

As we begin this five week series on holistic stewardship - I think it would be helpful for us to begin with a working definition of stewardship. For many people, the only thing that pops into their minds when they think of stewardship is the church asking for money. And while it is helpful to know pledges for the next year - and we will have a week talking about stewarding our finances, stewardship is about so much more. It is rooted in an old English version of a butler<sup>1</sup> - an official keeper of a house - that is not theirs, but is tended by them - the traditions, standards, and stories of the house are kept by the steward. And so I invite you to a working definition of a faithful steward - as one who uses the resource it has, so that the resource does what it should do. One who uses the resource it has, so that the resource does what it should do.

In this series, I hope we can consider a broad variety of resources - and how we are faithfully stewarding them. Things like our work, our community and relationships, and today - our time.

Our experience of time is complex. An hour spent doing something we love, passes in the blink of an eye. 15 minutes of something that bores us can drag on for hours. Think about your experience of lockdown during the height of the pandemic - does it feel both like a lifetime ago and also like it just ended? The same is true for other major events in our life: births, deaths, marriages, graduations... “[Time is] a big ball of wibbly-wobbly, timey-wimey...stuff”, as the Doctor says.

We experience time as a gift - but it often also feels short - and none of us know how much we get. Psalm 90 reminds us poignantly of God’s eternity - the expansive reality of everlasting to everlasting is beyond our full comprehension. Even God experiences time differently than we do - a thousand years is like a day or a single watch in the night. Which is contrasted with our mortality - the grass that is renewed in the morning, withers in the evening. There is no question - our time is limited. It is a resource in need of stewardship.

I feel like all of us have been part of a stewardship series where we are asked to look at your checkbook as if it is a theological document - a reflection of your priorities, values, and beliefs. What if you were to look at your calendar this way? How do you spend your time? Does your calendar reflect your priorities - your values - your beliefs?

Is there space for the holy? Places where you choose attentiveness? Is there sabbath? Time when you are able to step out of the rat race and know that you actually don’t run the world? A place for perspective and hope that God’s grace might be with you - even if the dishes are still waiting?

Or is there just not enough time?

I confess that I can be a bit of a time management junkie. I choose to read books about such things. I am on an email list for a blog that focuses on time management and productivity. I even fan-girled the writer of the blog at the airport in Philly one time. And she was incredibly gracious and funny and wonderful. Ben will tell you that sometimes he receives

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<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction of Beyond the Offering plate, Adam Copeland suggests these comparisons.

not so subtle emails from me about bundling tasks, tracking your time, or setting timers to keep your focus. When I feel most out of control, it is strangely comforting to me to make a to-do list and study my calendar and tell myself that I really can achieve that elusive work-life balance if I'm just rigid enough.

In the essay she wrote for *Beyond the Offering Plate* - the book we are using to guide this series, Maryann McKibben Dana invites me - and all of us, beyond a vision of stewardship of time based on chasing balance. Think of a ballerina, she says. Standing gracefully en pointe (en pwent). Perfectly balanced on the tips of toes. Balance is beautiful to watch - but [real life] is too fluid, chaotic even, for balance. Whole-heartedness is better, she says - being present to the task - to the time at hand.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes invites us in that direction as well. It reminds us that there is a season - a time - for everything. And so perhaps good stewardship of time is about discerning - or figuring out - what time it is. Because even though Psalm 90 reminded us of our mortality - it also contains in it the plea - the hope - for what we do to have meaning - for it to last. Prosper the work of our hands, the Psalmist cries. Similarly, in Ecclesiastes we hear this hope echoed. It is the gift of God to eat and drink and take pleasure in our toil. A gift to be present in the life we have.

Which is not to say that all time is easy or happy. Quite the opposite - Ecclesiastes honestly names that there is time for mourning and death and tearing. Everything is not cheerful. But there can be a gift to approaching life with an openness to where you are. Sometimes we can feel less constricted by the difficult times, if we simply allow ourselves to feel them - to be in them for the time that they are.

When we were doing Bible Study this week, Mary shared about a journalist friend of hers who got stuck in a traffic jam on his way to cover a story. He could not change his situation. He was going to be late whether he got angry and blew his car horn repeatedly, or whether he sat back and listened to his favorite music. He chose to listen to his music - fully present where he was - even when it wasn't time he was choosing. This feels like a good stewardship of time to me.

Think about your life. What time is it? Is it time for you to rest? To renew? Can you embrace that time without shame - or feeling like you should do more?

Is it a time of mourning? A time where loss weighs heavy? Can you be in that - and not be guilty or feel like you are asking too much of those around you?

Is it time for you to work? To tend to others around you? To volunteer your gifts? To serve or to give? Can you welcome this time in your life?

Is it time to dance? To laugh with abandon? To let go of what others think and be fully alive? Is that a time you can seize?

What time is it?