

## LIVING THE CONTROLLED LIFE

### Controlling Our Time: What is Your Most Valuable Possession?

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What is your most valuable possession? When you first read this question your mind may quickly scroll through a balance sheet that lists all of your possessions, looking for your asset with the highest value. For most people, you might hear that their home is their most valuable asset or it might be your business or your investment portfolio? No matter which asset you may select as your most valuable, you will have picked the wrong one. Our materialistic culture drives us to think of our *things* when we think of our valuables, but there are other non-material things that are worth much more.

I would suggest to you that the correct answer to this question can be found by looking on a different balance sheet altogether. Bob Buford, a self-made multimillionaire and the author of the book *Halftime: Changing your Game Plan from Success to Significance*, once spoke at a financial conference. Right in the middle of that presentation Buford made a comment that was so profound and struck so deeply that one man who were listening was so stunned by it that he said he heard nothing else that Buford said for the rest of his presentation. Buford paused, gave a reflective look, and then commented, “It seems insane to me that a person would be willing to trade what he has a shortage of—time—in order to gain more of what he already has a surplus of—wealth.” You cannot read this once and fully absorb it, so look at it again. “It seems insane to me that a person would be willing to trade what he has a shortage of—time—in order to gain more of what he already has a surplus of—wealth.” And if you live in America, you are most likely already “wealthy.”

So, what is your most valuable asset? It is the time that you still have “banked” in this life. Your “time on this earth” account is all too quickly shrinking with every day that passes. And the most troubling part of this time account is that we cannot see how much we have left. Is it days, months, years, decades?

We often hear people ask the question, “How do you spend your time...?” This is a very accurate way to phrase how we use our time: we *spend* it. Unlike your financial accounts that you can make additional deposits into and build the account in the future, you can make no additional deposits into your time account. The total number of days allotted to us was deposited into our time account before we were even conceived. King David confirms this in Psalm 139:16, when he acknowledges, “*And in Your book were written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.*” So, all of us will spend our time on something—and once it is spent, it is gone.

The truth of Bob Buford’s comment is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the story of the rich farmer we looked at earlier. After another excessive bumper crop season, he says, *This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to*

*come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ Luke 12:18-20*

How pathetically sad. He was willing to trade what he had almost nothing left of—time—in order to gain more of what he already had a surplus of—wealth. And then to add insult to his folly, God goes on to say of this man, *“So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (Luke 12:21). He did not die rich—he died broke.

In Psalm 90:12, Moses asks God to help him use his time account wisely. He prays, *“So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.”* Paul said it this way in Ephesians 5:15-16, *“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”* And not only are the days “evil,” they are also very limited.

If we are wise, we will manage our time account with even greater care than we manage our investment account. And we should be very leery about making any withdrawals out of our limited time account—“spending our time”—in order to make additional deposits into our already surplus—and temporal—investment account. And do not deceive yourself – whatever you have in a savings and investments is, in fact, a surplus.

If we are totally honest with ourselves, many of us would admit that we have a more money to give away than we have time to give away. It can be much easier to make a gift from our surplus resources than it is to make a gift from our ever shrinking time account.

Keep this in mind: it is not in how much of our *stuff* that we give; it is in how much of *ourselves* we give that allows us to fully experience the joy and blessing of giving. We have too much wealth in this country to experience much true sacrificial giving from our material possessions. But, relatively speaking, we have precious little to give from our time account and that is where we learn to give like those who have little.

For example, many families are beginning to catch this vision and are seeing the power of short-term family mission trips to needy countries. Can you guess what proves to be the greatest obstacle in pulling off such a trip? You might think it is the funding, but in reality, that is really the easiest part of the trip. The hardest part of the trip is finding the time for all of the members of the family to make the trip—to make a difference. The problem is more time than money.

Consider this story from an older man. He shares,

“I spent a good bit of time visiting my grandmother. She was a zealous and committed Christian woman and everywhere you turned in her small home, there were signs of her faith—a Bible on the coffee table—plaques and pictures on the walls—Bible verses on the refrigerator. There was one plaque in particular that made had a profound impact on my thinking as a young boy. I did not realize it then, but the words on that little plaque had been permanently etched into my consciousness. The words read, ‘Only one life ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.’ In keeping with this powerful message, my entire life, for the most part, has been one

continuous effort to use the brief time that God has allotted me to do something with it that will have an eternal impact. Without this ultimate, eternal objective, life is correctly summed up by Solomon, “*All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind*” (Ecclesiastes 2:17 NIV).”

What is your most valuable asset? How are you using your most valuable asset to do something that will last for eternity? Our cry should be, to paraphrase Isaiah 6:8, “Here I am Lord, [*spend*] me”.

## STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. How does Bob Buford's comment, "It seems insane to me that a person would be willing to trade what he has a shortage of – time – in order to gain more of what he already has a surplus of – wealth" strike you? Are you guilty of being "insane"?

2. Why is the story of the rich farmer such a perfect example of what Bob is saying? "This is what I will do: I will tear down barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'" Luke 12:18-20

3. Are you like most affluent American families who have more money to give than they do time? If this is true, then what is your most value possession? What are you doing to preserve and spend wisely this most precious of all possessions?

4. How do you respond to the comment, "It is not in how much of our wealth we give; it is in how much of ourselves we give that allows us to fully experience the joy and blessing of giving?" How do you respond to that idea? Do you get more joy out of writing a check or getting personally involved? Why?

5. The plaque mentioned read, "Only one life 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last." What could you do with your limited remaining time on earth to accomplish something with your life that will last for eternity?

6. Moses tells us to "number our days that we may present to You a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). What if you were to learn that you only had 30 days left on this earth? How would your life and the use of your remaining days change? What does this tell you about your real life priorities and how wisely you have used the time already spent?

7. If you continue on the course your life is on right now, when you finally exhaust your "time account," how will you measure up to Ephesians 5:15-16, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time?" Have you made the most of your time? If not, what would you have to change for the answer to be "yes?"

8. Would you be willing to pray to the Lord, "Here I am, Lord, spend me?" What might happen if you sincerely began praying that on a daily basis?

9. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?