

Understanding the Times

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Pastor E. Keith Hassell

1 Chronicles 12:32 (NKJV) “of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command;”

Timing is everything. Dan Millman once said, "I learned that we can do anything, but we can't do everything...at least not at the same time. So think of your priorities not in terms of what activities you do, but when you do them. Timing is everything."

Everything has a proper time to accomplish a specific purpose. King Solomon said, *“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: ² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”*¹ In other words, God has ordained a time for every action and event in human history including the very events of our lives. When things occur according to God’s timing, they fulfill God’s beautiful purpose. King Solomon continued, *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”*²

Understanding the times will lead to proper timing. Timing is a function of sequence. An engine can only run if all its moving parts operate in proper sequence. Improper timing renders the engine inoperative and useless. In the same way, the sequence of events in our lives work together for good when they are in proper timing. Proper timing requires making choices that are in proper sequence. Something normally regarded as good—such as buying a home—can cause all kinds of problems if it is purchased at the wrong time.

Timing is also the proper administration of time. Timing involves time management. Every person has the same amount of hours and minutes in their day. Unsuccessful people waste their life one minute and one hour at a time. Successful people can accomplish more in one year than others do in a lifetime. Successful people have learned how to manage their time with the use of things like calendars and watches. They have learned how to discipline their lives to get the most out of the time they have.

Timing is also the proper response to opportunity. Many people miss the opportunity of a lifetime because they did not recognize the time of opportunity. Leonard Ravenhill once said, “The opportunity of a lifetime must be seized in the lifetime of the opportunity.” We must learn to understand the times in which we live so that we can recognize the time of opportunity when it arrives.

Failure to understand the times not only robs us of the blessings of proper timing, it also makes us a victim of time and circumstance. King Solomon said, *“I returned and saw under the sun that—the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. ¹² For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.”*³ It is important to note that God is omniscient; thus, there is no chance with God. “Chance” is the human perspective to what is regarded as the unpredictable circumstances and events of life. God knows the proper time for everything. It is for us to search out God’s timing so that we might know what to do at the proper time. The sons of Issachar were such a people.

Issachar was one of the twelve tribes of Israel who were noted for their understanding of the times and their insight into what Israel ought to do. How did they gain this understanding? The Hebrew word translated here as “understanding” refers to an understanding gained through knowledge and information, specifically through the

¹ Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 (NKJV)

² Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NKJV)

³ Ecclesiastes 9:11–12 (NKJV)

reading and studying of God's word. Their knowledge of Scripture enabled them to view their current circumstances from a divine perspective so that they might apply the proper biblical response. How important this is! Apart from a proper understanding of the times, our discernment will be off and so will our timing. As a result, we will either do the wrong thing at the wrong time or a right thing at a wrong time. Neither will result in God's peace and blessing.

There is a tension in timing that makes discernment necessary. In his blessing over the tribe of Issachar, Moses said, *"Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between two burdens; ¹⁵ He saw that rest was good, And that the land was pleasant; He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden, And became a band of slaves."*⁴ Moses likened Issachar to a strong donkey who carries two burdens and who desires rest in a pleasant place. Bearing two burdens required a proper discernment of tension created by the weight of the two loads in order to establish a proper balance across the shoulders. The tribe of Issachar had a servant's heart to shoulder the burden of God's people. God chooses servants to be His leaders. Why? They understand the tensions involved and have developed a discernment for how to balance two opposing virtues as previously described by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:2-8. Other tensions might include those of liberty versus love, law versus grace, Word versus Spirit, and mercy versus judgment. In the same way that people who have never raised children do not understand the tensions involved among those who are raising children, so people who are unwilling to shoulder the burden of service among God's people do not understand the tensions at work in making properly timed decisions. They do not feel the weight, or the tensions, or the imbalances involved. They are unprepared to lead. They cannot properly discern what must be done.

If proper timing involves a proper understanding of the times in which we live, the question must be asked, "What time is it anyway?" First, it is "time to awake". The apostle Paul declared, *"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."*⁵ Second, it is "time to work". Jesus said, *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."*⁶ The apostle Paul said, *"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, ¹⁶ redeeming the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*⁷ Third, it is "time to be saved". The apostle Paul said, *"For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*⁸

We have all made improperly timed choices that have resulted in regrettable consequences. We must learn from our failures. We cannot change the past and we must not presume upon the future. We must stop and consider that all we have is this present time, this present moment, this present instant called NOW. Hesitation results in the loss of this moment in time. Hesitation means "to stop because of indecision." God's grace comes to us at an instant of time in which we must make a decision afforded by the opportunity set in front of us.

In conclusion, we must ask ourselves two questions. First, "What time is it in my life right now? What does God want me to do?" Second, "What would cause me to hesitate in responding to Him right now?" If God has set an opportunity before you, don't miss it? Remember the words of Leonard Ravenhill: "The opportunity of a lifetime must be seized in the lifetime of the opportunity." Now is the time.

⁴ Genesis 49:14–15 (NKJV)

⁵ Romans 13:11 (NKJV)

⁶ John 9:4 (NKJV)

⁷ Ephesians 5:15–17 (NKJV)

⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NKJV)