

# starters for Sunday

## **Moderators' Worship Notes: Very Rev David Arnott**

### **Stewardship Season**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank the Very Rev David Arnott, former Minister of St Andrews: Hope Park with Strathkinness, for his thoughts on the stewardship of time.

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## Introduction

Christian Stewardship is a fundamental part of Christian Discipleship. It is concerned with the gifts of God and the way we use these gifts. It is concerned with the love and commitment of God to the world and its people, and with our response to God's love and God's commitment.

Worship has a pivotal role in any consideration of Christian Stewardship in the life of the Church. In worship we give thanks for the gifts of God; we confess our failure to use these gifts as God expects them to be used; we explore the pages of the Bible and engage in theological reflection on God's giving and our response; we offer to God our time, our talent and our money to advance the kingdom.

Three former Moderators of the General Assembly kindly agreed to take us on a journey through some of their personal thoughts about the stewardship of time. They offer us prayers, sermon notes and hymn suggestions, however it is up to the reader to adapt these as he/she sees appropriate.

I wish to express my gratitude to the contributors for their time and assistance in writing this material which can be found on the Church of Scotland [Starters for Sunday pages](#) and on the [Resourcing Mission](#) website, where additional archive material can also be found.

Edith Scott

Acting Team Leader – Stewardship and Finance



## Life's Interruptions

It had been an exhilarating visit by a group of young Transylvanians to our church in Glasgow. As they were about to depart we asked them for their impressions of Scotland. One of the boys pointed to his wrist watch. 'You are dictated to by this', he said. 'Time rules your lives.'

It's a funny thing time. It goes so slowly to begin with as school days last interminably and summer holidays go on forever. Then it enters a manic period when family and work concerns all pile in one on top of the other and you just know there are not enough hours in the day. And then in the days of our autumn the speed seems to decrease again and life, is lived, if not at an altogether more gentle pace, then at a pace you feel you can control.

If we live today in a generation of instants from coffee to photographs to electronic communication we still believe, however, in a God of the Bible who crossed the desert not at the speed of a jet plane but with the lumbering gait of a camel. So when we turn to the pages of scripture we have metaphorically to discard the watches that govern our day, the fast pace of living we automatically endure and enter an altogether different world of time, where the speed of a donkey or the fleetness of foot characterised the length of a day's journey.

And yet it is the sameness of the human condition that allows the Bible still to speak not just across centuries but also across cultures. Matthew for example in his 9th chapter paints a picture of some quite frenetic activity of Jesus, by pressing together without a break a string of incidents and events. He shows Jesus healing a paralytic, calling a tax-gatherer to be a disciple, engaging in a round table discussion as he ate. And as if that weren't enough for one day he meets the disciples of John for a further discussion and then a ruler comes to plead for his daughter who has just died. As he is making his way to the ruler's house he stops to speak with a woman who had touched the hem of his garment before continuing to bring the girl back to life.

Even then Matthew is not finished as he recounts the incident of Jesus healing two blind men, a demoniac and then the chapter concludes with Jesus teaching, preaching and healing in the region's various towns and cities. Whatever else Matthew is portraying it is not a picture of a man who worked to rule or who took things easy, not even a picture of a man who stewarded his time well. Rather the pace is frenetic and it leaps from one story to another incident without a pause, leaving us quite breathless.



But, in all of that hive of activity (if not hyper-activity) there lies the clue as to our own use of time. Jesus did not allot his time, so many hours here, so many hours there. You don't read of people being told to come back tomorrow the office closes at 5.00pm. Rather as he is on his way to bringing a young girl back to life, he is interrupted by a woman who has been suffering a haemorrhage for twelve years. Jesus seizes that interruption; he takes the opportunity that presents itself and he heals the woman.

I like that use of time. For it is not a quantitative description of how to use time but a qualitative one. Jesus used all the time he had at his disposal, some for healing, some for teaching, some for sleeping, some for solitude before God, but he used it. He lived his faith.

The time we give to the church is not to be assessed by how many hours we spend on the church premises, but rather it is to be judged by how we use our time to further and increase the Kingdom of God. And that can be at home, in the office as well as at church. Our Christian faith is not something we put on like a football supporter's scarf once a week and then forget about it for the remainder. It is an attitude of mind that shapes how we live every day.

Those of you who have been blessed with children will know the principal thing children both need and want is not the latest gadget or branded footwear. Rather it is just time, the time a parent takes to be with their offspring. For in that time love is shared, confidence is nurtured, well-being is encouraged, all because one person devotes time to another. Any child knows that a parent has other demands on his or her time, it comes with being part of a family. So for a parent to devote time to a child is a most precious way of affirming that young life. It is the unspoken way of declaring, 'you matter to me, you are important for my life.' And that was what Jesus did for that woman. He didn't brush her off because he was headed elsewhere. He saw a need and he responded.

When Araunah suggested to David that he take, free of charge, what he required to make a burnt offering to God, David refused and paid him 50 shekels of silver. 'I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing', he says.

When we are offering up our time for the church's work in the world we also have to remember it will cost us, because it is time we could be using to do other things. We could dig the garden, watch some television or become so immersed in our daily work that we become



proportionately increasingly ineffective. Your sacrifice of time will cost you, therefore you have to have an eye on the bigger picture.

Jesus did. His bigger picture was that he was here on this earth to show that the Kingdom of God was at hand. So he took every opportunity to show that. Just as David did. His bigger picture was not a 'freebie' but an understanding of the nature of his relationship with God. That dictated his actions. How we use our time will show how we understand our own bigger picture; how we understand what it means to be a child of God and believe in Jesus Christ.

If Matthew is demonstrating in the 9th chapter how Jesus uses his time, it is a splendid example of a man who used every opportunity planned and unplanned to show God's love. I have to confess that unnerves me. As the old saying has it, 'Sometime he went about doing good, other times he just went about.'

It can be helpful every so often to take stock of how we use our time. Do I do any good or do I just do? Does my contribution make a real difference?

When we were looking for volunteers to help run a Holiday Club one summer an elderly lady approached me with her two walking sticks to the fore. 'I am no longer able to help with such an energetic task,' she said, 'but I will give you my time every morning at 9.30am, Just as you are starting I will remember you all in my prayers. That will be my contribution.' And what a contribution it was.

Today you will have the same time as you had yesterday, and as you will have tomorrow. As you make your plans, make sure you leave room for life's interruptions as you head off for something you have planned. It maybe just there you will proclaim the Kingdom of God is close at hand.



## Prayers

### Call to Worship

To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven.

### Call to Prayer

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom

### Prayer

Almighty and Eternal God

With hearts full of gratitude, (how could it be anything else?)

we come before you in prayer.

We pause to look around at the world you have created,

the world into which you have set us.

We rejoice at the myriad of colours that brighten our day;

we marvel at the wonderful cycle of the created world

where nature once seemingly long dead slowly rises back to life again.

We rejoice in blooms and blossoms that come in a wide profusion of scent and hue.

Lord God, for the beauty, mystery and wonder of your creation we give heartfelt thanks.

But with our gratitude, a confession that we don't always use our time wisely or well.

We don't pause long enough to allow the beauty of the world to inspire us.

We rush to and fro ignoring the unspoken pleading of those with whom we spend time.

We immerse ourselves in such a busy-ness of activity

as if we were trying to convince ourselves, if not others, of our own importance.

We miss opportunities and chances to leave people feeling better than when we found them;

we use our time to promote ourselves rather than your kingdom;

instead of going about doing good we seem to be content just to go about.

Father forgive us.

Forgive us for letting time slip through our fingers like so much sand;

enable us to use our time wisely



so that each day may yet be another opportunity to show your love to those who most need to hear it and see it, touch it and feel it.

Almighty and Eternal God

help us to fill each day not just with activity but with reflection.

Help us to use our days wisely so that as we travel through life

we may walk at your pace and learn to see and to hear your voice in the world.

In the name of Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Amen.

### **Second Prayer**

Lord God,

today we pray in time

for the time is now

and the needs of the world press in upon us.

We pray for those who fear the slow passage of time  
who hear the footsteps always passing by their door  
but never ringing the bell.

We pray for those who endure the curse of loneliness  
that produces the silent scream of frustration.

Enter into their time-scale through your servants, Lord Christ

And let each one of us to be open to the nudging of your Holy Spirit.

We pray for those watching time slip through  
their fingers as if they were powerless.

The offspring grow into independence  
no longer needing the same amount of time  
and life loses some of its fulfilment.



We think of those who sit at the bedside  
aware that each hour and each day is precious beyond measure  
while regretting the time they have wasted  
to encourage, or to thank or even to love.

As we pray, Lord for those living under the burden of time  
so also we pray that each may learn to live in your time which is now.

In that instant, present Lord God,

We pray for our world.

For the people of Syria that the sounds of warfare may be relegated to history.

For the refugees risking life and limb in the pursuit of a better, safer life  
that tomorrow may be more assured than yesterday.

For our political leaders that they might search for a more secure future  
rather than an instant fix today.

And for ourselves, Lord, we pray.

Today is where we live.

Yesterday is what we know.

Enable us to take that experience of today and yesterday into a new tomorrow  
where our confidence in your gospel, and our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord,  
will enable us to go forward in faith assured that our times are in your hand. Amen

### **Offering Prayer**

With grateful hearts we lay before you, Lord  
the offerings we have brought.

They are signs, if not of our faith,  
then of our desire

to share in the work of your church.

May they and we, together, be used  
to proclaim the good news that  
Jesus Christ is Lord.



## Musical Suggestions

CH4 30	I waited for the Lord
CH4 100	O Lord thou art
CH4 159	Lord for the years
CH4 194	This is the day
CH4 237	Look forward in faith
CH4 276	Wait for the Lord (can also be used as a sung response)
CH4 511	Your hand O God has guided
CH4 534	Make me a captive, Lord (alludes to an old fashioned wind-up watch/clock)



## Further Advice

For any advice or ideas on Stewardship Programmes for your church, please contact:

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## Additional Resources

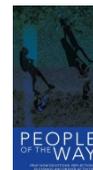
### Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

### Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [People of the Way](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



### Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

### Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

### Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

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*Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.*

