

“Together in Priorities”- John 17:20, 21, Ephesians 5:15-17, Colossians 4:2-6

Jesus prayed a prayer before he died that the disciples and the early church would be united together to win the world for Jesus Christ. The early church took those words to heart and worked together in five important areas of ministry. I challenge our church today to have these same characteristics today. Three weeks ago we looked at the first characteristic and that was united in prayer, the second characteristic was united in presence, last week we looked at being united in possessions. This week we look at the fourth area of ministry and that is priorities.

All of us have priorities. The things that is most important to us in life. Whether we believe it or not but how we live and what we do determines our priorities in life. How we spend our time determines most of all our priorities. Time is the most important commodity of the 2010s. “Where does it all go” is the question we often ask. A recent consulting firm recently shed a little light on this subject. The average American over the course of an average lifetime (72 years), spends 21 years sleeping, 14 years working, 7 years in the bathroom, 6 years eating, 6 years travelling, 5 years waiting in line, 4 years learning, 3 years in meetings, 2 years in returning calls, 1 year searching for lost things, 22 months in worship, 8 months opening junk mail and answering e-mails, 6 months waiting at traffic lights.

“I haven’t got time” has become the watch phrase for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The problem I believe is not time, but how we use time. All of us feel at times what the prophet Isaiah wrote, “I have used up my strength, but I have not accomplish nothing.” So what is the solution? What time management secrets can free us up from the treadmill many of us feel that we are on? How can we be like the early church whose priorities included good management of time in their ministry? God in his word gives us good thoughts in the subject.

First of all, good time management is the mark of wisdom. In the book of Ephesians the Apostle Paul tells his listeners “to make good use of the opportunities or the time that we have” despite the difficulties of living in these days. In the book of Colossians that was read a few moments ago, Paul again

invites his listeners to “redeem” the time that God gives us- by taking our free time fruitful by investing our lives in him and in others.

Secondly, good time management is an act of good stewardship. As most of us know the word stewardship means to use what God has given us wisely and fruitfully. Paul writes to the church at Corinth that we have been given a gift of time and we must prove to be faithful in using the gift of time wisely. We also all know the expression “killing time”. Sometimes we say that when we are just doing nothing while waiting for something important to happen. Killing time is not good stewardship of the gift of time that God has given us.

Third of all, good time management can be learned. Good time management just doesn’t happen. Good time habits must be developed over our life time. The writer of Psalm 90 recognizing how precious time is and how hard it is to manage it well, asks God to teach us that our days are numbered and how we are to spend them wisely. “Teach us to number our days aright, so that we might gain a heart of wisdom.” Help us to spend our time as we should.

We have discovered how God feels about good time management so the next question we ask is, “What do we need to do to have good time management skills?” Let’s look again at Ephesians 5. In this chapter Paul gives us three things we can do to better manage our time. If we manage our time well we will have more time for family, ministry, and other things that are high priorities in our lives.

The first thing Paul invites us to do is what I call analysis of our personal life style. We need to step back and evaluate how well we are doing in life with what we have. In Ephesians 5:15 Paul writes, “So, pay close attention to how you live. Don’t live like ignorant people but people who are wise. “We all have different life styles and temperaments. How many of you are morning people who can jump out of bed early and be ready to go. There are some of you who are night people. You stay up to one in the morning, but you have to have three alarm clocks to get you up in the morning. Then there are those who do better in the middle of the day.

I have evaluated my life style and I am definitely a morning person. I don't do well in the early afternoon. I remember visiting a family in the early afternoon. I remember falling asleep and taking a 30 minute nap while sitting in their living room. They let me sleep and when I woke up we continued our conversation. To say the least I was embarrassed. Analyze your personal lifestyle and see when and how you can devote to doing things.

The second thing we can do to better our time management is to utilize the present. We are to seize the day: Carpe diem. In verse 16 Paul says we are to make the most of every day. The only opportunity that you and I get is the opportunity right now. The opportunity of yesterday is lost. Don't let the opportunities of the present get by us because we're waiting for the perfect time or place or conditions. Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, "If you wait for the perfect conditions you will not get anything done."

In order to utilize the present is to keep the clutter out of our life: The physical clutter and the emotional clutter in our lives. The clutter in our lives that may occupy our vision for life and it becomes negative. The clutter that comes when you and I sweat the small stuff: The stuff that a week from now won't make any difference. The clutter that pulls us away from God.

The third thing that we can do to better our time management is to prioritize what is important. In verse 17 Paul says, "Don't act thoughtlessly, but find out what God wants you to do." A sign in front of a plant nursery read: "The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago. The second best time is today." The second best time is the only time we have.

Back in the golden song days of the seventies was a singer named Jim Croce and one of his hits was, "Time in a Bottle". In this song Jim sings about putting time in a bottle so that he could have time for family and friends. The theme of the song was that when he wanted to have some time he could take the cap off the bottle and pour out some time. Nice song. Not gonna happen. Jim Croce died very suddenly in a plane crash and all of the people and places he was going to and to see, the relationships he was going to develop died with him. He thought he could put time in a bottle.

I have conducted as many as thirty funerals a year and two things jump out at me. There is sorrow for the loved one and there is regret. If I heard once I have heard it a number of times, "If only I could have my loved one back." We cannot look at yesterday and have it back. Today we can do something about what you have right now. Time management! It is the best thing we can do for ourselves. It is one of the best things God can do for us.

A strong church is one whose members work on being unified in prayers, unified in their presence, unified in their possessions, and unified in their priorities. Its not only good for the church but it is good for all of our lives.