

TRUTH FOR TODAY

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HOW SHORT MY TIME IS

I grew up in Northwest Tennessee, out in the country. Where we lived, television reception wasn't much. On a good day, we were only able to get three television stations, as cable and satellite services were light years away from our neck of the woods. Back then, we had an antenna you had to turn by hand. I, being the only boy in the family, served as antenna-turner. It was a dreaded task anytime, but especially so in the winter and doubly so at night in the dark. The metal antenna pole was so cold you were sure your hands would freeze to it!

Oddly enough, it seems television programming then with only three channels was a lot better than the hundreds of channels now available. One show that I particularly enjoyed watching was *The Twilight Zone*. While Dad and Mom didn't care much for it, we watched it anyway. Some of those episodes were downright scary, especially the one with the gremlin right outside the airplane window. I didn't sleep for a week after it aired - and did not want to rotate the antenna either! Some episodes weren't frightening, but all had an ironic twist at the end. Such was true of the episode that concerned time, titled "Time Enough at Last."

"Time Enough at Last" was a story about a bank clerk (Henry Bemis) who loved to read. Reading was more than a hobby or passion to him - it consumed his life. The poor, terribly near-sighted man was forever trying to find time to read. With his thick coke-bottle glasses he would try reading on the job, but his boss would catch him and threaten to fire him. He would try to read at home, but his wife wouldn't let him. She would snatch his newspaper away and tear up his books! He became so desperate he started reading the labels on the condiment bottles until his wife took those from him too. The henpecked bookworm never had time to read!

One day, on his lunch break at the bank, Bemis snuck down to the bank vault in the basement. He read and read during his lunch break but was suddenly interrupted by an intense explosion - the building shook so violently Bemis was hurled to the floor. Gathering his senses, he made his way to the door and opened it, only to find everything destroyed and everyone dead. He walked through the ruins of the town to his house, which was in shambles. Bemis realized a nuclear holocaust had taken place, and that what saved him was his being in the bank vault. He wandered through the town, and found enough food to last him the rest of his life. The only problem was loneliness - there was simply nothing to do.

Bemis was so despondent he was at the point of taking his life - until he saw across the street the ruins of the city library. He climbed over the ruins, and found books in perfectly good condition. He was like a kid in a candy store, beside himself with joy! He arranged several piles of collections of books, including works of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Frost. Elated, he now knew what he could do with his time; he could spend the rest of his life reading these works without interruption and bother. He had “time enough at last”!

Bemis bent over to examine more closely another book, and of all things, he stumbled - his reading glasses fell off and broke. He couldn't see anything - he couldn't read a single word on a page. The episode ending with him crying, “*It's not fair!*”¹ Here's a man who thought he had all the time in the world, but he was sadly mistaken.

Of course, all of that is just Hollywood, and fiction. But aren't we a bit like Henry Bemis at times? Don't we live as if we have all the time in the world, and forget how brief the time is that we do have?

Our subject for thought concerns time - something that applies to us all. We live in time,

and measure life by time in years, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds. We plan our lives around time, make appointments by it, and organize our schedules by it. So ours - no pun intended - is a timely subject!

In this and subsequent articles, we want to look at how we view time, how we treat time, and some different perspectives on time. Then, we want to take a Scripture safari, looking at some Biblical characters who remembered the brevity of time. On that same Biblical excursion, we'll look at some individuals mentioned in Scripture who ignored time's transient nature. Finally, we'll wrap up noting some reasons why we should remember how short our time is.

HOW WE VIEW TIME, HOW WE TREAT TIME

Far too many of us are guilty of wasting time. Ask some the question, "What are you doing?" - their response? "I'm just killing time." Perhaps we've all been guilty of that crime, forgetting that time is a precious commodity indeed, far too important to "waste" or "kill." Benjamin Franklin said, "Do not waste time, for it is the stuff life is made of."² Another remarked, "When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection."³ Time is something that - when it is gone - you can't get it back!

Back in the early 1970's singer-songwriter Jim Croce sang the song "Time in a Bottle:"

"If I could save time in a bottle,

The first thing that I'd like to do

Is to save every day till eternity passes away

*Just to spend them with you...."*⁴

Those were the days when you could actually understand the words to songs. And, you weren't embarrassed by the words! Croce wrote that song after his wife told him she was

pregnant. Three years later, he died in a plane crash.⁵ Afterward, his song took on whole new meaning. Croce could not - nor can we - save time in a bottle or anywhere else.

Many would like to prolong time if they could - somehow manufacture time and lengthen life in the process. Conquistador Ponce de Leon was the famous Spanish explorer who lived in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. History has it (some say legend) that Indians told him of an island called Bimini, which reputedly possessed a fountain of youth - a spring whose waters had the power to restore one's youth. He then searched for almost ten years - ten futile years in vain, as he longed to halt the aging process.⁶

Doctors are constantly searching for ways to avoid the death of their patients, trying this new medicine, trying that new treatment. Every physician hates to lose the battle to death! Through advancements in technology, if you have an extra \$28,000 lying around, you can request, at your death, to have your body frozen and stored through a process called cryonics. For instance, if you die of cancer, odds are, given enough time, a cure will be found. If that cure is discovered 200 years after your death, your frozen body will be thawed, the cure applied, and voila - you can keep on living!⁷

The shortness of time - or the longevity of it - is often a matter of perspective. To children, the passing of time occurs at a snail's pace. On a road trip, kids start asking "Are we there yet?" about a mile down the road. Christmas can't come soon enough. Kids often can't wait until they don't have to go to school anymore. After the first day in class youngsters come home and ask, "Am I going to school the rest of my life?" Answer: "Yes! Life itself is a school." It seems like forever until one is old enough to date...to drive...to graduate...to move out on their own.

On the other hand, to adults the passing of time is often a blur. After all, it was only

yesterday when we were kids. When we had kids and brought them home from the hospital. And now they're grown - off at college! Life just isn't fair, is it? About the time children are old enough to start helping out around the house they move out!

So how we view time is often a matter of perspective. Time flies when you're having fun, but not when you're in a hurry and the light turns red, or there's a train on the tracks, or you're in the checkout line at the store. How we view time - and how we treat time - may differ from situation to situation.

Who doesn't ignore the brevity of time? We know that people aren't going to live forever, but maybe, just maybe somehow I will. We know that some lives are cut short in untimely deaths, but that's not going to happen to me. We often plan and live our lives as if time will never end for us. Addressing that mindset, James has this to say:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 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 4:13-15).

Paul reminds us to make wise use of our limited time; he says:

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:14-15).

The phrase "walk circumspectly" means to be constantly looking around to make the most of every opportunity. When an opportunity passes, it cannot be reclaimed - it is gone forever. That's what it means to redeem the time.

ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0734683/>.
2. www.brainyquote.com/quotes/benjamin_franklin_132003.
3. A.W. Tozer, <https://www.goodreads.com>
4. <https://genius.com> Jim Croce.
5. Ibid.
6. www.history.com suggests de Leon's search was mere myth rather than actual history.
7. www.cryonics.org

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