

Faithful Stewardship of Time (Part 1)

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Preacher: Fred Stone

- [0 : 00] Good job. Thank you, Derek and Amy. Derek has never looked better, has he, than to have Amy up here with him and not have that bow tie on too.
- What time is it? 1050. Thank you very much, Jake. And just as in the first service, he is a week early.
- Because I'm not talking about that kind of time. We're going to look at that kind of time next week. What time is it in your life? What is the season that you find yourself in right now?
- What season of life is it? Last year when we looked at the book of Ecclesiastes, I used as sort of, it was a chart, an example of looking at our lives in terms of the four quarters of a football game.
- And when I put that on the screen and talked about that, I had more comments. I had more requests for that chart than anything I've ever done in this church. So I want to use it again to kick off this message this morning.
- [1 : 15] We're going to begin to think about our stewardship of time. Managing our time. And next week it will be more about the hours in our day, the days in our week, the weeks of the month, the months of the year, that kind of time.
- But today I want us to think about time in terms of a season of life. And we're all in one. To use the football analogy, the first quarter would be birth through 20 years old.
- That's when you're growing up. That's when you're learning about life. That's when you're exploring a lot of things about who you are, what life's all about.
- Well, the second quarter, we'll call that ages 21 through 40. That's when you start finding your place. And it's important if you're in that season of life, start finding your place.
- That's when you start looking for and finding your mate. For a lot of us in this room, when we entered that quarter, we were already or getting ready to get married.
- [2 : 34] That's when we start having children, adding to our family. That's when we start maturing.
- And for some people, it may need to be emphasized, that's the time to mature, to grow up in the second quarter of life.
- Then if we live, we enter the third quarter, ages 41 through 60. That's when you're established. That's when you are hopefully focused.
- You know who it is God's made you. You're on the path that he's put you on, family-wise, vocationally, the way you're serving him.
- Those are the years your children are going to grow up and move on, hopefully. And you'll have an empty nest.
- [3 : 35] And those can be great years. The third quarter of life, there's just a lot of positives about it. You get grandchildren. Hopefully your children grow up, they move out, but they don't move far away.

And they bring those grandchildren into your life that you get to play with and enjoy life with. But you know, as you get older, in that third quarter of life, toward the end of it especially, a lot of times your parents start having some health issues.

And we need to pay more attention, be more involved, be there to help. Well, if we're still alive, we're going to move into the fourth quarter, ages, we'll call that ages 61 through 80.

That's when most people are going to be closing out their primary career. But a lot of people, and a lot of people in this church, have started a, what might be considered a second career during the fourth quarter of life.

And for a lot of people, it was not a paid career, not a paid change, but one that is very enjoyable. Doing things that you really like, you want to do.

[4 : 57] And you don't have to be paid for it. But it's also a time of adjusting to a slower lifestyle, slower pace of life. For a lot of people, maybe most, that's when your health starts declining.

You go to the doctor more. You're more just susceptible to problems. You're realizing your mortality.

You realize, I'm not getting better. I'm not staying the same. Things are winding down.

And the reality is, we're not going to live forever. And the way your body and just things change, that's one of God's ways of letting you know.

Things are winding down. Well, if you live past 80 in this analogy, you're in overtime. A lot of people in this country today live past 80, so they're in what we're calling overtime.

[6 : 04] But for the overwhelming majority, that is truly a time of winding down, struggling to stay active. That's a time for most, many people, if it hadn't already happened, a spouse dies.

Children may have moved away. And so that, for many people, is a time of increasing loneliness. You can't get out like you used to. It can be a time, usually is a time of decreasing independence.

And then there's ongoing health issues. And surely, when we're in the overtime period, as we're looking at here, if we are just honest with ourselves, we've got to face the fact that death is not that far away.

Seasons of life, we're all in one. I want to encourage you, at the very beginning here, embrace where you are in life.

You can't do anything about it. There may be some of you, you're in the first quarter, and you wish you could move on quickly. Don't wish that. Because it'll be here before you know it.

[7 : 26] Some of us, like me, you look at that chart, it's sort of depressing. I can't believe I'm in the fourth quarter. Just starting the fourth quarter now, in the lower parts of the fourth quarter.

But I want you to think, where are you in your season of life? You can't do a thing in the world about it.

You are there. The only way to get out of it is to die. So embrace where you are in life. Embrace this time, because this is where you are, and this is where you must live.

If you're in the younger quarters, by the grace of God, you'll live, but you're going to move on into another quarter. Now, I want you to think about all the different quarters you have already gone through, or the one you're in.

Think of all the relationships, the emotions, and the experiences that have taken place thus far in your life, in all these quarters.

[8 : 39] The third chapter of Ecclesiastes summarizes all of our experiences and emotions and so forth in the various seasons of life.

I want you to turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter three, and this is just going to be how we begin the message this morning. Chapter three, verses one through eight, is probably the most famous poem ever written on the subject of time.

A time for everything. In Ecclesiastes, chapter three, and let's read verses one through eight. For everything, there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to break down and a time to build up.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.

[9 : 46] A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose. A time to keep and a time to cast away.

A time to tear and a time to sow. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.

The preacher, as the author of Ecclesiastes refers to himself, Solomon, begins by stating the big picture of life and death there in verse 2.

A time to be born and a time to die. The beginning and the ending. And basically in this poem, the rest of the verse describes what happens in between.

The life situations that most of us have experienced or will experience or will at least observe people who do experience them.

[10 : 50] I want you to note how the poem expresses the complexity of life by pointing out the emotions and actions that are polar opposites. Look at it.

Verses 3, 8, and 8. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. But not all seasons of our lives have an opposite that's necessarily good or bad.

Look at this. In verse 3, a time to break down, a time to build up. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to keep silent and a time to speak. Each of those can be good or bad.

It just depends on the situation. This poem shows the complexity of life as well as the variety.

You think about your life, wherever it is, whatever quarter you're in. Think about where you've come from, where you are today.

[11 : 52] In your life, your seasons of life, there's hard times. There's great times. In between times. And then there's just a lot of in between times, isn't there?

Some of the times of our lives, we have no control over. It just happens to us like war. War and peace. But most of what we see in this list, if you just glance at these verses, takes place in a relationship with another person.

Our seasons of life are lived in relationship with other people. And he's bringing that out.

Think about it. He talks about a time to dance. You dance with another person. He talks about a time to laugh.

You laugh with other people. If you laugh too much just all alone, people will start, you know, looking at you funny. You dance with another person.

[13 : 02] You laugh with other people. You mourn the death of people you loved. That's what makes mourning at death.

I mean, there's people who've died this week in Pickens County that you don't have a clue who they were. I don't know who they were. And I don't think about it. But when people die that you knew, that you loved, that you had a relationship, there's mourning, there's grief.

I want you to think. You don't love everybody. We're supposed to. We're supposed to love other people.

Try to meet their needs. Recognize them as persons created in God's image. Things of that matter. But we don't. We struggle with some. And what I'm getting is we don't embrace everybody.

And there's probably someone that you may even hate. And if you don't embrace them or want to embrace them, and you struggle with loving because you sort of hate them, that's a sign of a bad relationship.

[14 : 20] Something has happened to cause you to feel that way. We measure time and seasons of life in this world more by relationships than anything else.

More than the clock or the calendar. I want you to think about your growing up years. Think about the first quarter of your life. I thought about that some this past week.

Not just in reference to this sermon. I've just been thinking about that for some reason. When I think about the first quarter of my life, those growing up years, I think about people. I think about my parents, my grandparents, and other relatives.

I think about friends. People I grew up with. People I played sports with. When I think about the first quarter of my life, it's all about people. Relationships with people.

If you think about the past activities you've been involved in. The work you've done. The sports you've played. Don't you think more about the people that you worked with, that you played with?

[15 : 22] Your coaches, your leaders, your boss. The ones who worked for you. And you do the actual thing. Today, almost every part of our lives involves a relationship.

Today, right now. Almost everything going on in my life involves my family, my church family. And a few other people. Most, everybody in this room, except the guys who are on staff at this church.

You have a family. You're a biological family. You have a church family. And you have a work family. Most everybody. You have classmates. This is my work family and my church family.

And Brian's and Jeff's and Mike's. And so, right now, my life. My season of life. As I just think about what's going on. It's all about people.

It's all about relationships. And when I think about my spiritual life, I don't think about the concept of God.

[16 : 31] When I think about my spiritual life, I think about God as He's revealed Himself in His Word, in Jesus. I think about Him as my Heavenly Father. That I talk to in prayer.

That I, when I read the Bible, I think this is God's Word. This is God's speaking. When I think about Jesus, I don't think about a man who lived in this world and just died on the cross 2,000 years ago.

I think about Jesus. He is the Son of God. He did walk this world. He died on a cross for my sins and He arose. But He's alive right now. And I talk to Him. I think about a relationship with my Heavenly Father and my Lord and Savior Jesus when I think about my spiritual life.

The times and seasons of our lives. The things that matter most in them involve relationships with other people.

Think about it. You only laugh and cry with people. You work and play with people. You live and die with people. Think about this now. We're going to spend eternity with the Lord and with His people.

[17 : 48] That's what heaven is going to be all about. Relationships with God and God's people. Now I want you to think. What are you doing right now to make sure that the people God has placed in your life, what are you doing to make sure that they know the way to spend eternity with the Lord?

And you, if you're a Christian. And all of God's people. I want you to look next is now is the time to take an interest in the spiritual condition of the people we already have relationships with.

I want you to look on the screen at what I hope will be a familiar sight to you. This concentric circle image here. I have shared this on many occasions because I think it's the best way for us to think about.

God has placed individuals, people in our lives that we know, we love, we have relationships with. Who are not Christians for the purpose, one of the reasons for us to influence as Christians, point them to Jesus, and even share the gospel with them so that they'll be saved.

I want you to look there and I want you to think with me, this is going to be real quick. You've heard it before. I hope, I hope you've heard it before. But I want you to think in your life right now.

[19 : 24] Begin in circle one. You begin with self. You've got to be a Christian for this matter. You've got to be living in close fellowship with God, wanting to obey Him, wanting to do what He's told you to do, and sharing the gospel, making disciples, being Jesus' witness.

So you begin with yourself and your own right relationship with God. But I want you to think in your immediate family, people who live with you, parents, children. Think next about other relatives, people that are close to you, kin to you, but maybe they don't just live with you.

Then circle four, think about close friends. Circle five, you have neighbors, coworkers, school friends, people you do things with socially.

Think about acquaintances, people you just casually know, the person who cuts your hair, person who does things to help you around your house maybe.

And then number seven is important, circle seven, person X, the person that God brings into your life for a brief time. Now as you think about the people in your life, I'm sure that a lot of those people are already Christians.

[20 : 42] But they all are not. Maybe by the grace of God, all your relatives, close friends are. But if you look at those seven circles, there's a lot of people in our lives, if we look, if we think, if we notice, they are not Christians.

Think of those individuals as people that God has brought into your life. Probably for many reasons, but one of them is for you to be a witness to.

The first way we're all witnesses is by the way that we live. By us professing to be Christians, coming here, being a member of this church, when people see us and know that, they look at us and think, that's a Christian.

And for many people, they evaluate this whole idea of a relationship with God, Christianity, with what they see in us. And so we are a witness.

We are an influence, for good or bad, to everyone we know, everyone in our circles who knows we are a Christian. And so it is important how we live. It is vitally important that we be people of Christian character, integrity.

[21 : 59] That does matter. But it's not enough because no one's ever going to know how to become a Christian by just looking at us, observing us, even admiring us.

So the second way we're witnesses is by explaining the gospel, talking to people about who Jesus is, what he's done, how they can be rightly related to him by trusting in him.

Don't you think with me? People in those circles who are not Christians, but they know you, they have a relationship with you. They trust you.

They will listen to you. They will allow you to talk to them, if you have a relationship with them, about things that are important to you because they're going to respect you as their friend, as their even acquaintance.

So we need to take advantage of those opportunities, those kind of relationships, to talk with them, ask them questions.

[23 : 04] Let them ask questions of us about our relationship with the Lord, asking them questions about their relationship with the Lord. On the second Sunday of this past January, second Sunday of this year, I preached a message on the importance of all of us building relationships with people in these circles of influence.

And I gave out this to everybody here that day. There are some still available there on that corner and on the table at the back in the vestibule that faces this wall. On one side, the circles of concern, on the other side, an explanation of the gospel.

I want to encourage you to get one of those and let that be a prompt to you to invest in the people in your circles and then learn how to share the gospel. But I encouraged everyone on the second Sunday of this year to make sharing the gospel one of your New Year's resolutions.

On the first Sunday of March this year, I pointed out in a message on God's patience. That if you have unsaved friends or family members in your life, it may be that God is patiently waiting for you to share the gospel with them.

It may be that God is patiently waiting for you to make yourself available to him to use you to influence that person to become a Christian.

[24 : 38] He may not be, but he may be. In that message, I also encourage everyone to ask God to help you to share the gospel with one person you know and love before Easter Sunday.

Which was April the 21st. It was six weeks away at that time. Then on March the 31st of this year, I preached a message with the title, Who is Your One?

And we looked at a passage of scripture, Luke chapter 5, where Matthew, who's also called Levi, Matthew became a follower of Jesus. And shortly after that, he invited his unsaved tax collector, social outcast friends to come to his house.

He threw a party with Jesus there because he wanted to influence his, or he wanted to introduce his friends to Jesus. In that message, I pointed out how J.D. Greer, who's currently the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, pastor of a very large church in Durham, North Carolina.

It's called The Summit. He asked everyone in that large church at the beginning of a year, if they would identify one person in their circles of influence who was not a Christian, and then commit to pray for them and seek opportunities to share the gospel with them.

[26 : 01] That took place at the beginning of 2017, and Greer described what happened at the end of that year. This was in an article written in January of 18. He said, It is not an elaborate or complicated idea, but this simple idea led to our most evangelistically effective year to date.

What an incredible joy it was to have people come up to me at church and say, Pastor, this is my one. He said, they just repeated that phrase throughout the year.

Who's your one? I emphasized back in March that we all need to ask God to help us to identify one person for us to invest in, for their spiritual well-being.

I want to ask four questions about that now. Have you identified one unsaved person in your life to focus on?

Most of you were here in January, in March. Have you identified one unsaved person in your life that you have been focusing on?

[27 : 16] If not, if you have it, you were here, but you didn't, or you weren't here. If not, will you do so now? Will you ask God to help you identify one person?

A family member, a friend, a co-worker, a classmate, that you think is not a Christian? And then number two, have you developed a relationship with them?

Have you been working on developing, growing closer to them in a relationship? If you have, and you've seen progress, thank God because you see him at work.

But if you have been investing in someone, but you just don't think you're getting anywhere, don't give up. Sometimes it takes time, a long time.

And God may just use you here and someone else there. A long time ago, we were living in Seneca, and we had a neighbor that was not a Christian at the time. I got to know him.

[28 : 25] We did things together. And one time I mentioned something about going to church. He just sort of brushed me off. He wasn't rude. He didn't have any problem with me, but he let me know real clearly, no, I don't care to talk about that.

Then some time went by, and at church we had what we call back then a friend day. And I asked him, would you and your family be my and Lisa and our boy's friend at church on such and such Sunday were having this friend day emphasis?

He looked at me and grinned and said, yeah. And he came a few times after that. Then he moved away and we moved away. Years later, one day I got a telephone call and he said, I want you to come to my baptism.

He said, God used you in the process to bring me to faith in Jesus. Over time, over years, God used some person to plant a seed, to water a seed.

And eventually, maybe there were 14 people who influenced him. I don't know. But eventually God saved him. And he was happy to let me know of what God had done in his life.

[29 : 40] And God had used me in a little way. If we'll just work at it, we may be surprised at just how God will use us in certain ways that we don't see any evidence of it now.

But down the road, we see how God used us. The third question. Have you been praying for this person? Have you been praying that God will convict them of their sin, show them their need for Jesus?

Or would you just begin now to pray? You've identified somebody or you make a commitment you will identify someone. You'll work on developing a relationship with them.

But it's not just about you. You're not the one who's going to save them or change them. It's God, so you need to pray and ask him to do that. To work in your life, to work in their life. And then number four, have you shared the gospel with them?

Some of you were here in January and March. We've gone through this. We've talked about this. Some of you made a commitment. Some of you have talked about your one. I've heard some thoughts, some comments.

[30 : 46] But I want to ask you, have you shared the gospel? It's important to identify someone, to pray for them, to develop a relationship with them, to love them.

But sooner or later, if you're really going to be a faithful witness of the Lord, you've got to share the gospel with them. And I want to encourage you to ask God to help you to be prepared and then seize the opportunity when he does.

Just do it. You know, there's only three weeks from, we're only three weeks away from December. Can you believe that? We're only six and a half weeks from Christmas. Many people who are not Christians will attend church, or at least think about it, around Christmas time.

Many people who are not Christians, they know that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus. And so they'll be thinking a little bit. They've heard songs. They see advertisements.

Jesus is the reason for the season. So a lot of people are more at least open to your invitation to join you in church during the Christmas season.

[31 : 57] You could invite them to come to your Sunday school class with you, to come to any service here on Sunday morning. You could invite them to some of our special Christmas events, like our musical service on Sunday morning, December the 15th.

Our Christmas on the lawn on Sunday afternoon and evening, the night of December the 15th. Our Christmas Eve service on Christmas Eve at five o'clock.

Let me ask you, who is your one? Or who will you make your one? I don't intend by any means to put you on a guilt trip.

I don't like to be put on a guilt trip. But the reality is this. Every person in your circle of influence is going to die.

And they're going to spend eternity either in heaven or hell. And where they spend eternity depends on whether or not they have a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

[33 : 05] Everybody needs to hear the gospel. Everybody needs to understand that from God's perspective, everybody is born with a sinful nature and naturally does things their way instead of God's way.

Everyone's born into this world with an inclination to just do their own thing. And in the process, we disobey God. We break His laws. And the penalty for that sin is death, is separation from God for all eternity, ultimately.

And that's hell. That's the bad news of the Bible. But the good news of the Bible that people, everyone needs to hear, is that God does love us.

God has shown His grace, His undeserved favor, by sending His Son, Jesus, into this world. And Jesus lived a perfect life and fully obeyed God's law for those who believe in Him.

And Jesus died on the cross as our substitute if we'll trust Him. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, the sins of all who will believe in Him. He arose from the grave, which proves that God accepted His sacrifice.

[34 : 17] And everybody needs to hear this word, this good news, and be challenged to admit their sin, turn from it, change their mind, repent, and trust Jesus wholeheartedly as their Savior and Lord.

Surrender their life to Him. Everybody needs to hear the good news that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The people in your circles, people that you know and love and care about, their eternity depends on how they respond to the gospel, how they respond to Jesus.

What if no one ever explains clearly the gospel to them? You, being involved in their lives, can make sure that doesn't happen by making them your one, building a relationship where they trust you, praying for God to use you, and then sharing the gospel with them as God gives you the opportunity.

And then it's between them and the Lord. You can't save anyone. I can't save anyone. Ecclesiastes assures us, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.

And that includes sharing the gospel. Don't miss out on this time to share the gospel with the unsaved people that God's put into your life.

[36 : 00] If you're not a Christian, don't you miss out on this time for you to respond to the gospel by putting your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of trusting Christ now. I want you to look at this quote from 2 Corinthians. He's quoting the Old Testament. For it says, In a favorable time, I listen to you.

And in the day of salvation, I have helped you. And then he applied it to the Corinthians. Behold, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. Now is the time for us as Christians to get serious about obeying God, identifying our one, and asking God to use us in their lives to draw them to Christ.

Who is your one? Let's pray together. Father, Father, Father,