Time Well Spent (excerpt)
By R.C. Sproul

Time is the great leveler. It is one resource that is allocated in absolute egalitarian terms. Every living person has the same number of hours to use in every day. Busy people are not given a special bonus added on to the hours of the day. The clock plays no favorites.

We all have an equal measure of time in every day. Where we differ from one another is in how we redeem the time allotted. When something is redeemed it is rescued or purchased from some negative condition. The basic negative condition we are concerned with is the condition of waste. To waste time is to spend it on that which has little or no value.

I am a time waster. When I think of the time I have wasted over the course of my life, I am hounded by remorse. This guilt is not a false one fostered by an overactive work ethic. The guilt is real because the time I have wasted is real time.

The late Vince Lombardi introduced the adage, “I never lost a game, I just ran out of time.” This explanation points to one of the most dramatic elements of sports—the race against the clock. The team that is most productive in the allotted time is the team that wins the game. Of course, in sports, unlike life, there are provisions for calling time-out. The clock in a sports contest can be temporarily halted. But in real life there are no timeouts…

Given my propensity to waste time, I have learned a few tricks to help me beat the clock. They may be helpful to some of you.
First, I realize that all of my time is God’s time and all of my time is my time by His delegation. God owns me and my time. Yet, He has given me a measure of time over which I am a steward. I can commit that time to work for other people, visit other people, etc. But it is time for which I must give an account.

Second, time can be redeemed by concentration and focus. One of the greatest wastes of time occurs in the human mind. Our hands may be busy but our minds idle. Likewise, our hands may be idle while our minds are busy. Woolgathering, day-dreaming, and indulging in frivolous fantasy are ways in which thoughts may be wasted in real time. To focus our minds on the task at hand—with fierce concentration—makes for productive use of time.

Third, the mind can redeem valuable time taken up by ordinary or mechanical functions. For example, the mechanics of taking a shower are not difficult. In this setting the mind is free for problem solving, creative thinking, or the composition of themes. Many of my messages and lectures are germinated in the shower. When I used to play a lot of golf, I found that the time I had between shots was a great time for composing messages in my mind.

Fourth, use your leisure time for pursuits that are life enriching. Leisure time is often spent on avocations. Reading is a valuable use of time. It enriches life to read outside of your major field or area of expertise. Augustine once advised believers to learn as much as possible about as many things as possible, since all truth is God’s truth. Other avocations that are enriching include the arts. I like to study the piano and I dabble in painting. No one will ever mistake me for a serious
musician or an accomplished artist. But these avocations open up the world of beauty to me that enhances my view of God and His manifold perfections. I also enjoy working cross-word puzzles to warm up the little gray cells and to expand my vista of verbal expression.

Fifth, find ways to cheat the “Sand Man.” Several years ago I had an epiphany about time management. Though my life-long pattern had been to stay up late at night I realized that for me, the hours between 9–12 p.m. were not very productive. I reasoned that if I used those hours to sleep I might secure more time for more productive things. Since then my habit has been to retire between 8–9 p.m. when possible and rise at 4 a.m. This has effected a wonderful revolution for my schedule. The early hours of the day are a time free from distractions and interruptions, a marvelous time for study, writing, and prayer….

Sixth, use drive-time for learning. Driving a car is another mechanical function that allows the mind to be alert to more than what is happening on the roadway. The benefits of audio tape can be put to great use during these times. I can listen to lectures and instructional tapes while driving, thereby redeeming the time.

Finally, in most cases a schedule is more liberating than restricting. Working with a schedule helps enormously to organize our use of time. The schedule should be a friend, not an enemy. I find it freeing in that the schedule can include time for leisure, recreation, and avocation. It helps us find the rhythm for a God-glorifying productive life.
[The article “Time Well Spent: Right Now Counts Forever” was written by Dr. R.C. Sproul and published in *Tabletalk* magazine (September 1997, pp. 4–7). This excerpt is reprinted by the kind permission of Ligonier Ministries.]