

Di122 Essentials of Christianity

Lesson Di122-24 Christian Stewardship: Time

It might seem strange, but God, the one who has no beginning and no end, who dwells outside of time, is still concerned about how we spend our time. Moses makes that clear in the first and second chapters of Genesis. The heavens and the earth were completed in just six days. “Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done” (Gen 2:3).

This is the last of three lessons on Christian stewardship. Just as our material resources are a gift from God, our time is his gift to us too. We have discussed that God wants us to give tithes and offerings of our chickens, our harvest, or the money we earn. This lesson considers giving portions of our time to honor God and to expand his kingdom. The bare minimum is to set aside one day of the week to spend in worship and praise to God, and to rest from work. In fact, the fourth commandment God gave to Moses was to “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Ex 20:8), because God himself rested on the seventh day.

Abraham, called ‘God’s friend,’ is a Bible example of someone who gave himself and his time to God. You cannot become the friend of anyone unless you spend time with them. You won’t understand someone unless you take time to speak and to listen to each other.

When God asked Abraham to leave his home, he “obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Heb 11:8). As Abraham moved to each new place, he would build a new altar, where he would worship God. Though God’s promise to give him a son was not fulfilled for a long time, he continued to pray and to trust God. When Lot, his nephew, was in great danger because of God’s coming judgment, Abraham interceded for him. God still destroyed Sodom, but he delivered Lot and his family.

When Isaac was born to them in their old age, Abraham and Sarah rejoiced. Years later God asked him to give Isaac as a burnt offering, so Abraham obeyed and trusted God again. At the last moment God spared Isaac. These and other miracles would not have happened without Abraham’s trusting and waiting upon God. In the process the lives of many people were influenced for God. All this took place because Abraham spent time with his friend, Yahweh. A verse that summarizes Abraham’s life, says, “Abraham believed the Lord [Yahweh] and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

Jesus, when he was on earth, offered guidance about time and our service to God and others. Before Jesus called the 12 disciples, he went to a mountainside to pray. He spent the night praying to his Father. When morning came he called his disciples to him. “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14). The call, first of all, was “to be with him.” Jesus was asking them to give him all of their time. They needed to spend time getting to know his ways before they could be sent out to do his work. Jesus needed their help. To become the kind of helpers Jesus needed, however, would take large amounts of their time. This fact is still true today; only spending time with Jesus and his words will make us into

effective disciples. God still calls some to be in more full-time ministry and others to bivocational ministry. Still others he calls to witness as they go about every task in whatever path he has directed their lives.

Perhaps one of the most difficult times for Jesus was when his cousin, John the Baptist, was beheaded in prison. The Twelve had just returned from their first time of ministry without Jesus. They reported to him all they had done and taught. They were all saddened by the news about John. “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place” (Mark 6:30-31). It is possible for God’s servants to be so dedicated that they neglect their own rest and nourishment. Rather than not giving God enough time, they try to give too much. Christ’s example shows us a balance between ministry, rest, and taking care of ourselves physically and spiritually. He and his disciples needed time to grieve and to be comforted by the Holy Spirit.

What actually happened was that the crowds watched the boat going across the sea and followed. Seeing the multitude, Jesus had compassion on them, healed their sick, and began teaching them. By this time it was late in the day, so Jesus fed more than 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Only after the crowd left, was Jesus able to go up on the mountainside by himself to pray. The rewards of this ministry were many, but they all required the time of the disciples. They were learning what it meant to follow the master, Jesus and to be comforted and refreshed by the Spirit.

Jesus also told several parables about servants—their time and their duties. In one story some servants were left to take care of their master’s property. These servants can be compared to Christians today, who are obeying the master and waiting for his return. The servants were left with different amounts of gold, vineyards, houses and even other servants to care for. Those who took the time to do the master’s will fully were greatly rewarded. Those who failed to pay attention and give their time to the master’s work were punished severely.

One such story concludes this way: “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 24:45-51). The faithful servant in this story was the one who used his time wisely to provide the basic needs of people at the right time. This servant was not focused on his own needs or desires, but the needs the master had clearly shown him among the people under his care. As spiritual leaders, we must be faithful shepherds in caring for the ‘sheep’ that God gives us to lead.

After Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, his followers instituted worship on the first day instead of the seventh. Taking a “Sabbath rest”—one day a week to honor God and rest from labor—is still very important to God’s people today.

Perhaps this teaching about the stewardship of time can be concluded with the words of Paul: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:1-2, KJV). Paul admonishes us to present our hearts, our minds, and our will as living sacrifices to God. This offering of one’s time and very self is our service—our act of worship. Those controlled by this world are only concerned for themselves. As transformed people we want to do the will of God. We place our time and our lives at his disposal. He wants to work through us to reach the lost and disciple the found.

This lesson is **important** because it reminds us about how important time is to God and that we must use our time wisely. Jesus taught by his example, how we should set our priorities. If God’s Son felt the need to spend time with the Father, how much more should we? He expects us to be good stewards of the time he gives us.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we all have received the gift of time. This gift is to be used to know Jesus better and to share his love and compassion with others. It is required that we be found faithful, should Jesus come back for us today or should we suddenly be called to meet him in death. We strive to say as Jesus did, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Your **review** questions are:

1. Why was Abraham called the “friend of God”?
 - A. If you said that Abraham was called the “friend of God” because he is an example of someone who gave himself and his time to God, you answered correctly.
2. When Jesus called the 12 disciples to follow him, what was he really saying?
 - A. If you answered that Jesus was really saying he wanted the disciples to spend their time with him and learn from him, you are right.
3. How did Jesus describe a faithful servant in the parable of the faithful servant?
 - A. If you said that, according to Jesus, a faithful servant is one who is found obeying his master’s instructions when the master returns, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to the lesson several times. Then go tell someone about how God views the stewardship of our time for his purposes. Tell about how Abraham the “friend of God” used his time so that God could accomplish much through his life. Pray with the person, asking God’s help and direction to be able to use his time for God’s purposes.

Memorize these scripture verses:

Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

Romans 12:1-2, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:1-2, KJV).