

## (JUST) ENOUGH TIME

*“My uncle told a good story with his life, but I think there was such a sadness at his funeral because his story wasn’t finished. If you aren’t telling a good story, nobody thinks you died too soon; they just think you died. But my uncle died too soon.” Donald Miller*

When I was first diagnosed with cancer I worried about dying before my story was finished. I had, and still have, a number of things to achieve, people to reach, chapters to live and to tell. It wasn’t the dying part that bothered me so much as living long enough (and well enough) to complete my story (and complete it well). A number of things have comforted me since then, not the least of which is the assortment of passages strewn throughout the pages of my Bible – a selection of which come from John’s Gospel. These in particular, consoled me; on the one hand, with the confidence that God would give me with enough time to do everything he wanted me to do. His “To Do List” was still achievable even if I did have less time than I had previously thought. On the other hand, there were other verses that injected me with a conviction that he would give me *just enough time*. I’d have time, but no more than I needed to finish my assignment.

When the professor gives you a due date, if you’re smart you *do* it before it’s *due*. The boss gives you a deadline and you know that if you cross that line you’re *dead*. If they don’t give you a due date or deadline, you ask them for it, because you want to know how to pace yourself and would rather not be surprised when they ask you for it at the last minute when you’re only half finished. If you’re a procrastinator the pace usually looks like – wait till that last minute and then pull an all-nighter. I call it the “heart attack pace.” At least it’s a pace.

The thing with God is that he doesn’t usually give due dates and deadlines, at least not to me. Doesn’t tell us how much time we have to finish our work here. I guess he expects us to live responsibly, sensibly, and obediently. We don’t know when our eternal life performance review is scheduled, so if we’re wise we make every effort to stay in love, stay on track, and stay on task.

Nobody likes the boss or the professor that’s infamous for not giving people enough time to accomplish their assigned tasks. *“I want a 30-page paper on the fall of Rome... Let’s say... by the beginning of class tomorrow.”* Or, *“Work up those sales projections for next year by Thursday.”*

*“Thursday. Okay. Wait. What?”*

**He gives us enough time to do what we’re supposed to do.**

He has the big picture in his mind when he assigns us tasks to do. He knows what we’re best at, how we’re built (duh?), and what sort of opportunities will come our way – since he’s the one who brings them our way. He knows how much time we have here on his earth and he gives us what we need to achieve his goals for us.

Being no Greek scholar – English is a big enough challenge for me – I don't usually like to play the original language card, but I think the distinction between two terms in the New Testament for "time" might help me explain my point. When "time" is referred to it's either "chronos" (pronounced with a hard "C" sound) or "kairos." The former expresses the *duration* of time and the latter speaks of its *distinction*.

OK, let me be clearer. *Chronos* is what you look at your watch or your calendar for. Obviously, we get our word "chronology" from it. It has to do with the passage of time. When you look in the mirror, it's *chronos* that happened to you between now and twenty years (or more) ago. *Kairos* describes opportune moments, times when something significant happens. When Jesus said, "my time has not yet come," that's *kairos*, best time for him to show his true glory. When we say, "I had a good time," we're not talking about a *quantity* of time (that would be *chronos*), but it's *quality*. Whatever amount of time we spend doing whatever it is, it has a certain value to it – that value is *kairos*. Paul told us to "make the most of every opportunity (*kairos*)."

The reason for my little Greek lesson is to make the point that God gives us enough time (*chronos*) to have all the times (*kairos*'s) he's planned in eternity past for us. We can cunt on him to give us enough time in this life to accomplish enough things for his glory.

*"After doing God's will by serving the people of his time, David died."* **Acts 13:36 (GWT)** That's when I want to die, when I'm finished doing God's will by serving the people of my time.

The day before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. gave his last sermon at the Church of God in Christ in Memphis on April 3, 1968, called "*I've Been To The Mountain Top*." His closing words were:

*"Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"*

Like Jesus, King knew that his days were numbered. Your sense of limited longevity may not be as sharp to you as it was for them, and I'm absolutely not suggesting that you live in any sort of impending doom about dying. But the fact is, someday the Teacher will say, "*Time's up. Turn in your project, as is.*"

*"So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times! Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants."* **Ephesians 5:16-17 (The Message)**

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**John 9:4** “As long as it’s day we must work the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.”

**John 11:9** “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light.”

**John 12:35** “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.”

When I was newly facing the bleak reality of a medically incurable disease in my bloodstream I began a pretty serious musing about my mortality and came upon these words of Jesus. I was thinking about all the things I still wanted to do while in this body (have grandchildren, teach them to whistle, write several books, tell more people that God loves them, etc.) and started to wonder if I had time to get it all done. I really want to go home and be with Jesus – honestly I do. To see his face in that most exquisite place – what could be better? On the other hand, before transferring to the permanently and profoundly superior place, I want to complete my assignment here in our temporary and inferior place.

There’s an old saying, “*The world’s a bridge. The wise man will pass over it, but won’t build his house on it.*” My doctor tells me that it’s likely that I’m much closer to the end of the bridge than I used to think I was and, as doctors do, he gave me some projected numbers of years and percentages representing my possibilities. As disconcerting as all that was, my take was that God has his own possibilities and projections. I’m much more inclined to hitch my hopes and prayers to those.

As I seriously ponder my temporariness, these three statements of Jesu give me both *comfort* and *conviction*. One day he said, “There’s time,” and then on another he warned, “But not a lot of it.” One eases my fears and tells me that I’ll have enough time to finish what I started. The other provokes me to get on my horse and “ride like Jehu.” I have enough time, but just enough time, if you get my drift.

I want you to think with me about these similar, yet dissimilar, announcements of Jesus about our *duties* and the *daylight* available to us in which to finish them.

I propose a synthesis of these passages in two simple sound bytes:

1. **Don’t be nervous.** *You’ve got enough time to do what you’re supposed to do, but...*
2. **Don’t be careless.** *You’ve only got enough time to do what you’re supposed to do*

**Don’t be nervous.** *You’ve got enough time to do what you’re supposed to do*

- “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light.” **John 11:9**

The backstory is that Jesus’ disciples were worried about him going back to the place where people had previously threatened his life. He was intent on going to visit his sick friend, Lazarus,

but they were against it. They thought it was way too dangerous, but he assured them that he had enough time to do what he was supposed to do. The Father wasn't going to allow them to crucify him quite yet. *"Doesn't the sun shine for twelve hours? I've got time. No one's going to kill me until it's the right time for it."*

All along his Father had been telling him what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. This case seemed no exception as he was leading Jesus to go to his sick friend Lazarus and raise him up. So when his friends pleaded with him not to risk it, he vetoed their counsel.

I know that Jesus was God's only begotten, but I believe the principle is the same for us who follow in his steps as disciples. Of course our mission isn't in the same league as his, but we're also "on assignment" for a particular God-planned amount of time to do certain God-pleasing things. And since that's true, we should trust that he will give us enough time to complete that assignment. When he intends for us to accomplish some task, he gives us time to do it. Makes sense, right?

Wiget's Free Translation --- *"Don't worry about it, I've got time before they take me. I'm not worried about it. There's plenty of daylight left for me to do what I'm supposed to do. The Father is working all this out and giving me the time I need to finish what I started."*

You've got to love his serenity, not just about his inevitable death, but about his limited amount of time to do all that the Father wanted him to do! He, who lived the most important life in history, and yet lived such a brief span of time, was at peace with it.

This gives me hope that I have enough time to do whatever it is that I'm supposed to do. (I didn't say, everything I *want* to do, unless we're talking about my wants running parallel to his.) I believe the Sovereign will give me every *minute* (the kind that includes 60 seconds) that I need to accomplish every *minute* (the one that sounds like "my newt") thing he wants me to do.

I'm comforted that he has my days counted and logged somewhere. (If we can back up our digital data on "The Cloud," I assume he has some safe and remote location in the clouds for his records.) Though I'm not privy to that number of days or the location where the number is kept, I'm content knowing that he knows these things. He'll give me enough time to finish my assignment here – definitely no less and probably no more (but we'll talk about that later).

### **Sometimes we go into overtime**

There's another piece of this story – the main storyline itself, actually – that presents yet another possibility about me (and you) having enough time to do God's will. His friend Lazarus was sick, and instead of hopping on the most fleet-footed camel to Bethany, Jesus intentionally waited two more days to go to visit him. Some versions even say, *"He heard that Lazarus was sick, therefore he waited two more days."* Though it wasn't immediately apparent to those around him, he had a *method* to what seemed more like *madness*. He knew that the Father had things in hand and that he still had time to do what he was supposed to do.

By the time he got there Lazarus had been in full rigor for at least four days. His sisters were well into their grieving when Jesus finally showed up. They expressed their disappointment that he was late, too late. *"If you'd been here earlier my brother wouldn't have died,"* they moaned in succession. But Jesus wasn't late. There was a perfect time for him to arrive in Bethany and call his friend out of his tomb, and that time hadn't yet passed. There may be a "bad odor," but there's still time, and for God's glory he delayed until that perfect time. You couldn't have convinced his sisters of it, but for Lazarus, the sun hadn't actually set. The coroner had long since pronounced him doornail dead, but on God's clock there was still time to spare.

As much as the Lazarus-raising was a mercy miracle, it was also an overtime miracle. The official clock had run completely down for Lazarus. Regulation time had run out, but since God had other plans for how this game was supposed to conclude, he sent it into overtime! Of course, this was an opportunity for Jesus to show his authority over death, but my guess it also had something to do with Lazarus needing more time to finish his own work. He still had things to do on earth before setting up permanent residence in heaven.

We only have record of Jesus raising three dead people, all of which, eventually died again at some later date. As such, these were more like "resuscitations" than resurrections. But in addition to the Son of God showing the world that he has authority over death, he gave these three an *overtime* to finish their purpose here on earth. I don't know what Lazarus had yet to do, but Jesus gave him more time to do it! One wonders how often God postpones or overturns our dying in order to give us the time we need to finish our assignments. Probably more often than we suspect.

For Lazarus the clock had run down to zero and the buzzer had sounded. It seemed like all hope was way out the window – the game was over. The fans of *Death and Darkness* were cheering and pouring out of the stands and onto the field. The Referee interrupted the celebration and put the game into overtime. What seemed final was only temporary, miraculously the clock had time on it again, during which the *Team of Life and Light* scored the winning touchdown! *"Lazarus come out!"* The fans of *the winning team* flooded onto the field in victory.

That's how God gets his wins sometimes – in overtime! His miracles extend the usual. When the time is right he sets up overtime victories. He doesn't always do it this way, but picks his spots for such dramatics. Maybe it's because his overtime wins are more memorable. He shows up late (so called) and by the time he's finished doing whatever it is that he does, late seems right on time.

One time he even made time stand still. The earth stopped revolving while he kept the sun in noon-position long enough for his army to win their battle (Joshua 10). But his most famous overtime win was, well you know what it was... Hope was dead, all was lost, hell had won – but wait! *"Wasn't that the stone they put in front of the cave three days ago?"*

Sometimes he takes his time and then some. He waits longer than we'd hoped, lets our life situation degenerate to desperation, until he transforms it for his glory and for our good. He lets

the clock run all the way out, but then takes the game into overtime – another outrageous win for the God Team!

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I have things I feel called by God to accomplish in this place before being transferred to the better place. The confused cells in my blood threaten to cut short the lifespan I previously had in mind, but because I know that he gives us a full “twelve hours of daylight,” my fears and frustrations are calmed. Even when the twelve hours are up and our normal life expectancy is exhausted, sometimes he heals the sick or even raises the dead – taking us into overtime!

The takeaway is not that we’re to *take our time* in doing what we’re supposed to do, but rather *take God’s time into account* while we’re trying to get it all done. It’s not as though we have all the time in the world (not in this world, anyway). Both this world and the next have their own unique clocks, calendars, and time zones. We can’t quite synchronize our watches with the other place per se, but we can and should keep our eye on the keeper of the clock and trust that he will give us enough time to finish our game.

So, there are “*twelve hours of daylight*,” so ***don’t be nervous***, you’ve got enough time to do what you’re supposed to do. On the other hand, ***don’t be careless***, you’ve got just enough time to do what you’re supposed to do.

**Don’t be careless. You’ve got just enough time to do what you’re supposed to do**

- **John 12:35** *“You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.”*

*“You don’t know if you’re going to live long enough to slow down ... and discover the truth of your spiritual identity. You may not be destined to live a long life; you may not have 60 more years to discover and claim your own deepest truth ... you have to live every day as if it’s your last, because one of these days, you’re bound to be right.”* **Anne Lamott to Cal grads the Spring of 2011**

If you tend toward being, as my dad used to say, “nervous in the service,” you might want to rest yourself a bit more in the theme of the previous section. If you’re more likely to be asthmatic with anxiety than comatose with carelessness, you might want to review that lesson before moving on to this one. You’ve got twelve hours of “daylight” in which to finish your work here on earth, so unload the world’s problems off your shoulders and not be in such a hurry through your life.

You feel better, right? Good. That’s what I was hoping. Inhale grace and exhale angst.

Now let’s talk about the opposite extreme. If you’re given to dragging your feet through life, remember that you don’t have forever to fulfill your assignment down here. Yes, you have

twelve hours, but *only* twelve hours. The sun will go down at the proper time. Daylight is not interminable. The next world is the timeless one not this one. There's a reason this one has clocks and calendars.

You have enough time, but if I get his drift in the verses above, it's *just* enough time. We have to walk while it's light, because darkness is on its way. That is, if you're going to get done all you're supposed to get done, you'll need to get out of granny gear, shift into second, pop the clutch, hit the gas, and go!

I know *nervous Christians* – the sort addressed above – so constantly clenched with guilt they don't make pleasant company. They can't ever seem to *unplug*. I'm quite personally acquainted with the type, if you know what I mean. *I* didn't even like me when I was like that! On the other hand, my *careless Christian* friends can't ever seem to get *plugged in*. They drag their feet like the sun was going to stay directly above them up forever. I guess they think there's plenty of time to begin making their contribution to the world and never just quite get around to it. They might as well photocopy last New Year's resolutions. It's to those precious procrastinators that I now speak.

One day during the prequel part of my life, the part before getting acquainted with Jesus, my friends and I hiked Mount Lassen to watch the sunset. We'd heard that it was spectacular from up there but we were mostly looking forward to all the pot we were going to smoke at the summit. If scenes from "Dumb and Dumber" should come to your mind, let them, they're entirely appropriate to what happened next. And if, after reading this, you're not dissuaded from pursuing the dooper's life, then you may be Dumber.

Anyway, we made the hike to the top, smoked our fill, oohed and awed at the vibrant din of colors, and embarked on the return hike down. What didn't dawn on our inebriated brains was that along with the descent of the sun would arrive the dark.

*"Wow man. It's dark. Did anyone bring a flashlight?"*

*"Dude, I brought the dope. He brought the snacks. You were in charge of the flashlight."*

What kind of dolts fail to think past the sunset? Stoned ones. You probably figured that at least *I* survived – long enough to tell the story anyway. I can't be certain of all the others since we did a head count down at the car but were never quite in agreement about the original number of hikers.

The point? The sun always goes down. After it rises from its nightly rest and then climbs to its apex in the noonday sky, that's what it does – *it goes down*. Jesus said there's going to be a time when we won't be able to see, when darkness will overtake us. So if you have something you should do, something that requires the light of day, unless you have one of those bright-as-the-sun-after-dark-highway-construction-crew-flood-lights in your trunk, you'd better get it in gear and get it done before it gets too late.

*“As long as it’s day we must work the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work... You are going to have the light just a little while longer.”*

You have time, but not a bottomless quantity of it. You have at your disposal “just a little while,” otherwise quantified as long as a day lasts. We don’t know when, but the due date for our work here on his planet is sooner than later.

The sun won’t stay up forever; it’s just not what it does. So while you can still see where you’re stepping – a sure sign it hasn’t gone down yet – get out of your Lazyboy and get to work. If you don’t want to be bumping around down a treacherous trail after dusk, you’d better get a move on.

*“Another reason for right living is that you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for the coming of our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here.” **Romans 13:11-12** (NLT)*

Not only is our time limited; it’s running out, and right now it’s later than it’s ever been! Paul used the same metaphor that Jesus did, but in reverse. Instead of *the day* being nearly over, it’s *the night* that’s almost spent. His point was the same though – don’t be lazy and don’t procrastinate. You only have so much time to find and finish your work to make God’s earth a better place.

Though unaware that his life would last only twenty-nine years, missionary David Brainerd wrote in his journal, *“Oh, that I might never loiter on my heavenly journey!”* If you’re familiar with the story of this godly man, you know that he wasn’t one to “loiter.” He gave everything he had all the time for his entire life, as brief as it was.

If anyone was aware that his time here was limited it was Jesus. He knew what was coming and had a mounting awareness that “his hour” would arrive sooner than later. In hopes of preparing his disciples for its imminent inevitability, he spoke of his death frequently in terms of his “hour” or his “time.”

Cancer reminds me that I may well have less time than I used to think I had. In reality, we’re all terminal; our “hour” is unknown to us, and so we’re advised to take full advantage whatever daylight we have left and manage it the wisest way. The membrane between this world and the next is so thin it’s almost translucent, therefore, before it tears, we should follow the Lord of both worlds as closely as we possibly can. On the other side, time doesn’t seem to be an issue, but here the clocks tick every second and calendar pages turn over every month.

*“Be careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” **Ephesians 5:15-17***

As the Maker’s offspring, even our minutes matter. We must be resolute about maximizing our moments for his pleasure and leaving this a better place than we found it.

Nevertheless, contrary to some sermons I've heard (and might've given the impression in a few of my own), his goal isn't to make us *busy*. Have you seen the bumper sticker, "*Jesus is coming soon. Look busy!*"? As a constant reminder, a friend of mine displays on his desk a plaque that says, "*Beware of the barrenness of a busy life.*" It's faithfulness God's looking for, not busyness.

### ***Passion with patience ...***

Many successful marathoners work with a pacesetter, which keeps them from running too fast too early, and too slow for too long. If they burst off the starting line in a dead sprint they won't have the gas to finish well twenty-six miles later. Alternately, if they save too much for the end, they might not have the time to catch up with the frontrunners down the stretch. Life in Jesus is not a *sprint*, but neither is it a *stroll*! If we want to run well and finish well we need a balanced recipe of *passion and patience*.

Some of us, adrenalized as though on a sugar-high (that we often mistake for pure spiritual impetus), expend too much nervous energy running in circles, trying to manufacture the kingdom rather than letting it come at God's sovereign pace. Others of us conserve too much energy for way too long. What are we conserving it for? The finish line is in sight. If we want to break the tape, rather than trip over the winners' podium after the medals have long since been awarded and the national anthems already sung, we'd better make a run for it!

Among us are both *nervous overachievers* and *careless underachievers*. We have to find that pace in between – where we know when to slow it down and where to speed it up, a medium between the two (a non-mediocre medium) – a pace equally full of passion as well as of patience.

### **Here's an edited piece of my journal from July 2009**

*Lord, help me to use all of my daylight for finding and fulfilling the purpose for which I still have breath in my aging lungs. While the sun's still up, remind me not to languish in the light, sunbathing. At the same time, help me avoid being tense – leaving you behind and making me unpleasant to the very people I hope to influence toward you.*

*I can't tell what leg of the race I'm currently in; I only want to go as fast or as slowly as you'd have me go, running next to you – my Pacesetter. Mercifully enable me to do what I'm supposed to do when I'm supposed to do it. Give me passion to run like the wind and patience when your wind is a gentle breeze.*

### **Work till the sun goes down...**

**John 9:4** *"As long as it's day we must work the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work."*

In Jesus' day when the sun went down they went to bed. They didn't get cable in Galilee, so what was there to do at night but sleep? When they saw dusk arriving it was time to wrap up the day's labor, eat supper, and take their rest. There was no working late at the office, so if you didn't finish, you were out of luck, at least for the day.

Jesus used the twelve-hours of daylight as a metaphor for how much time his apprentices had with him onboard to show them how to do the work that God had assigned to them. For them, it was a matter of months, not years before he would leave them to the work. In our case, it's our lifetime, however long it might be, that corresponds to the period of time the sun shines in one day. The bottom-line is, we don't have much time to get our work done. Whether it's days, months, or years; span of time here is limited.

The work to which he referred in their case was to make a blind man see. The disciples delayed the work with debate – *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* This is a favorite Christian delay tactic. We waste all kinds of time and energy with case studies where we treat people more like lab rats than ones stamped with the divine. We tend to be more concerned about the *theological problem* than our *neighbor's problem*. We set up committees to analyze issues to death – “the paralysis of our analysis” – and often never get around to doing anything about them. If we're not studying the problems of the world, we're dissecting the Word, and never quite get the two (the world and the Word) close enough to each other for the one to impact the other. But Jesus came to *solve* problems, not *study* them. He spit, mixed it with earth, said, *“We don't have time for this!”* and helped the man who was right in front of them listening to the debate about him.

I wonder if the time-consuming theologizing and analyzing belongs *after*, rather than instead of, meeting the needs of others. We could put on our suits and ties and argue causes for poverty or social disintegration, or we could put on our work clothes and do something about it. *“It's getting dark, guys! Do you want to talk about it, or fix it?”*

I also wonder if Jesus used saliva-soaked mud for his miracle in order to take it even further out of the realm of explanations and theories. It just worked, and that's all the man cared about when they interrogated him: “Who was he? Where did he go?” How it worked, why it worked, will it work again? He didn't care. It worked! His focus was on the effectiveness of the work, not the method, the method that Jesus got from the Spirit at the time, I'm sure. In my opinion, another time-waster is what they call “strategic planning.” While there might be some merit to it, how we go about doing God's work is not in the same universe of importance as that we *do it!*

The man's testimony is well known, *“All I know is, I used to be blind and lost, and now I'm not!”* If you're waiting till you know more before you'll get to work for him, you might be waiting longer than you've got. In my experience, God tends to let us know more when we use what we already know.

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They say that when it's all said and done there's usually more said than done. I sincerely hope that in your case and mine, this won't be true. I trust that we'll do more than we say with the *just enough time* we have to do it.