

Sunday, January 10, 2016  
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Romans 12:1-2  
Stewardship of our time

**[How has my understandings of time changed over the course of my life?]**

Traveling across multiple time zones, adjusting to that “new” time for a couple of weeks, and then traveling back home is certain to make me think more about time. It is also true that such moving out of comfort zones – those places where time and routine are familiar - is a path to growth, new insights and learnings – and that's important to me as I continue to ponder what good and godly stewardship means for my life. So I've agreed to share a bit about how my understandings of time has changed. This also takes me out of my comfort zone! Please understand that I'm sharing the place that I've come to – I have no expectation that you will come to this same place

Remembering a time when with young children Glenn might return from work to a messy house, food not yet prepared for dinner, maybe unhappy children or a frustrated wife and [hopefully tongue in cheek] say “**so what have you been doing all day?**” Let me quickly add in Glenn's defense that I did not feel the need to justify how I spent my time - and I resonated with the question. What had I been doing all day? Where had the TIME gone? I could quickly note that, well, I'd been mothering, reading, rocking, feeding, cleaning, listening, laughing, crying, playing.....and laundry, getting groceries, going to doctor's appointments, cooking, etc. At some point it become clear to me that what I do with the time I have each day, 24 hours, just like everyone else in this room, is not really the question. The question is not “what will I do with these next hours?” The question is “**Who am I today? How will these next hours reflect who God has called me to be – right now, today?**”

This attitude – this perspective has been **very freeing**. I live in a world that wants me to compete at every level – how I look and dress, what my house looks like, what I do for work outside of the home, what car I drive, what I accomplish, what degrees I acquire, how beautiful my flower gardens are -and the even more important things like what shampoo or toothpaste I use.....but with this perspective I feel free to TRY to put this aside and ask just one question – **for today, Lord – who am I? And then, how can my time today reflect you?**

This is not to say it's easy – I still have lists of things that need to be done – important tasks and deadlines. I get frustrated when things happen that “interrupt” my day – unexpected, uninvited distractions. I struggle with the sense that I should at some level buy into the “competition” -- **Should I be doing more? What have I really accomplished? Should I be busier? But I don't want to be busier!**

I remember a sermon Loanne Harms preached in July of 2012 and I've kept notes from that sermon. She asked important questions -- “How can we joyfully answer God's call when we are too busy to joyfully do anything?” “How much of what we do really matters?” Those are questions directly related to how we “spend” our time. She reminded us of a frequent reply when someone asks how things are going – and we say “so busy!” Or “crazy busy!” and she called that a **boast disguised as a complaint**. Somehow I am important if I'm busy – lots of demands on my time means I'm needed, even wanted!

There are times I've felt uneasy, even inadequate if I admit that I'm not too busy. **Not busy? What's wrong with you? Lazy? Unmotivated? Are you ill?**

Certainly I want my time to be filled with enough – enough meaningful work, enough meaningful relationships, enough challenge to keep life interesting – and also enough confidence to say “no, that is not what I feel called to spend my time on right now” – or “yes, that's something I feel I should do and there is time enough to do what is most important.” **Enough – what is enough?** That's different for each of us, but something I want to think about carefully so that I make the choices - not something I drift into unawares, not something I want handed to me from a magazine advertisement.

I actually find it a bit hard to think about “time” without thinking also about other resources I need to steward – energy, body and money come to mind. I learned quite a number of years ago that I am a better person, more centered, more thoughtful, and I just feel better when I exercise regularly – like nearly every day. It is good for me physically, emotionally and spiritually. It also takes time – at least 45 - 60 minutes a day. I also live in the cold north so I can't do my exercising in the free out of doors -- it costs me some money. Time, money, energy – all things I need to steward. If I take this same mindset when thinking about exercise, every day I say **“Who am I today? How does the way I spend my time today reflect that I am a beloved daughter of the living God?”** To then choose not to exercise says I don't value my physical, emotional or spiritual bodily needs and that's not a place I want to go. Again – in no way am I suggesting that you need to come to these same conclusions. Life circumstances and the demands on time are different for each of us, but we need to consider how the way we use our time reflects God's call in our lives.

I remember a change in myself when one of our sons wanted some expensive Michael Jordan shoes and I found myself quickly saying “we can't afford that” - and then I felt convicted. That was too easy – that was an excuse because when it came time for braces on teeth, which cost a lot more than the shoes, we made the resources available because we felt it was important. The reason for not buying the shoes was that it was not something we felt was important enough to spend that kind of money for so my reply should have been “that's not a priority for us. Those shoes are a status symbol and there are plenty of other good shoes that would serve you just as well for less money. If it is really important for you, you may save your money to buy them.” I've come to this same understanding about time – when asked to do something it's too easy to just say “I don't have time for that” “I'm too busy” - implying that my time is so valuable and I'm needed in so many other places – and this is simply not important enough for me to even consider. The better answer for me to give is “let me think and pray about that.” Now there are certainly times to say - “my plate is full right now or I don't feel called take on that responsibility” - if I've been honest and thoughtful about that request.

I certainly learned a lot about the ways to view time from my parents. One memory that speaks to me of how they valued time as a way to build family was that we would take vacations, even with a dairy farmer dad with no paid vacation time, when leaving the farm, ones livelihood in someone else's hands was a big deal. Who could/would take care of those animals and that farm like Dad did? Yet Mom and Dad made taking family vacations a priority.

Our time in Puerto Rico was also formational. There was almost a sense that time moved more slowly there – and it certainly felt like that on Sunday morning when church started when people arrived, not at the stated time! That was hard for someone who was taught that to be respectful and polite you show up on time. But as I lived and worked there I learned to appreciate this more fluid sense of time. I observed this difference these last weeks in Africa. Things move at a different speed – lots of folks sitting, seeming to watch the world go by, waiting for the bus or walking slowly along the road, less hurried. To my American sensibilities, if I dare call them “sensibilities”, life there is a hassle as it is in many many places in the developing world. The roads aren't good so you need to drive slowly – could I relax and enjoy the African massage? Things are not as convenient, there is no such thing as fast food.

We walked on dirt paths that wandered along the side of the streets. The world looks different when I walk slowly. And really, **what is the good life anyway?**

I love to travel – that takes time and money but I view it as an investment. My world view grows – I learn that people everywhere are more similar to me than different. When we travel with family we learn to know one another in new ways as we interact in and with cultures, away from the expectations and responsibilities of home. Spending time together, sometimes in close quarters or dealing with differences of opinions reminds us that we are still family – **what does that look like?** I observed that happening these last weeks – and I am so grateful for the opportunity we've had. Then the question becomes **“Am I allowing this travel time to continue growing into the person God has called me to be? Is my heart opening more to the other? Am I gaining new understandings of how my life in America impacts others negatively because we use so many of the world’s resources? – another question of stewardship. Who am I away from home?”**

I've asked a lot of questions today – and I hope to keep asking questions of myself about how I steward the time and energy I'm allotted. Asking questions helps me stay away from ruts of thought and routine and to me that's a good thing. Feel free to ask questions of yourself – and of me as well. We can help each other to be accountable if we are open to that.  
Thank you.