

He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins

Series on Stewardship

44 years ago, in 1967, a US Senate subcommittee heard expert testimony about what the future would look like. Those experts told the Senators that because we now have such wonderful technology; our whole lifestyle will change for the better. They said that because we have all these labour saving devices, that by 1987, people would be working 22 hours a week for 32 weeks of the year, and would be retiring by the age of 40. They said the big challenge of the 1980's and 1990s will be what to do with all our excess time. Is that your major challenge in life in 2011?

We have all these inventions to save time. Shampoo and conditioner all in one bottle. Internet banking where we don't need to interact with real human beings. Scanners at superstores where we can checkout our own stuff. Pre-cooked and pre packaged meals that we can heat and eat. Tea bags that are much quicker than making a pot of tea. Email is supposed to be faster than snail mail, but we spend more time doing emails than we ever did when we used to write real letters. And if we send out emails after midnight, or before 5 in the morning, some of us secretly hope that people will be impressed that we are working so hard.

Some years back someone had the bright idea that if we could sell food - not on the basis of nutritional value, or quality, but on the basis of speed of delivery, it would be a good thing. Not good food, or cheap food, but fast food like pizzas and hamburgers. So today we have fast food restaurants so that we don't have to waste time cooking. Then someone had another bright idea. Why not have drive through lanes, so that families could eat in their cars, just as God intended us to. And then there's a bonus to the whole fast food industry. When the family hasn't got time to stop at the fast food restaurant, and the kids are hungry, they can scrounge around between the cracks in the car seats and find old French fries and bits of burger buns.

Do You Have The Hurry Sickness Disease?

Our whole lives are go-go-go. We are rush-a-holics, rushing here and rushing there. The number one menace on our roads is no longer the drunk driver, but the speeding driver. We get irritated because the photocopier takes 90 seconds to warm up, or the lift is too slow in getting to our floor, or the traffic light phasing is too slow for our lane. We are a generation suffering from hurry sickness. If you don't know if you have this disease, here is a self test question.

You're in the supermarket and you find the shortest queue. You count the items in the trolley of those in front of you. Then you look right and identify a man who is the same number in his queue. You look left and find a woman who is the same number as you in her queue and you watch to see if they get through the checkout before you. If they beat you, it spoils your whole day. Are you like that?

Hurry sickness is the disease of our age. So what are the gurus of our society doing for those of us with hurry sickness? How are they helping us to cope? Their answer is more of everything. More time-saving inventions. Constant internet access on our Smartphone's. Faster cars. More meals to eat on the run. There was a little girl whose father always brought his briefcase home. She said, "Why you do that Daddy?" "Well - I can't get all my work done at the office". "Daddy, why don't they put you in a slower group?"

Jesus told lots of stories that had a kick at the end of them. Here's one. I'll read Jesus' story at the end, but I want to re-tell his story and set it in our generation. There was this man in the agricultural business who was just consumed by his work. He worked 12 to 14 hour days plus weekends. He was director of several companies. Work was not just his occupation, it was his preoccupation. Even when he was at home with his wife and kids, his mind still drifted to work.

The kids tried to get him to read them stories and play games, but after years of trying they just gave up and stopped complaining. His favourite phrase was – “When things settle down”. He used to say to his wife “When things settle down we will have that holiday. When things settle down I’ll spend more time with the kids. When things settle down I won’t work such long hours”. Even though he was a bright guy, he never seemed to notice that things never settled down.

One night he wakes up at 2 o’clock in the morning with a pain in his chest. He goes off to the doctor for a check-up. The doctor says to him, “You’ve had a slight heart attack. Your blood pressure is up. Your cholesterol is up. You’ve got to make some changes”. For a while he does. He goes to the gym, watches what he eats, and he feels much better. But as the symptoms go away – so does his motivation. He says to himself “This is a waste of time. I’ll do it when things settle down”. His wife wants him to come to church with her, and he intends to, but Sunday morning is the only day of the week when he can sleep in. Besides the church is so crowded, it’s hard to get a seat and there aren’t enough car parks. He says to her “I’ll do this church thing later, when things settle down”.

Then the big boss comes to him and says “I want to restructure your division of the company. We are on the verge of a major takeover. I want a major effort from you. I want you to overhaul all our software, update our inventory, and restructure your whole division to make us more profitable. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. If you do well, I’ll make you vice president”. He just goes for it. He makes sure everyone has a Smartphone that is never turned off. Every computer is on broadband and networked for more efficiency. There is 24-hour a day service capability to all the customers. Staff are on call one weekend in three, and he leads the way by going on the roster himself. There are toll-free numbers for ordering and guaranteed dispatch times. He’s so excited he says to his wife “When I’m finished this project we can relax. We will be financially secure. It will be great. Then we can settle down”. She doesn’t believe him of course, because she’s heard it all before.

At 11 o’clock one night she goes to bed. He says “I’ll be there as soon as I’ve finished this paperwork”. At 4.30 in the morning she wakes up and finds that he still hasn’t come to bed. She’s really mad. She thinks to herself “This is ridiculous – it’s like being married to a child!” She goes to his office, and there he is fast asleep with his head resting on his papers. She tries to wake him, but his skin is cold to the touch. Panic rises in her throat as she dials the ambulance. They come to check him out, but there is nothing they can do. He’s had a massive heart attack. His death is a whole column in the Financial Times. His is the lead item on the morning TV business news. He would have loved what they wrote about him. On his tombstone they summarized his life with words like leader, entrepreneur, innovator, visionary. But when it was dark, and no one was around, the angel of God carved one word in the granite of his tomb stone. It was God’s summary of this man’s life. Fool.

Two Of The Great Lies Of Our Time

This man had been so busy living he didn’t have time to make a life. This man lived with a belief in two of the great lies of our time.

1. “When things settle down”

“I’ll do it when things settle down”. Friends, the only time things are going to settle down is when they lay you in that casket and bury you deep in the earth. That’s when things settle down.

2. “Someday, more is going to be enough”

The Bible says that being content with what you already have is a learned skill. Being content with the car you drive. The house you live in. The person you are married to you. The way you look.

It All Goes Back In The Box

Early in my life I learned to play monopoly. The object of the game is to acquire. When I first started playing I used to hold on to all my money, but I gradually realised that the people that bought property always finished up the winners, because people who landed on those properties in the game had to pay rent. The ones that bought property put houses and hotels on them, and mortgaged them to buy more property, and eventually finished up with most of the properties and most of the money as well. I learned fast, and got to be really ruthless at monopoly. It was especially pleasurable when I could beat my older brother, because when he was losing, sometimes he would throw the board in the air and say "I don't want to play any more". But the hardest lesson I've learned in monopoly was not when I was losing, but when I was winning. The lesson was this. When the game is over, it all goes back in the box. Houses, hotels, money, properties, utilities – it all goes back in the box. I didn't want it to go back in the box. I wanted to preserve all my possessions, but I learned it wasn't mine to preserve. It all goes back in the box for someone else to play with. It really didn't belong to me. I just used it for a while. The next time it will all go to someone else. That's the way the game works. When the game ends – and the game always ends – all the stuff goes back in the box.

The businessman is out jogging and suddenly he feels a pain in his chest. The game is over and it all goes back in the box. The teenager is driving carefully, and without any warning, a front tire blows out. The game is over and it all goes back in the box. The doctor says "I'm sorry its malignant". Into hospital – and the game is over, and it all goes back in the box. The house, the car, the boat, the shares, the clothes, all the toys, even your body goes into the box. Most of us live our lives rushing from one thing to another trying to squeeze two lives into one. We live our lives accumulating degrees, information, possessions and money. It's all a form of denial of the reality that we're going to die.

Here's the story Jesus told as Luke the physician recounts it in his gospel.

"Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15 – 21)

In this story that Jesus told there was one question the man never asked. The question was "Then what?" When your barns are full – then what? When you've bought everything you ever wanted – then what? When you got every promotion you never pushed for – then what? When you've got the ultimate house – then what? What will the angel of God write on your tombstone?

God has given us one lifetime to prepare for eternity. Over the next few weeks we are going to be studying the series "Managing Our Finances God's Way". But the course is dealing with a whole lot more than finances. It's actually dealing with getting our priorities straight. It's about establishing Godly habits and Godly ways of thinking. It's not just about dedicating our finances to God, but dedicating ourselves to him. Jesus talked about people who are rich towards God. Imagine that. Imagine if at the end of these seven weeks of studies each of us were richer toward God because the direction of our lives had markedly changed over these next few weeks. Let's ask God for that together.

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