

Stewardship Now **January, 2011**

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Reflections on Our Understandings of Time

How would you describe the current economic times?

Perhaps you are one of those who has been partially or fully unemployed.

When have you been entrusted with a gift for a time?

Perhaps these are the blessing God has give you for a lifetime.

How often do you forgive your neighbor or partner?

Perhaps as often as many times as it takes to develop a significant relationship or achieve a goal.

How do you know when God is calling you to do something new?

Perhaps you have considered a new position or a change in vocation.

How do any of these times relate to God's understanding of eternity?

Perhaps we can see our lifetime as only a blink of an eye in God's time.

In Scripture there are many references to time – hours, days, years. These references are often in five contexts: 1) a description of specific times (Amos 5:13); 2) a period of time for which someone is entrusted with a gift or responsibility (Daniel 7:25, Rev. 12:14); 3) the number of times for an activity (Ps. 62:8, Mt 18:21); 4) a specific time for events (Hos. 10:12, Acts 1:7, Romans 9:9); 5) the relationship between a specific time and eternity (Eccl. 3:11, Heb. 10:12).

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3 offers familiar words about time (Read verses 1-14). In verses 11-14, the contradiction between God's view of time and a human view of time becomes clear. God was present at the beginning and will be present at the end. Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken away from it. As God's people we live with daily responsibilities and tasks to be accomplished. We often put time in a finite dimension and feel the pressure of time in the form of a deadline. Is this really what God intended? How are we stewards of time?

In the Bible certain numbers took on symbolic meanings. One of these is the number 40. Forty may simply be a period of time, which may or may not be intended to be taken literally. A period of 40 days, nights or years appear several times in the Old and New Testaments.

- Noah and family were in the ark for 40 days or 40 nights.
- Moses remained in the Sinai for 40 years.
- Moses was on Mt. Sinai 40 days and nights at two separate times.
- Twelve spies scout out the land of Canaan for forty days.
- Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years.
- Elijah wandered in the wilderness for 40 days.
- Jonah warned Nineveh they had 40 days to repent.
- Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.
- Following his resurrection Jesus was on earth 40 days before the ascension.

As a person gets older, the days seem to pass more quickly. Sometimes we forget the significance God places in each increment of time.

What is the value of one year?

Ask someone who has been diagnosed with a terminal disease.

What is the value of one month?

Ask a mother whose baby arrived prematurely

What is the value of one minute?

Ask someone who just missed their plane.

What is the value of a second or millisecond?

Ask an Olympic athlete who came in second place.

Consider each of these periods of time as you approach the New Year. What value do you place on each? Some people have discovered that yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. And today is a gift. That is why it is called the present. May we learn to embrace and value every moment in our relationship with God, our relationship with those who are important to us, and the call God has given us.

Stewarding Your Personal Mission Statement

It seems more and more difficult to make New Year's Resolutions. It seems like so many of them never come to pass. Perhaps the enthusiasm of January is lost by April or July. Many people have instead chosen to use the New Year as a time to review their personal mission statement.

What goes into a personal mission statement? The best-selling *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey suggests that mission statements "begin with the end in mind." Consider your mission statement as less of a desired future goal and more of a description of how you presently live your life with those desired ends in mind.

A personal mission statement describes the way you live and not so much the place or situation where you would like to arrive. Consider the difference between your life goals and your *lifestyle*. The key question is personal and everyone's answer is different: "How do I want to live?" A mission statement is designed as a tool for turning self-knowledge into self-actualization. Your mission statement helps you understand how you turn who you are into what you do.

Here are some simple steps in a process of forming your personal mission statement:

1. The first step is spiritual at heart. Time spent in prayer and searching the scriptures for guidance is foundational. The advice of a trusted friend or pastor can also be invaluable.
2. Look back on observations or advice that you've been given. What has stuck with you? How might that advice apply in your daily life?

3. Write some thoughts that focus on the *way of life* you would like to live. Think about what you do on a daily basis that is core to who you are. How can you put these activities into words? What ideals do these actions represent?
4. Finally, write, or re-write, these thoughts into a concise form. Shorter is better. Think of how you might share these statements as an elevator speech. These words can be your personal mission statement for the coming year.

What do examples of personal mission statements? Here are some from years past:

Stefanie in New York City: "I basically have two: The first is "Work to live. Don't live to work." When I made a list of my dreams it didn't include working a lot. And, most people's lists of dreams doesn't include that, but isn't it funny how we often end up working so much? The second is "Carpe Diem". I believe people should seize the day and chase their dreams rather than sit around waiting for them to come true."

Keith in Overland Park, Kansas: "To help others discover the joy of generous living and giving in Christ."

Jonathan in Florida: "'Live giving.' It's been pretty powerful for me because it definitely offers a clear choice when I ask myself, 'If I do this, will I be living a lifestyle of giving?' If the answer is no, I don't do it!"

Pastor Greg in Texas: "I want to be a person who:

- lives each day in the tension of it possibly being my last and the excitement of it being my first.
- Sees the eyes of Christ in the eyes of all I meet.
- Shows up, speaks my truth, and lets God handle the rest.
- Is willing to ask for help.

Ultimately as a person and leader, I want to be present, be faithful, be brave, be love.

Irene in Florida: "My personal mission statement is 'Bloom where you are planted.' Many times I have wished that I could be far away as a missionary or working in the midst of the poor—something like Mother Teresa. However, I came to realize that mission is right here today and I can do the best I can with what God has given me now. So for right now, today, I will be in mission for God right here."

How are We Stewards of Trust

The first two months of each calendar year are the most common time for congregations to have an annual meeting about the year ahead. When is yours scheduled? These gatherings are a time when leaders share their ideas and recommendations with others in the congregations. The reaction is often based on a very intangible asset – TRUST. Developing and maintaining trust is an important role of leaders and staff in the congregation.

In Scripture the word trust in its various forms appears over 200 times. There are many references are about trust in God. For example, in Proverbs 16:20,

*Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper,
and happy are those who trust in the Lord.*

There are also precautionary statements about those who trust in the wrong things. For example, in Proverbs 11:28,

*Those who trust in their riches will wither,
But the righteous will flourish like green leaves.*

Most often references are about where one places their trust. But how is this trust relationship built and maintained.

In his book *The 8th Habit*, Stephen R. Covey describes six facets of building trust:

- ▶ **Abundance Thinking**
How do you see the glass? Is it half empty or half full? Building trust is often based on seeing a wealth of resources and recognizing the potential for growth.
- ▶ **Integrity**
As faithful members in the Body of Christ, we are guided by Christian principles and faith practices. Being true to our faith and principles reflects our integrity. This is attitudes and behaviors.
- ▶ **Maturity**
When a person shows both courage and kindness in addressing difficult issues, a sense of maturity is evident. This is gained through observation, experience and reflection.
- ▶ **Technical Competence**
This involves demonstrating the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish a specific task. Professional development provides the foundation for competence, but practice and personal commitment make this a reality.
- ▶ **Conceptual Knowledge**
The ability to see the big picture and how the parts fit together reflects our capacity to look beyond ourselves and see the possible connections for others. Sharing this perspective helps others grasp the bigger picture.
- ▶ **Interdependence**
An awareness that all life and the whole Body of Christ are connected.

As stewards of God's mission and God's blessings, how are we these facets present in present in the life of the congregation? How are leaders making these facets possible? How does one know when there is trust? .

Stephen Covey tells us,

Trust becomes a verb when you communicate to others their work and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves.
(*The 8th Habit*, Stephen Covey; ©2004, p. 181)

Look, list, watch. Where and how is trust being build in your congregation? How are we all stewards of this trust? May we first have trust in God.