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Managing Your Time for Significance
December 4, 2014

I recently read about a dad who realized he was so busy that he was missing out on enjoying his children's lives and building life-long, healthy relationships with them. It was certainly not his intention to ignore his children and to crowd them out with his own busyness, but it had happened. His oldest daughter was a sophomore in high school, and he calculated the number of Saturdays that she would still live in his home. It was 143. To mark those 143 weeks, he went and bought 143 marbles and put them in a jar.

Every time a week went by, he would take one marble out. The purpose of the jar was to be reminded of how little time he had left with her. His time with her was scarce. It had always been scarce, and he wanted something that stared him in the face each day that reminded him of just how scarce it was.¹

You might consider this man a wise father. He saw that he was missing out on something significant, and he sought to remedy the situation. His first effort along these lines was to recognize just how scarce a resource time is.

Today, my topic is managing time for significance. So often when we speak of time management, we speak of ways we can do things more efficiently so that we can get even more things done or work fewer hours. While that might be a valid reason to manage our time, my purpose in speaking about time management today is not to find ways to get more done more quickly, but rather to get more done that is of significance.

What if at the end of your life a doctor came to you and said she had developed a new pill. If you don't take it, she says you will die today. If you do take it, you will live for seven more days with complete youthful strength and vigor. My guess is you would take the pill. You would savor the opportunity for a final week of life. The question is what would you do with those days. Would you spend it cleaning out the pantry or the garage? Would you spend it staring at your smart phone to check out the latest news feeds? Would you spend it watching a re-run of a show

you had already seen? Those are rather silly, rhetorical questions. I don't think any of us would spend our time in those ways. And we would not spend our time in those ways because we would have a very keen sense that time is our most precious commodity and is worthy of being spent on only the most important of matters.

Now for most of us, I would hope for all of us, we have more than seven days left, but even if we have 10,000 days left (that is a little more than twenty-seven years) the days we have are still scare. Think of it this way, we can keep accruing more and more wealth right up to the day we die. That wealth can even appreciate after we die. But when we consider the days of our lives we must admit they are a depreciating asset. There will be a day when we will have gone bankrupt in that regard. So it seems to me that if we want to manage our time for significance, a very good place to start is by recognizing that time is a very scarce resource just as the father did who placed the 143 marbles in a jar.

A second valuable point when it comes to managing one's time for significance is to schedule one's values. Theodore Roosevelt loved the outdoors, arguably more than any other U.S. president. As a young boy he learned the art of taxidermy and by age twelve had a significant enough collection of stuffed specimens that a number of them were received by the American Museum of Natural History. Roosevelt continued his love of the outdoors throughout his teen years, and by his early twenties, the Smithsonian gladly accepted 622 more specimens. For Roosevelt the great outdoors mattered, and he wanted to leave his mark by allowing others to appreciate it as well.

But Roosevelt was not a backwoods, naturalist. He grew up in New York City and would eventually become the state's governor before being elected vice-president and taking over the presidency when James McKinley was assassinated. With the pressing matters of his day, ranging from the development of safe food and drug standards, the construction of the Panama Canal, and the breaking up of monopolies, one would think that Roosevelt's love for the great outdoors would go by the wayside. But it didn't. And it didn't because Roosevelt was resolute at scheduling his values. For example in 1903, he went on a national speaking tour, but along the way he purposely set aside time to see some of the country's greatest natural resources. That meant he spent two weeks camping in Yellowstone National Park; visited the

Grand Canyon, and went to Yosemite where he slept under the stars for three nights. It's no surprise then that during his presidency Roosevelt created five national parks, eighteen national monuments, including the Grand Canyon; set aside fifty-one federal bird sanctuaries, four national game refuges, and more than one hundred million acres' worth of national forests.

The frustration we experience in our lives can in large part be attributed to the difference between the values we embrace and the lives that we live.² We become frustrated because deep down we know that something should be attended to or that something is important, and yet the life we live neglects those very things. One answer to this kind of frustration is to schedule our values. Do you value time with family or friends? Then schedule those times in. Consider those times a meeting that cannot be missed. Do you value being able to help those who may be going through hard times? Then calendar in times you will serve those people rather being ruled by the urgency of any given day. A corporate vice-president was struggling in his relationship with his wife and his children. He kept assuring his pastor that he loved his wife and kids. Finally, the pastor interrupted him and said, "The problem is you love your family with your heart, but you don't love them with your schedule. And they can't see your heart."³ And the same can be true with any of our values. People can't see them if they are only in our hearts. They can only see when they are expressed in our schedules.

Now, you might say the idea of scheduling one's values is all well and good, but that sounds like you're adding one more thing to my plate. I can understand your angst, and so that brings me to the third point as to how to manage your time for significance: you must learn to say no to a lot of little things in order to say yes to a few big things.⁴ One of the things I am frequently impressed about those who attend BridgePoint is the ways in which they serve in the community. They are involved on the boards of non-profits. They are serving at-risk youth. They are volunteering in the prison system. They are serving on their local PTA and for HOAs. They are coaching baseball and football teams and helping people get on their feet after a lifetime of addictions. And many of them are engaged in something at this church as well. I think this is wonderful, but I cannot tell you how many people (and I must include myself among that number) who have put their hands in so many pots

that they have either worn themselves out or discovered they aren't adding much to any one activity.

Last month Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg had his first-ever public Q&A session. He was asked a wide variety of questions like: Why did Facebook force its users to install the Messenger app? Or, how did you overcome the obstacles you faced in building Facebook? But his answer to one rather more personal question—"Why do you wear the same grey t-shirt every day?"—is what garnered the most interest. Do a google image search on Zuckerberg and you will find that in a majority of the photos he is wearing a grey t-shirt. I would imagine that many people expected a light-hearted reply from Zuckerberg in regards to his grey t-shirt, but instead his response was rather thought-provoking.

He said, "I really want to clear my life to make it so that I have to make as few decisions as possible about anything except how to best serve this community. . . . I'm in this really lucky position, where I get to wake up every day and help serve more than a billion people. And I feel like I'm not doing my job if I spend any of my energy on things that are silly or frivolous about my life."⁵

Now, I am sure that many would argue whether it is really that draining a choice to choose a different color shirt on some days, but it seems to me that Zuckerberg's philosophy is not that bad. He has decided to say a big yes to serving the people that make up the Facebook community, but to make that possible he has said no to little things like worrying about the color of the shirt he will wear.

I would guess that nearly everyone here wants to lead a life of significance, not one that is just frittered away. And it seems to me that if we treat time as a scarce commodity, schedule our values, and say no to little things so we can say yes to the big things, we can do a great deal to manage our time well for significance.

¹ Craig Groeschel, "25/8" in *Catalyst One Day Leadership Essentials* (2014), 15.

² Craig Groeschel, "It's About Time" in *Catalyst One Day Leadership Essentials* (2014), 6.

³ Andy Stanley, *Choosing to Cheat: Who Wins When Family and Work Collide* (2002), 48.

⁴ Craig Groeschel, "It's About Time" in *Catalyst One Day Leadership Essentials* (2014), 6.

⁵ Eugene Kim, "[Here's the Real Reason Mark Zuckerberg Wears the Same T-Shirt Every Day](#)," *Business Insider* (November 6, 2014).

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