

Spiritual Procrastination

Physical and Spiritual Procrastination

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“Our God is not what we say we worship, but that which we serve. Our God is who we give our life.”

These are the words of our pastor John Ritenbaugh in a sermon shortly after the feast. He went on to say that, “The Laodicean merely goes through the motions and gives lip service to God. The Laodicean serves God passively, and unless he repents, he has rejected the Kingdom and God through his actions.” John concluded that, “We must seek God diligently and show Him through our actions that we love Him.”

Do we serve God passively? Are we guilty of spiritual procrastination?

Procrastination means we put off what should be done today. Procrastination defined is “to put off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness.”

Spiritual procrastination, then, is to put off doing something that will help us build our godly character and thereby glorify God.

Let us face it, we all procrastinate from time to time. Taking out the garbage, washing the dog, cleaning the garage, doing our homework, exercising, doing our taxes, we can all substitute a less than favorable task in the phrase, “I’ll do that later.” But once we get into doing the task, it passes by rather quickly, and we think, “You know, that wasn’t so bad,” and we have a feeling of relief and a sense of accomplishment that we have completed it. This is especially true regarding spiritual procrastination.

How much better do we feel when we have maintained focus on God despite all the distractions in our life? How much better do we feel when we have spent adequate time with God, praying, studying, meditating? How much better do we feel when we have completed a good work for someone in need?

So why then do we procrastinate? The answer is that procrastination keeps us from having to face issues. It allows us to spend time on things that are more fun. It helps us to keep from having to make a decision. It prevents us from having to take moral stands.

But procrastination is in fact a decision. Indecision is a decision. We probably have not thought about it much when we do procrastinate, but what we are saying is that it is not important and/or it can wait. It does not really matter, and/or I will have plenty of time to take care of that later.

In essence, when we procrastinate, we are stating through our actions that something else is more important. When we spiritually procrastinate, then, we are putting things in the world before God. We are telling God that He is not that important, and that we will get to Him later.

A quick study into procrastination reveals three primary reasons why we procrastinate.

- First, we are not committed to doing it.
- Second, we do not place a high enough priority on it and/or we are just plain too busy.
- Third, we are afraid of doing it. Fear of success, fear of failure, fear of finishing.

Satan knows that it would be very difficult for him to convince us that we should not pray, study, meditate. We all know that we should do those things. So he does the next best thing. He convinces us to put off building our spiritual endurance to a later time, and that later time, more often than not, never comes. We put off doing something we know we should do with the best of intentions, but as the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Turn with me to James 1.

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

For Christians in God's church, spiritual procrastination is usually caused by failing to properly prioritize our lives. As such, I will spend the remainder of the sermonette focusing on this cause of procrastination.

It is simply not possible for us to do everything, and our ability to prioritize our lives is the best defense against Satan's ploy of spiritual procrastination. Satan plots to distract us, using the world to imprison our time. It is a subtle attack on our relationship with God, and more often than not, we do not even realize it when we are under attack.

Do we find ourselves often saying, "If I only had more time." Are we too busy to get in shape, too busy to spend time with family and friends, to do good works? Are we too busy to spend adequate time with God?

We live in a world that is busy, full of distractions and a go, go, go, more, more, more mentality. And Satan has convinced this world that faster and bigger is better, and he has all but eliminated the concept of being content with what we have. We are constantly bombarded with advertisements for things we never knew we needed: TV, email, newspapers, magazines all tell of how much greener the grass is for the Joneses.

And you know what? It has worked. Over the past 50 years, priorities and time allocation have shifted from family to an all-out effort to acquire as many things and do as many things as we possibly can. Stay-at-home moms are replaced with the working soccer moms struggling to keep a job and to cart the kids around the various activities. Family dinners are replaced with

fast food pit stops. And meanwhile, dads are left in the office working 50-plus hour workweeks trying to provide for the family and ensure that his kids have the same benefits as the Joneses.

Incidentally, the average American is working now 46 hours a week with 38% or more working 50-plus hours a week, according to a study by the National Sleep Foundation.

So we live in bigger houses and we drive bigger cars. We carry cell phones, laptops, handheld devices all designed to maximize productivity and suck out every last bit of free time that we might have. Our homes are connected to the Internet with high speed connections, and we pay bills online. We communicate online, because we simply do not have time to meet face to face anymore.

And just when we thought the pace of life could not increase any further, Mitsubishi has announced, “The pace of life is speeding up! People are on the go! Mitsubishi Electronic Technologies keep pace with the in-vehicle multimedia designed to create an entirely new vehicle-centered flow of information and entertainment! Obtaining news and traffic information, receiving and sending email, or just searching a restaurant for dinner, Mitsubishi Electronic researches the seamless flow of information between your home, office, and car!”

New technologies help us do more faster, and the demands for increased productivity put more and more pressure on us to keep up with the pace of life in both the work and home environments. And when the day is finally over, we sit down with our heads spinning, and we “veg” out in front of the TV to remind ourselves why we are working so hard and moving so fast. And the TV starts to recharge the go, go, go, more, more, more mentality because it constantly reminds us of what we do not have.

And we do not let a little thing like money deprive us of not getting what is rightly ours. We use credit to provide for our family, which in turn requires us to work harder and increases our stress and pressure.

So how do we overcome the natural pulls of the world and avoid spiritual procrastination? How do we maintain focus on our true purpose? The answer is rather simple, the implementation difficult.

Ready! Aim! Fire!

It has often been said, and is even truer today, that if you are not working your plan, you are working someone else's plan. The lack of a plan does not result in freedom or spontaneity. In fact, it is just the opposite. The lack of planning removes our freedom and our ability to choose. If we fail to aim when shooting a gun (ready, fire), we miss the target.

Likewise, if we do not purposely allocate our time, if we do not create an environment and develop habits that support our own goals and priorities, we are aimlessly traveling through life.

And we should remember that we are disciples, and the word disciples comes from [the word] discipline. And our lives should not be aimless. We have been given the knowledge of God's truth that provides our purpose, and we must aim our lives on God. We simply cannot afford to squander the short time we have here on earth.

Please turn with me to Ephesians 5, verse 15. Here we are instructed to walk in wisdom.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

We must dedicate time to meditate and focus on what is important and remove what is not important from our lives. Unlike God, our time and resources are fixed. There is only one of us, and we only have 24 hours in a day.

We can, however, choose how we spend that time. We can also control the scope of our lives. The scope of our lives is defined as everything that

requires our time and attention. It is God, family, friends, home, car, TV, activities, hobbies, entertainment, etc. That is the scope of our life.

And how do we reduce the scope? Well, first we take an inventory of all the things that require our time and attention. We then estimate how much time we need to be spending in each aspect of our lives.

Let us do an example. How much time do we spend watching TV? Many of us will quickly calculate that we spend a mere one hour a day watching TV, and that is nothing. As an aside, I think we would be surprised if we kept a log at where we spend our time. But for example's sake, let us stay with that one hour a day estimate for TV. Now let us take our 24 hours a day and we will take out eight hours for sleeping. And if we are one of those rare people that get to work only 40 hours a week, we will take out another eight for work, two hours for eating, 30 minutes for getting dressed, and 30 minutes for a commute to work. That leaves us with a measly five hours of flex time. This is time that we get to choose how we spend it. So let us put that one hour TV into perspective. What we are saying is we are allocating 1/5, or 20% of our time, our flex time, to TV.

So we have to ask ourselves, is this time well spent? We must prioritize each aspect of our lives to ensure we are focusing time and attention on the things that are most important to our spiritual lives.

Philippians 1:10 (AMP) so that you may surely learn to sense what is vital, and approve and prize what is excellent and of real value.

As we look to prioritize our lives, we should look for opportunities to simplify our lives. We can ask ourselves questions like, “Do I live in a house that requires too much time? Is my yard so big that I require the Carolina Panthers ground crew to properly maintain it?” “Do I, like most Americans, live beyond my means, which requires me in turn to spend more time at work and accept a job that takes more than 40 hours a week?”

If our scope is too large, if we try to do too much and we do not reduce it, we are forced into procrastinating in at least one area of our life. We will fail to deliver on commitments, neglect our family, complete an activity or a job less inadequately, ignore a friend, or worse yet, ignore God.

We must, as Richard reminded us in his “Be Still” sermon (#442), slow down and take time for self-evaluation; to be still and work on improving things, ourselves, and our relationship with God. It is during this time that we allow God to impress on us His direction for our lives. It is during this time that we can reestablish our focus on what is most important.

As we wrap up, the best of intentions are meaningless to God. As John mentioned, “We serve God by what we *do*, not by what we say.”

Please turn with me to Proverbs 24.

Proverbs 24:30-34 I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

As *Barnes' Notes* explains,

This parable is much deeper than at first glance. The field and the vineyard are more than the man's earthly possessions. His neglect brings barrenness and desolation to the garden of his soul. The thorns are evil habits; habits spent wasting time that choke out the good seed, and the nettles are those that are actually hurtful and offensive to others. The wall is the defense which laws and rules give to inward life and which the sluggard learns to disregard. And finally, poverty is the loss of the true riches of the soul, tranquility and peace and righteousness.

After feeding the 5,000, Christ instructs His disciples to gather up all the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost. This passage shows the care that Jesus took to ensure that nothing was wasted. While He could have the power to provide an infinite quantity of food, He taught us we must not squander anything that has been given to us by God.

Likewise, God has given us our time, and we have the ability to choose when and where we spend it. If we cannot possibly manage our limited time now, how could we possibly manage unlimited time like God?

You can jot down in your notes Luke 16:10.

Earlier I defined procrastination as putting off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness. Carelessness, laziness, passiveness, good intentions: Where have we heard these descriptive words before? These are the same words used time and again to describe the Laodicean.

Spiritual procrastination is in fact a characteristic of the Laodicean. We must always remember when we procrastinate doing good works, praying, studying, meditating, fasting, we are telling God He is not that important and can wait, and He does not really matter, and we will have plenty of time to take care of it later.

As Paul reminded us, we must learn to sense what is vital and prize what is excellent and of real value. We must prioritize our lives so that we not waste time and thereby fall victim to Satan's plot of spiritual procrastination.

Let us close in James 4.

James 4:14-15 Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.