish and serve our spouses (Eph. 5:25-29). Our children and friends need our company, friendship, and time – *without* being made to think that they're a distraction.

So when we allow ourselves to grow distracted at work, we end up robbing *them* of the time that *they* need with us.

Of course, not everyone struggles with this temptation. We each have our unique strengths ... and our unique weaknesses.

But if you share this particular temptation with me ... *do* know that you're not alone. And please join me in resolving anew to overcome that temptation – by rejecting the Enemy who brings it, through the power of our Savior!

Solomon says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your mind" (Eccl. 9:10a). That means *refusing* to be distracted – no matter how much the grass needs to be mowed or the bookshelves need to be dusted.

On our own, we can't. We'll be slaves to the distraction of the moment.

But praise the Lord, we're not on our own! And he who is in us is *greater* than He who opposes us. By His power, we *can* overcome. – and we can make *excellent* use of the time, unto His glory!

May the Lord grant us the focus to overcome distraction. And may the Lord never find us idle during the time when we should be hard at work!