

P.S.

SURVIVING a week's work sometimes feels like no mean feat. In some parts of the world, Wednesday is known as 'hump day'. If you can just get over that hump it starts to seem as though there is hope of making it to the weekend! But some Mondays, even Wednesday seems an eternity away.

I recently picked up a copy of the British Airways in-flight magazine. It contained a delightfully ironic and perceptive account of all this, of how the working week can unfold, and how human beings have an incredible capacity to waste time.

Monday, the article said, is dossier's day. Nothing ever happens on a Monday, and empirical research has shown that fewer emails are sent and received and fewer phone calls are made than on any other day of the week. There is so much of the week still to come; whatever it is that needs to be done can wait.

Skip Tuesday for a moment, and come to Wednesday. Although Wednesdays might feel good because the week is halfway through, the fact remains that, as far as work is concerned, the week has half passed, and there is a gnawing sense that not enough has been done. The weekend is a long time away, yet too near to actually get anything done in the intervening period. Wednesdays are paralysed with indecision: work now, or postpone a full week's work until next Monday?

On Thursdays there is a calm acceptance that the week is now a write-off; and Fridays, the British Airways journalist pointed out, are a joke—to all intents and purposes the start of the weekend. Who has any serious meetings on a Friday?

Which leaves Tuesday; the only day of the week when any serious work gets done! Perhaps the working week should be reduced to Tuesdays just to increase productivity!

The piece is clever because, although it is caricature, anyone can recognise the elements of truth within it. Human nature has this capacity to waste time, to procrastinate. We want to get things done, yet sometimes we don't want it quite enough to actually start (or finish). Instead, time is frittered away, and we're left with a feeling of dismay; irritation with ourselves, perhaps; guilt; and the lingering knowledge that we will have to motivate ourselves all over again another day.

The journalist Andy Rooney said, "It isn't working that's so hard, it's getting ready to work". It takes courage to make a start. It takes effort to shake off

All in a week's work

the lethargy that can seem to come baked-in on certain days. Writers sometimes say that, once they get started, the words seem to flow. But there is nothing more forbidding than a blank page. Starting off is the most difficult thing.

The Scriptures contain some rather explicit advice on this topic: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:14-17).

The concept of "redeeming the time" has to do with buying it back, making use of something that would otherwise be lost and dead to you. The Greek term can be used like we use the term 'redeem', meaning 'buy back'; but it can also simply mean 'buy', but in an emphatic sense. It would not be used of walking into a shop and buying a chocolate bar. It would be used of a wholesaler going to the trade market (or to the cash and carry) and buying huge boxes of chocolate. This is the sort of intensity that we should be putting into ensuring that our time is not wasted.

Or again, from Colossians: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (4:5,6).

The juxtaposition of ideas here is interesting. "Redeeming the time" is not just about (for instance) making sure we spend time doing godly things rather than, say, reading trashy novels. It is not just about using our time in relation to God (as one might think if only the Ephesians passage were in view). The Colossians context shows that we have a responsibility to use time wisely with respect to our dealings with others also. We are to be wise and circumspect in our interactions with them, speaking in an appropriate and Christlike way, and using wisely the times of our interactions with them. I suppose this would apply both to being generous in our giving of time to our employers, co-workers, friends, relatives and neighbours, and to using that time that we do have with them in a Christlike way. It might also include ensuring that we take our opportunities to talk to them about the things we believe. We need to put away laziness and procrastination, then, both towards God and towards our fellow man.

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