

**TRAPPED IN TIME**  
**A Devotional Meditation from**  
**Ecclesiastes 9:10-12; Luke 12:18-21; Philippians 3:7-16**  
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My grandson came to visit us a few days ago, and for a couple of hours he was my sole responsibility. Time stood still as I allowed him to explore his world in safety. He took no notice of the time. How could he? At eight months of age, he is only now growing accustomed to being alive in a world full of new and wonderful things to discover. Time is not on his list of concerns at present.



Not so with his grandfather. As I rescued fragile objects from his reach, stacked up toys for him to knock down, and played the role of human jungle gym, it occurred to me that my afternoon would not be productive. Once, in my impetuous days as a young father, I would have resented the intrusion on my precious hours. There were things to do, places to go, and people to meet, and caring for a young child interrupted all of that. My time was precious. Every second of it not devoted to productivity as I defined it was a moment forever lost.

But what about those fleeting moments with my young child that would never come again? As a grandparent I now know how precious they are, and how much more important than anything else I could be doing. It took many years to learn that, and considerable help from my daughters. The life of an Army Staff officer is always busy, and there were days the only interaction with my girls was kissing them before dawn when I set off for work, and kissing them at night when I got home just before bedtime.

Eventually, by the grace of God, I realized that it was more important to be a good father to my daughters and a good husband to my wife than to serve a system that excelled at grinding people down. When faced with the choice of losing sleep or missing out on a special memory, I learned that sleep could wait, but my family could not. My years in the Army taught me that everything I did could and would be undone, often much faster than expected. My priorities changed when I realized that six months after leaving the Army, no one would remember what I had done, but decades from now, Rachael will tell her grandchildren that I was a much better writing coach than soccer coach, and Kathryn will tell her grandchildren how she taught me to appreciate modern dance.

When we're young, we simply get frustrated at not having enough time to do what we want. When we get older, we realize what we wanted to do often had very little lasting value. So, we look back on life and wonder whether we have really lived well or not.

If all we're seeking is peace and security on the world's terms, then we will be sadly disappointed. No matter how much money we earn, how much prestige and power we attain, how much property we acquire, or how many credentials we accumulate, we will always find someone who does it better, and we will wonder how we could have failed. In a materialistic existence with no view beyond our present reality, Solomon offers this as his best advice:

Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your all strength, for there is no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom in *Sheol*, where you are going.

I further observed under the sun: The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the mighty, nor does bread come to the wise, or wealth to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; for time and chance befall them all. Moreover, no man knows his time: like fish caught in a fatal net or birds caught in a snare, so people are trapped in a time of calamity, that falls upon them suddenly.

Ecclesiastes 9:10-12 TLV

In other words, enjoy life while you have it. Make the best of this sorrowful existence and find happiness. That's the conclusion of the wealthy farmer in Yeshua's parable. When his land produced a superabundance of crops, he determined that the time had come to live at ease:

And he said, "Here's what I'll do! I'll tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I'll store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'O my soul, you have plenty of goods saved up for many years! So take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry.'" (Luke 12:18-19 TLV)

That's the counsel of this world, but our Creator calls it foolish:

But God said to him, "You fool! Tonight your soul is being demanded back from you! And what you have prepared, whose will that be?" So it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich in God. (Luke 12:20-21 TLV)

Becoming rich in God is an eternal concept. Our Creator has given us our souls, and one day He will require them back from us. The question, then, is not what we have done to amass wealth, status, power, goods, happiness, peace, or anything the world loves, but what we have done for His eternal Kingdom. That's the real test of how well we have used the time He has allotted us.

The question is whether we are doing what God has given us to do with His commission in mind. Whether the work is great or small, we do it to His glory because He has redeemed us and desires our love, which we demonstrate through our obedience. By our life experience we gain the talents to perform the Kingdom tasks placed before us, but none of that experience has any value outside of this Kingdom context. That's what Paul explains in his letter to the Philippians:

But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered as loss for the sake of the Messiah. More than that, I consider all things to be loss in comparison to the surpassing value of the knowledge of Messiah *Yeshua* my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things; and I consider them garbage in order that I might gain Messiah and be found in Him not having my righteousness derived from *Torah*, but one that is through trusting in Messiah—the righteousness from God

based on trust [faith]. My aim is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death—if somehow I might arrive at the resurrection from among the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11 TLV)

Notice that this is Paul the Apostle who says, “if somehow I might arrive at the resurrection.” If anyone should know for certain that he had attained the resurrection, it should be Paul – especially the elderly Paul who wrote these words in captivity in Rome shortly before his death. But this very Paul, in reflecting on his life, goes on to say:

Not that I have already obtained this or been perfected, but I press on if only I might take hold of that for which Messiah *Yeshua* took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself as having taken hold of this. But this one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal for the reward of the upward calling of God in Messiah *Yeshua*. Therefore let all who are mature have this attitude; and if you have a different attitude in anything, this also God will reveal to you. Nevertheless, let us live up to the same standard we have attained. (Philippians 3:12-16 TLV)

This is the proper perspective. The very fact that we question whether we're doing what our Father expects of us is an indicator that we are, and that we're willing to receive correction so we can please Him to a greater degree. It's a very fine line between obedience out of love and performance to obtain promotion. We obey out of renewed hearts informed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Those renewed hearts are the instruments that keep us balanced. When I get discouraged at lack of fruit or results or productivity, I'm reminded that there are seasons when productivity won't reach what the world defines as acceptable. If we have the Kingdom perspective, then we know what we're really doing is choosing life not only for the here and now, but for the ones who follow us.