

# TIME – REDEEMING IT THE CHRISTIAN WAY

## OUTLINE:

### Part I – The Problem of Time

1. Introduction
2. Combating Time
3. The Christian View of Time
4. Lessons from the Life of Jesus

### Part II – Redeeming the Time

5. What Does Redeeming Mean?
6. The Way to Victory
7. Learning From Others
8. Some Further Guidelines

---

## Part I - The Problem of Time

### 1. Introduction

TIME is obviously against us.

Even as you glance at this and perhaps consider reading on, it is more than likely that you're wondering whether you can really afford the TIME!

You might, on the other hand, be one of those people who suffer not from too little TIME but from too much of it – you have it to ‘kill’ as we say. Whether TIME brings pressures or boredom, it is equally ‘**The Enemy**’ – as, indeed, many so term it.

This article looks afresh at TIME to see whether it must always be against us; whether it is inevitably our foe or whether God plans it to be our friend. The article then examines what it means to ‘redeem’ TIME, and how to go about this.

## 2. Combating Time

### A Healthy Environment

In recent times our understanding of personal health has enlarged to include not only our relationship with society, but also our relationship with our environment.

Conservationists call a stop to the misuse of that which is around us, in the knowledge that we suffer if we do not learn to adjust positively to the environment – understanding it, rather than dominating it or being dominated by it.

Usually, attention is focused on the obvious three-dimensional elements of our environment, but little or no thought has been given to that other ‘dimension’ in which everything we are and everything we do takes place, namely TIME.

### TIME – the Enemy

The way we talk about TIME shows clearly that our usual relationship to TIME is an unhappy one, (except for its role in healing grief).

Usually, TIME is **against us**; ‘*it is a constant battle to get things done in time*’ we find.

‘*If only I had the TIME...*’ is the wistful comment as we long to live better.

‘*TIME has caught up with me I’m afraid*’ we complain as another lot of intentions are frustrated and hopes shattered!

### The Unforgiving Minute

Kipling’s famous lines are worth noting for their view of TIME –

*‘If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,  
And – which is more – you’ll be a Man, my son!’*

Kipling’s Curse, I call it! While it doubtless inspired many good deeds, it will have increased rather than lessened the ‘pressure’ of TIME upon many.

Kipling’s solution to the problem of TIME is to let it drive you, like instinct drives lemmings! Each single second has not merely to be used or even filled – but **RUN!** (Is this an early reference to our demonic Rat Race?) We can experience endless guilt when we fail to win our ‘race’ against TIME, hence Kipling’s description of it is –‘**unforgiving**’.

### West versus East

In spite of his experience of India, Kipling’s ‘solution’ is typically Western, and is assumed to be normal by most of us today. It has a legalistic basis: we can ‘prove’ that we have spent time

‘well’ by listing **how much we did per minute**. (This ignores the mental, physical, personal and domestic chaos it caused in the process!).

Perhaps Kipling reacted against the East, for I am sure that, in general, the Eastern answer is the exact opposite: a minute is NOT best assessed by the amount of over-activity crammed within it, but by the quality of life it contains. Such life is one in which direction is more important than speed; eternal significance much more important than obvious busy-ness; and in which quantity of doing is less important than quality of being. How else could they not only tolerate but honour those whose lives are given to spiritual contemplation?

### **Time Off – Escape!**

Escaping is one of the West’s answers to our TIME-dominated culture.

How TIME-dominated it is! I remember queuing to get into a Military Tattoo at Earl’s Court. We were let in eight seconds late; quite a number in the queue, armed with the latest precision watches cried out “Trust the Army to be late!”

In some sports now, our eyes cannot see nor can we assess the difference between success and failure, and we know it only when electronics inform us!

Within society there are many ways, good and bad, in which folk try to ESCAPE from TIME.

Holidaying and entertainment are two ways of escaping from TIME, and have two large industries associated with them.

Some try to escape TIME by ‘dropping out’ of the materialistic society and the rat-race. Others hope to find escape within it, e.g. they buy every so-called ‘TIME-saver’ in the mistaken belief that increasing things reduces problems! The attraction of riches, whether reached by hard work or gambling, is due largely to the assumption that enough wealth would save us having to earn a living and we would then ‘have’ TIME, rather than TIME having us.

There is another escape from TIME in ‘ecstasy’, which literally means to be ‘placed outside’. Romantic lovers appear not to be in the grip of TIME or place – to the delight (and frustration!) of those around them. Sexual love in addition to physical delight brings its renewal and refreshment because of its ability to place the couple ‘outside’ TIME and its demands for a short while. The attraction of mystical experiences, whether religious, occult or drug-induced, lies in their alleged power to free us from TIME.

The Christian equivalent is to be ‘*lost in wonder, love and praise*’ – a state devoutly sung about in Western Christianity, but rigorously avoided and opposed in most of our Christian worship!

## Freedom

There are those who appear to experience freedom from the domination of TIME.

The very young have not yet grown into our TIME-bondage, and frequently find the NOW so all-absorbing that they have little awareness of TIME, and experience genuine shock (which adults too readily assume to be phoney) when it is, eg. ‘TIME for bed!’

There are adults and whole cultures who are not in TIME’s bondage. Many Africans live blissfully unaware of Kipling’s ‘unforgiving minute’ – let alone his ‘sixty-seconds’ to be run! (If you have ever had to prepare an African family to catch a plane or train you will know the truth of this!)

For such people TIME is divided only into three –

- what was
- what is NOW
- what is next

The clock does not usually dictate to them. **The NOW-event is left only as and when it has been given the full attention it deserves.** Such folk are blessed by living ‘in’ TIME but not cursed by being ‘of’ it. They show us that TIME can be more our friend than our enemy.

### 3. The Christian View of Time

#### In God's Good Time

To moan about TIME may get some of our frustrations off our chests, but we need to **understand** it, and ‘redeem’ it.

The first thing we need to affirm in our Christian understanding of TIME is that it is:

- GOD's
- GOOD.

TIME is not something that already existed into which one day (!) God decided to set-up his Creation!

Indeed there was no ‘one day’ until Creation. Nothing can exist outside of the Creator which is not of his creating. So in the Biblical terms of the first Creation story [Genesis 1:1-2:3] it is within a time-sequence of ‘days’ that the Creator chooses to work. These ‘days’ find their climax and goal not in the creative activity of the first six days, but in the creative passivity of the Seventh (Sabbath) in which the whole is contemplated and enjoyed.

When we ponder Creation and see God's hand in a beautiful view, in a new-born child, or in some microscopic or astronomical item of nature, we need to remind ourselves that TIME is an even more wonderful (and mystifying) item! Without TIME these things could not have been enjoyed, and probably could not have existed.

The question ‘**Where would we be without it?**’ raises mind-boggling implications – no growth; no past; no results; no future...!

To say that we are running out of TIME is a common enough experience, but if taken literally is about as daft as a fish in the Atlantic complaining that he is running short of water!

TIME has held within itself everything since Creation and will continue to do so until what we rightly term ‘the end of TIME’.

#### Paradise Lost?

God's creation was good [Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, etc.], and TIME was a very important part of it.

But it is both apparent from our experience and from Biblical teaching that whatever ‘Paradise’ there once was, it has certainly been lost.

The second creation story [Genesis 2:4ff.] continues to give a vivid explanation of the root cause of this in man's **sin**, i.e. in his:

- doubt (3:1),
- disbelief (3:4) and
- disobedience (3:6).

This results in a guilty-alienation from God (3:8); and in hatred (3:15), pain (3:16), ‘painful toil’ (3:17) and death (3:19) invading the created order. This is part of what is meant by the ‘Fall’.

When St. Paul considered the world, he felt that *‘the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now,’* [Romans 8:22]. TIME is part of this *whole creation*.

### **The Ravages of TIME**

Although we say that TIME *heals*, its ability to do this is usually eclipsed by its much more noticeable ability to bring *decline and decay*. Buildings and bodies alike suffer the ravages of TIME, and much money is spent on running repairs, and attempts to combat its effects. Ageing is generally fought, and the ability to ‘grow old gracefully’ is so unusual as to evoke comment.

### **The End of our Time**

Father TIME is usually depicted with a scythe and an hour-glass: reminders that all our lives in due course get cut-off; our ‘sands of TIME’ are limited and always running out.

Dying of what? ‘LIFE’, said someone wittily, ‘is fatal – everyone dies of it sooner or later!’

Death is TIME’s greatest victory over us. It does indeed always ‘catch up with us in the end.’ (One of the attractions of fictional heroes is their great ability to be free from ageing and regularly to escape death!)

### **God in Time – God conquers Time**

Each year we celebrate two very important events – Christmas and Easter. On these two events hang our *Christian understanding of TIME*.

- Christmas celebrates the fact that the Creator of TIME himself **stepped into TIME**.
- On Good Friday TIME seemed to have annihilated its Creator, but Easter shows that this was not so. By his resurrection Christ defeated death – TIME’s greatest weapon!
- The one who created TIME, **stepped into TIME** and was not conquered by it, but triumphantly **overcame** it.

We are used to regarding Easter as a celebration of God’s triumph over sin, suffering and death, but often fail to realise that a triumph over *death* is a triumph over TIME as well!

*‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may **not perish, but may have eternal life**’* [John 3:16] – these last words remind us that the redemption of TIME is at the very heart of the Gospel.

#### 4. Lessons from the life of Jesus

##### Lord of TIME

Jesus Christ was not immune to the problem of TIME, and it is helpful for us to note how in his life and ministry he appears to have dealt with it.

We know well enough how he combated the other symptoms of the Fall –

- sickness he healed
- sin he forgave
- death he defeated

What is there in the life and ministry of Jesus that –

- a) Shows him combating TIME, and
- b) Gives us some guidelines?

Let's note three things –

1. God in Christ was **not afraid to step IN to TIME**.
2. Christ was **tempted to submit to TIME's** dictates.
3. Christ was **never dictated to by TIME** or its events.

##### Lord in Time:

1. As a young **boy in the Temple** he already shows a growth in freedom, as, contrary to parental assumptions, he finds himself at home in his heavenly Father's house [Luke 2:41ff.].
2. At the beginning of his public ministry, the Spirit drives Jesus into **the Wilderness** [Luke 4:1-14] so that he may learn freedom from both inner and outer human pressures. Such discipline strengthens one's independence of 'normal' daily demands.
3. Christ's **first temptation** was to make bread from stones. His human hunger nearly caused impatience, and he was tempted to end his fast before the TIME his Father had appointed and to accept the Devil's modification of it. He refused to accept this.
4. The **second temptation** also required patience. If Jesus was lifted-up he would draw all people to himself [John 12:32, 3:14]. This was his mission, and wholly right; yet to jump off a Temple tower would have been wrong because it would have been the human solution according to the human timetable, not acting in obedience to God the Father. It would have ruined God's plans for him by taking an opportunity at the wrong TIME. The 'short-term' is always attractive!

5. Luke tells us that Jesus went to the Wilderness ‘*full of the Holy Spirit*’, and left in the ‘*power*’ of the Spirit. The **fruits of the Spirit**, especially **patience** [Galatians 5:22-23], are crucial if TIME is not to engulf us.

Our TIME is usually taken over by events and other people. Thus –

6. The **impending deaths of Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus** [Mark 5:21ff, John 11:1ff.] did not panic Jesus into ‘racing against TIME’.

On both occasions Jesus chose to delay his arrival. In the first, he resisted not only the impatience of the disciples, but Jairus’ wishes, the woman’s hopes and the crowd’s expectation – by staying to talk to the woman! [For more on this, see the article ‘**Faith and Healing – the Biblical Teaching**’ on this website] In the second we read ‘*...after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.*’

It is probably no coincidence that Christ’s refusal in each case to allow TIME to manipulate him resulted in two most dramatic victories over it – two victories over death itself!

7. Jesus’ treatment of **crowds** shows his refusal to be dominated by them. He once avoided them by boat [Matthew 8:18], and another time by hiding [John 8:59]. The sick crowd at the Pool were ignored in favour of repeatedly giving his attention to one individual. [John 5:1ff. especially verses 6, 14]

8. **Order** is the antidote to disorder – including the disorder of TIME. Hence Christ used his authority to still the storms in both nature [Mark 4:35ff.] and human nature [Mark 5:1ff.]. When faced with a large and hungry crowd, to avoid disorderly behaviour Jesus made the men sit down in small groups. [Mark 6:39]

9. **Kill him!** was the aim of two crowds; one at Nazareth where they attempted to throw Jesus over a cliff [Luke 4:28-30], and the other in Jerusalem when they wanted him crucified. In the first case he simply ‘*passed through the midst of them and went on his way*’, but he did not escape the latter. How can this be explained? The explanation is given by Jesus in answer to one of Pilate’s questions – ‘*You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above;*’ [John 19:11]. Jesus and the Father are at one, and no one has power over Jesus unless the Father wills it so.

10. Among other characteristics of Jesus’ life which relate to TIME are –

- **Sabbath.** Jesus habitually kept the Sabbath Day and worshipped in Synagogue. [Luke 4:16]
- **Retreat.** He also took other time off to pray and rest. [Mark 6:31]
- **Planning.** His Spirit-led life was characterised by structure as well as freedom. Christ planned carefully – his followers, his mission, and even the events preceding his death. [Mark 3:13ff, 6:7ff, Luke 10:1ff, Mark 8:31ff, 11:3, 14:13, etc.]

11. Christ's **death was offered**, it was not because his life was taken away – ‘*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*’ [John 10:18]

12. Christ **lives in obedience to his Father** – ‘*...I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me*’ [John 8:28]. ‘*...the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing;...*’ [John 5:19]

JESUS' FREEDOM FROM **TIME** IS DUE TO THE FACT THAT HE IS NOT DICTATED TO BY **TIME** OR ITS EVENTS, PEOPLE, OR PRESSURES. HE SPEAKS AND ACTS ONLY AT THE PROMPTING OF HIS FATHER.

## Part II - Redeeming the Time

As we saw in Part I, TIME seems usually to be against us.

As Christians we affirm that TIME is essentially part of God’s good creation, but, like all else, it is ‘fallen’. Its ultimate victory over us is death.

Christmas and Easter celebrate God’s entering into TIME and rising victorious over it. Christ’s victory over death, is his victory over TIME.

For Christ, ‘redeeming the TIME’ was a costly road to freedom. For us it will not be different. We are called to redeem the TIME *because the days are evil*. [Ephesians 5:16]

The purpose of the rest of this article is to help arm you for the fight!

### 5. What does Redeeming mean?

#### ‘Redeem the time...’

The heart of the matter lies in a right understanding of this phrase which occurs in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5.

Modern translations, with the exception of the Jerusalem Bible, tend to avoid the word ‘redeem’ and instead substitute concepts like *making good use of opportunities* [NIV, TEV, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Bible and Living Bible].

J.B. Phillips has *making the best use of*, while the RSV has the ambiguous *make the most of the time* – which any schoolboy will plan to do in his teacher’s absence, but which will be far from redeeming it!

#### A step nearer

Someone who suffers from the fear of open-spaces, suffers from ‘agora-phobia’, a phobia of the ‘agora’. The *agora* in New Testament times was the general open-place of the town where, for instance, labourers could be hired, where there was buying and selling, and where the children played [e.g. Matthew 20:3, Mark 7:4, and Matthew 11:16 respectively].

When the word was used as a verb, it meant to frequent the market-place, to do business there, and to buy or sell. Before the feeding of the Five Thousand, the disciples suggest to Jesus that he send the crowds away as it was getting late so that they could go into the villages and ‘agora’ some food for themselves [Matthew 14:15. Greek *agora-sosin*]. It is one of a selection of words used to describe Christ’s work, and does so in terms of his ‘buying’. St. Paul writes [1 Corinthians 6:19-20] –

*‘...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,  
which you have from God,  
and that you are not your own?  
For you were bought with a price;...*

We are familiar with the prefix *ex-* meaning out-of. On three occasions St. Paul adds the *ex-* prefix to *agora* to give it a special stress [Here in Ephesians 5:16 and also in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5]. This literally means to **buy-out-of**. This is well suited to buying a slave out-of slavery, and so is usually translated *redeemed*.

[Without getting too technical, the Greek verb is in the Middle Voice and so suggests some self-involvement or benefit. Perhaps 'to redeem-for-oneself'.]

Some translators have tried a little harder to express the thought of ‘**redeeming**’ by introducing words like *economy* (Barclay), *hoarding* (Moffat), and – best of all – *buying up* (Alford). *Buying-up* is getting warm, but it still falls far short of ‘**redeeming**’.

### **Redeeming Centres**

I wonder why so many modern translators fight shy of the word ‘redeem’? Redemption, after all, occurs both in the High Street and in the news!

Vouchers and ‘points’ that need to be redeemed are common enough, even if trading stamps and their Redemption Centres are things of the past.

### **In the newspapers**

Sadly the themes of redeeming and ransoming feature all too often in world news. Kidnappers leave a **ransom** note after their theft – **by which the true owner is told what price he must pay to redeem, or buy back, what is rightfully his, but which has been illegally stolen from him by an enemy.**

### **The Spiritual View**

The inadequacy of advice merely to ‘use TIME well’, to ‘take every opportunity’, etc. is that it completely avoids the real nature of the problem. Scripture suggests that the problem of TIME is usefully understood in this sort of way –

God has created TIME for us; it shares the fallen nature of all creation; it is still in rebellion against God and is in Enemy hands. Christ has paid the price for its redemption; and the task and joy of the Christian Church is actively to complete its redemption, which it can do by being in TIME, but not of it.

### **Redeem the TIME because...**

In Ephesians we are given the reason, and it relates to the spiritual view of TIME which I have just outlined. We are to redeem the TIME *because the days are evil*, (and note that ‘days’ are our most ordinary units of TIME). TIME is not a neutral element like a placid lake in which we swim. Rather, if left unredeemed, it flows **against** us.

There are practical ways such as re-organisation, etc. in which we can, as it were, learn to swim more strongly. This is good, but such TIME management tends towards **overcoming TIME physically**, rather than **redeeming it spiritually** - although the two are closely related.

### **Our language**

How we talk about things so often indicates our instinctive understanding of them. Our ways of talking about TIME dovetail exactly with the Biblical view. In ordinary conversation we use two contradictory words about it. We speak of it as the ENEMY but then we do everything possible to SAVE it! (How odd – usually the enemy is to be beaten not saved!)

Perhaps behind our use of these terms lies a true understanding that TIME is indeed in ENEMY hands, from which we must continue Christ’s work of SAVING / redeeming / ransoming it.

The redemption of TIME is one of the tasks of the redeemed LIFE, and the two cannot be separated.

### **‘Keep you in eternal life’**

In some of our recent orders of service there is a new emphasis on eternal life, not in one day being brought **to** it, but today being kept in it. Such an emphasis is timely – if you’ll excuse the pun! It reminds us that our true position is to be **in** TIME, but not to be of it. We are rescued from the reign of Evil to reign with Christ **above** all authorities and powers, and significantly to **sit** with him in heavenly places [Ephesians 2:6, but see also from 1:20].

### **St. Vitus?**

Christians of the Western World suffer because the Church takes its tempo and many of its assumptions from the world. ‘Ministry burn out’ is now a commonplace term. The gruelling schedules of most Christian leaders, suggest that their Patron Saint is St. Vitus! I remember when I first saw the Pope’s schedule for his British visit I remarked that it would be the Christians who would kill him rather than the atheists!

It is not surprising that there is an upsurge of interest in Retreats and Quiet Days, in order to break the domination of TIME over us.

The task of the Church is not to live under the destructive forces of unredeemed TIME, but to allow its own experience of **redeemed TIME** to overflow into the world for its healing.

## 6. The Way to Victory

The first part of this article explored the nature and problem of TIME’s domination of us. The way to victory over TIME is first to recognise the factors in our lives which can invite its domination, and then to have the grace and discipline to strengthen our vulnerable areas.

These factors can be divided into two sorts:

- a) those **within** us, and
- b) those **around** us.

Let’s look at them both in turn.

### Factors within us

We are all immature, and have a long way to go before we grow up into the full stature of Jesus Christ. To see the immature elements of our personalities and how they aggravate the TIME problem will help us overcome it.

- (i) The **Perfectionist** will always have a TIME problem until healed of that inner need to justify him/herself by works. While we are called to be perfect, **perfectionism** is self-centred indulgence and an addiction that can distort and ruin life.
- (ii) The **Muddled**. ‘Lord bless this mess’ is too serious a falsehood to joke about. Blessed mess cannot exist, for blessing would re-order it. Chaos is of the Devil and order is of God. The redeemed life will ever move closer to a right ordering, for the characteristic of the demonic is ‘the distortion of right orderliness’. All distortion gives the devil a foothold. The muddler, far from fighting chaos, actually creates it, and all muddle saps energy and invites the domination by TIME.
- (iii) The **Escapist** will never have TIME for the important things, since he/she is perpetually escaping from them. Folk who cannot cope with themselves, or with their marriage, or with their home, tend to escape from them by over-activity; very often helping and healing others as a subconsciously induced smoke-screen to cover the sick and unhealed areas of their own lives. Many clergy find it easier to pastor others than grapple to find their right family role. (Writers like myself can disappear to the typewriter to write about healing, rather than face the cost and disturbance of the healings that are needed in our own lives!)
- (iv) The **Unrealistic** folk will always have a battle of TIME, until they allow the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth about themselves and others. They tend to take on far more than they can manage by well-intentioned promises in the belief that TIME is on their side, not realising that their unreality sets it against them.
- (v) The **Attention Seeker**. We need to be noticed and need to matter; so we have an inexhaustible supply of devices to ensure attention!

Some cling to the security of sickness in preference to the demands of health. There are muddlers who have the ability to bring order to their lives but fail to do so because their muddle attracts sympathy and compassion. There are those, I suspect, who even create muddle to ‘prove’ the rightness of their own feelings of inadequacy! Most attention seekers have no TIME of their own because they are fully occupied taking TIME from everybody else!

(vi) The **Doormat** is another sort of person who always has a TIME problem. By ‘doormat’ I mean the person who can never say ‘no’, and who runs around at everybody’s beck and call. Often such a life-style is primarily to meet a deep personal need – the need to matter; the need to be wanted; a thirst for a relationship; opting for the servant-role, domination, and a partial return to the securities of childhood.

It is easy for the doormat-personality to assume that their indispensability is praiseworthy; it is not. While loving and serving are right, a fear-driven desire to submit and to serve below one’s potential is a failure to face growth into Christ.

Some pastors who should know better, enjoy the benefits of such service instead of guiding the person forward into greater maturity.

(vii) The **Professional**. The inability to say ‘no’ when it would be right to do so bedevils many in caring professions. But a professional doormat is as much a personality weakness as an untrained one! At its root may be a failure to experience one’s own growth and value other than in terms of professional busy-ness, or an inner insecurity which longs for approval and fears the possible rejection and misunderstanding that might arise if one’s client’s wishes were not met. While such weakness curries popularity, it reduces the helper to the doormat status, trodden-on and dominated by those God has called him/her to help; such a helper is always fighting against TIME.

### **Factors around us**

Space precludes a long list, but important among the factors around us which put TIME against us are –

(i) **Possessions**. Most readers will have had the experience of questioning the wisdom of accumulating possessions. Possessions demand TIME from us. We look at the Franciscan with more than a touch of envy sometimes, for the obvious benefits of poverty. By the time the so-called ‘TIME-saving’ machine has gone wrong, and we’ve spent a couple of hours trying to mend it; then have spent half an hour armed with a telephone and Yellow Pages in search of a repairer; have driven to the shop to find it shut for lunch; by the time the special part has come from Japan, (encouraged by twice-weekly phone calls from us to the shop); we have driven to collect it – only to discover that there is no place to park the car, we do indeed wonder at its alleged ‘TIME-saving’ abilities! Possessions sap our energy and put TIME against us.

(ii) **Television**. The TV, with our consent, takes away from us hours of our TIME. Little wonder that so many Christians are increasingly feeling the Spirit’s restraint in this area of home life.

## **Outside and in**

The personality weaknesses and some of the ‘outside’ factors were listed above to help us see what makes us vulnerable to TIME.

The different accounts of what seemed to be other individuals should be seen more as visible descriptions of aspects of ourselves.

Most of us have half or more of those characteristics operating within us at various times. When we make a decision which we feel may not have been the one that God planned for us, or when our behaviour seems to fall short, then it is a help to ask ourselves whether we were being steered by –

- our perfectionism;
- our muddle;
- our escapism;
- our unrealism;
- our attention-getting;
- our doormat-symptom;
- our unintegrated professionalism

– or other personality weaknesses that I have not mentioned; e.g. pride or envy.

Do not be depressed at what you find, ask the Lord to strengthen and touch whatever he discloses to you about yourself.

Although our service of Christ is perfect freedom, we come into bondage to the things that are allowed to take too important a place in our lives.

For real peace and freedom, the Lord may be calling for a radical new life-style. If love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, meekness, gentleness and self-control are the results of the Spirit-filled life, it is alarming to realise that when we allow ourselves to be TIME dominated, possession dominated, or self dominated, that these are the first things to go!

## **Getting Our Aims Clear**

Once we have recognised the nature of the problem of TIME, and recognised the factors in our lives which invite domination by TIME, we need to be clear in our aims.

We must not, for instance, fall into the usual trap of thinking that it is all right for others because they have more TIME than us, or that a single-child family find it easier to redeem the TIME than a four-child family. The TIME we are thinking about is given in equal measure to all, it is not something left over as and when we ‘get everything done!’ TIME is that which contains all our doing. The difference between the large family and the smaller is that among the priorities in TIME, children will feature more in one than the other.

## 7. Learning From Others

It is no coincidence that the book *Celebration of Discipline* [by Richard Foster, Hodder, 1980] remains so popular in our possession-ridden and TIME-dominated culture. **That which we do not master, masters us.**

### No new problem

Christians have, in the past, learned how best to **redeem TIME, and the principles behind their attempts still apply today** – however much our contemporary outworking of them should differ.

### Freedom fighters

The well-known vows of chastity, poverty and obedience work together to free us as Christians:

Chastity frees us from domination by **relationships**.

Poverty frees us from domination by **possessions**.

Obedience frees us from domination by **self**.

We have already seen how we are dominated by TIME when the weaknesses of our personalities and the power of our possessions have their way.

In a corporate and *disciplined rule of life*, the distortions of personality are kept to the minimum. The perfectionist has no more time allocated for his/her task than anyone else; the muddler within a simple life-style is freer from disorder; the escapist has to learn to stay within him/herself and to face being quiet when he/she would rather be busy; and so on.

While it may appear to us that such folk are ruled by the bell, it is clear that the bell, by imposing a discipline which individually each would probably not have the power to enforce, tames and contains the distortive elements of personality.

### Divide and conquer

The rigid division of the monastic day into periods for rest, work, prayer and recreation, is a safeguard against being dominated by the excesses of personality. The lazy cannot sleep too much; nor the workaholic work too much; the super-spiritual cannot pray too much, etc.

### Discipline

Some branches of Protestantism are inclined to confuse discipline with legalism and the danger of justification by works.

Rightly understood, discipline is the basic means by which the powers are tamed and redeemed without which they become the demonic agents of distortion in our lives. Discipline is the

door to liberation (to borrow Richard Foster’s phrase), and it is worth noting that the Epistle to the Ephesians dwells in detail on the right *ordering* of our lives before it suggests arming to fight.

Discipline is not the opposite of grace, it is its outworking. The opposite of discipline is chaos.

## 8. Some Further Guidelines

1. Re-read this article if you mean business!
2. Immediately start a spiritual notebook of intentions, progress, failures, lessons learned, etc.
3. Meditate over a period on the 12 items (one by one) of Christ’s life showing how he tackled this problem (**Lessons from the Life of Jesus**, above).
4. Examine the internal **causes** of your TIME problem, and relate them to your personality.
5. Examine and question your assumptions, each in turn, about life-style; possessions; money; social position.
  - Reflect on your experiences of domination by (i) relationships, (ii) possessions , and (iii) yourself. See what disciplines would check these.
7. Swallow your pride, and if necessary ask for practical help in managing your time better.
8. Pray daily for deliverance from all dictates that are not of God and for his continual healing of your personality.
9. Write out and revise your priorities in all areas of living. Give a right prominence to prayer, worship and recreation; and an appropriate obedience to God’s Sabbath-principle.
10. Make haste slowly. You are beginning a lifetime’s programme!
11. Review each day, note successes and failures and ask God to reveal to you the causes of the latter and to give you grace.
12. Pray daily along the lines of the following prayer –

**LORD GOD, I commit myself to serve you, and you alone, this day.  
Free me from the conformity and bondage of the world,  
and work within me again your miracle of transformation.  
Work within me by your Spirit to change my priorities;  
heal my inner fears and motivations;  
strengthen my weaknesses,  
and put right all my relationships;  
I ask this in the Name of your Son, our Saviour and Redeemer,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen**