

You'd think that all the clocks in the world would make us better at managing our time, but the truth is that time management is one of the biggest stressors in our culture. We work too many hours, we have too many distractions, and we're trying to squeeze in more work in less time. Procrastination is often the result of being so overwhelmed with tasks that we keep putting things off, only to find that we're now even more squeezed for time.

The relentless ticking of the clock (or, in their case, the movement of the shadow around the sundial) is what the ancient Greeks referred to as *chronos* time, from which we get "chronological" time. If you buy an expensive watch today (either to actually tell time or to make a fashion statement), the jewelry store will likely refer to it as a "chronograph." It keeps the time that we're always tracking, managing and of which we're running out.

The apostle Paul didn't wear a watch or carry a cell phone, but he was nonetheless always aware of time. It was a different sort of time, however, than you get by glancing at your watch or at a clock. Paul actually kept a running clock in his head, but, instead of tracking the *chronos*, Paul was far more interested in redeeming the *Kairos*.

Kairos is the brand of time most often mentioned in the New Testament. You won't find it on the hands of the dial or the digital numbers on a screen. Instead, *kairos* refers more to a decisive time - the right time, the appropriate time. The writers of the New Testament seem to understand *Kairos* in relation to the moment when God intervenes or is about to intervene in human history. But the word can also mean the time that God's people have to prepare for the ultimate *kairos*, thus Paul's admonition to the Ephesians to *[make] the most of the time [kairos] because the days are evil* (v. 16).

It's that *kairos* expectation that should fuel the management of our *chronos*. Paul begins this section of the letter with a call to set the alarm clock. The darkness of evil is about to be exposed by the bright dawn of God's coming kingdom, thus Paul tells the Ephesian church to *take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but indeed expose them because everything exposed by the light becomes visible* (vv. 11, 13). With the dawn about to break, Paul uses what may be a line from an ancient hymn as a wake-up call: *Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you* (v. 14).

With that coming moment in mind, Paul urges the church, *Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise* (v. 15). Use your time wisely, in other words, by ordering your lives after the new reality that is breaking in. In this way, you will make the most of the *kairos* and

live in ways consistent with the coming day of the Lord and not in step with the present evil that governs the daily calendar of much of the world. To *understand what the will of the Lord is*, and to do it, is the best time management strategy in light of the coming of the Lord (v. 17).

For Paul, the way that we become better *kairos* managers is by being filled with the Spirit, which is a contrast to the time-wasting practice of getting drunk and debauched (v. 18). Many people in the ancient world believed that being drunk could produce inspiration or possession by Dionysus, the god of wine. Many people in our day believe that they will get inspiration, or at least medication, from being intoxicated not only with drink, but with money, with drugs, or with power. They structure their time and their lives in pursuit of these things, thinking that they will be fulfilled, but these are time-killers.

Be filled with the Spirit instead, says Paul, and you will be able to face the present world not with songs of drunken parties, but the *psalms, hymns, and spiritual psalms* of worship (v. 19). There's an echo here back to the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came on the gathered church. As the tongues of fire and mighty wind of the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, some of the bystanders looked at their ecstatic behavior and their speaking in new language and said, *They are filled with new wine* (Acts 2:13). In response, Peter told the crowd to check their watches, since it was only 9:00 a.m. Instead, their behavior was a sign that the last days, the *kairos* of God, was at hand. Quoting the prophet Joel, Peter preached, *In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh* (Acts 2:17).

Life in the Spirit is life in *kairos* time, and the people of God set their watches and calendars by that standard. These days we might have atomic clocks in our homes that are accurate to the second because they synchronize automatically by radio frequency with the National Institute of Standards and Technology atomic clock in Boulder, Colorado. The watch on our wrist or the clock in the bell tower might be fast or slow, but the NIST F-2 clock is always right. The same might be said of the Holy Spirit, which calibrates us toward being right with God's time and accurate in our faith and practice.

How we "make the most of the time" is thus a function of how well we use our *chronos* to focus on the *kairos*. How does your calendar reflect time spent cultivating your relationship with God via the Holy Spirit? Does your daily rhythm include time dedicated solely to prayer, *giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?* (v. 20). Do you search the Scriptures daily to *understand what the will of the Lord is?*

(v. 17). Are you participating in weekly worship where you can be filled with the Spirit and make *melody to the Lord* in your heart? (v. 19).

Rather than just letting time tick away, put it to the Spirit's use. If you regularly carry a timepiece of some sort, be it analog or digital, consider the practice of saying a short prayer every time you check the time. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, pray for whatever is happening or whomever you're with at that moment. Coupled with a disciplined and regular spiritual life, it's a practice that makes the most of the time in a way that allows the Spirit to work in us and through us.

Those clocks we see every day should be a reminder to us to keep awake, for the time is coming when the light of God's glory will flood all of creation, pushing out the darkness and bringing the dawn of a new creation. Whether it's as small as a computer timer or as big as a seaworthy ship, every tick of the clock brings us one step closer to that day. That's something to look forward to - big time!

Prayer by St. Teresa of Avila

O my God! Source of all mercy! I acknowledge Your sovereign power. While recalling the wasted years that are past, I believe that You, Lord, can in an instant turn this loss to gain. Miserable as I am, yet I firmly believe that You can do all things. Please restore to me the time lost, giving me Your grace, both now and in the future, that I may appear before You in "wedding garments." Amen.

Sources:

- "List of largest clock faces." Wikipedia.com. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_largest_clock_faces. Retrieved February 5, 2015.
- "New atomic clock debuts in Boulder, sets standard for U.S. time." *CBSDenver Website*. April 3, 2014. <http://denver.cbslocal.com>. Retrieved February 5, 2015.

Big Time

Sunday, August 16, 2015

The Federated Church
Fergus Falls, MN

Ephesians 5:15-20

One of the iconic images of the silent-film era is that of funny-man Harold Lloyd hanging from the hands of a giant clock on the side of a big-city building, many stories above the street. The scene is from the 1923 comedy, *Safety Last*. The man in the picture is Lloyd himself. There is no safety net. Perhaps the reason that scene is so memorable is that a man dangling from a giant clock seems to capture out ambiguous relationship with time.



Quick survey: How many of you regularly consult a wristwatch or a cell phone to check the time? Do you check it twice a day? Five times? Ten times? We live in a world obsessed with time! We have multiple apps for tracking our calendars, managing our deadlines and even timing our walk to the office. We have time staring at us from the corner of our computer screens, from the dashboard of the car and from the digital clock on the bank sign down the street. If you live in a city, you might even look up and see a classic old clock fixed on a historic building which has been marking the time for generations.

In some cities, telling time is a very big deal. If you're in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, for example, you can't help but see the Abraj Al Bait Towers clock just about anywhere you go. Its clock face is 43 meters in diameter, built on a tower that's 601 meters (nearly 2,000 feet) tall. By comparison, London's "Big Ben," arguably the most famous clock in the world, is just over 6 meters in diameter on a 96-meter-high tower on the bank of the Thames. Even Fergus Falls has a city clock, right downtown on Lincoln Avenue. Other cities around the world have similar "big time" clocks to help residents and visitors track the time, some even assisting with chimes or bells when the clock strikes the hour.