

Gracious Timekeeping

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[0:00] Good morning, Watermark. Just a little introduction. I'm Bernard. I'm Angie's husband. And we've been attending Watermark here for about three and a half years.

So you're going to hear from me today. So for those that are visiting, I'm sorry, please do come back next week. You are, you know, this is amateur night, if you like. So let me start with a little story.

There were two of these young fishes swimming along, okay? So get a picture in your head, kind of like Dory and Elmo, you know, swimming along in the sea.

And it happened to meet an older fish swimming the other way, so like this. And the older fish nods to the younger fishes and said, morning boys, how's the water?

And the two younger fish swims along a little bit more. Then eventually one of the younger fish turns to the other and said, what the heck is water? This illustrates my challenge today, okay? Talking to people in Hong Kong about the Sabbath and about spending too much time at work is like talking to fish about water, okay?

[1:16] What's water? What's spending too much time at work, right? Everybody works these hours in Hong Kong. Last year, you know, CNN did a survey and analyzed 71 global cities, okay?

That's about all the global cities in the world, 71 of them. And it said, Hong Kongers work the longest hours in the world, 2,606 hours a year, 2,606 hours.

You can divide it in your head. That's over 50 hours a week, okay? So just give you a bit of contrast. And, you know, I know everybody says, Hong Kongers, they get so many holidays. We get 17 paid working days of holidays a year, okay?

So that's a lot less than the rest of the world. So just contrast, 2,606 hours for Hong Kong. In Paris, they work 1,606 hours, okay?

This is the capital of France. I hate to think what they work in Lyon, probably like 30% less. But so we work 1,000 hours more in Hong Kong than the people in Paris, okay?

[2:25] I'm not kind of beating up on the French. I'm just giving you a contrast, okay? So, you know, God has a real sense of humor, right? If you ask my wife Angie there that what is one area in my life that I'm most incompetent in, she would probably tell you it's my inability to allocate time to the things that are important in our lives, okay?

I'm a terrible time manager. You know, I'm not a good steward of my time. And so I learned about as much from preparing for this sermon as, you know, I hope you are going to.

So I have this problem. The problem I have is not able to say no, okay? I'm just not very good at saying no. Somebody come and ask me to do something.

It's like, sure. And then somebody else come and ask me to do something. Sure. And then I look at it. Oh, I'm double booked. But okay, I'll try and fit it in. So that's my problem. Then I spread myself too thin.

Then I have very little time left for my family. So that's my main issue. So, but I don't think I'm alone in this problem, right?

[3:32] I mean, I think most of us feel like we kind of struggle with time management. We feel our jobs demand too much from us. And we feel very, we find it very difficult to disconnect from our work, right?

I mean, I'm going to talk a little bit more about that. We struggle to make enough time for the relationships that are important in our lives. We struggle with spending time with God. We don't get enough sleep, okay?

Look, I mean, I see a lot of you with these fitness bands on you, okay? Okay, you probably make the number of like target steps in a day.

But I bet you everybody here is not making a sleep quota, right? So we struggle with enough sleep. And we also struggle with a lack of exercise, right? So the problem is how do we manage our time? Well, the first verse we talked about, Ephesians 5, said, Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time because the days are evil.

[4 : 36] Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. In verse 15 it says, Not as unwise but as wise. Being a good steward of time is a wisdom issue as opposed to a moral issue, okay?

The Bible doesn't say, Thou shall not stay past 8 p.m. at work, right? It just doesn't. So it's much more nuanced. It's actually a little bit more difficult.

Sometimes you kind of wish there was the 11th commandment that actually tells you, you know, you must leave work by 8 or, you know, Thou shall suffer the wrath. But it doesn't, okay?

The fact is it is much more difficult to manage our time and see what the Bible says. So how do we find out what the Bible tells us? You know, should we be working 40, 50, 60?

Is it okay to work 70 hours a week, 80 hours? Well, thankfully, verse 16 in the Ephesians scripture, actually in the King James Version, verse 16 it says, Redeeming the time because the days are evil.

[5 : 44] The word redeeming in Greek is actually a business term. It's a transaction term. It actually refers to maximizing your return, okay? So those in the investment community out here, you kind of understand.

That's kind of, you know, making a killing, right? So maximizing your return is the word redeeming. So the verse is telling us to maximize our return on our investment of time.

Don't waste it. Don't invest it in low yield investments in time. But how do we do that, right? So we're going to look at it under three topics, three headings.

Firstly, own the problem, okay? Are you a workaholic? Okay, I'm going to ask that. It's a rhetorical question, by the way. You live in Hong Kong, so you're probably, you know, some form of workaholic.

In fact, I think I noticed today's, the title is Confession of a Workaholic. It was the sermon title. And then the second title is Answer the Problem.

[6 : 45] The answer to the problem is Sabbath is the key to time stewardship. And the third, a practical application is solve the problem. What could Sabbath look like for us in 2016?

So, own the problem. Here's the standard conversation. I am assuming you probably had one of these last week in Hong Kong. Between you and you bumping into somebody, maybe, you know, at work.

How's life? Oh, it's busy. Dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot. Could be travel and so forth. So, that's a common exchange. Asking Hong Kongers about overworking is really about fish in water.

But that's because the most obvious, the most ubiquitous, and the important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and the hardest to talk about.

And I think how we manage our time and how we spend our time, what we spend our time on, is one of these topics that are just kind of hard to talk about. But we need to, right? So, I know what you're all thinking.

[7 : 54] All you're thinking are like, well, Bernard, if you know what's on my plate, and I just got too much on in a day, right? Yep, you have no idea what's on my plate.

Well, I feel like that as well. And I'm pretty sure you do. So, basically, listen to this statement and see if you agree with it, okay?

God could not give you more to do in a day than you can do. God could not give you more in a day than you can do. Would you agree with that?

I would say so, right? I mean, God wouldn't give you more in a day than you can do. So, the problem is we all have more in a day than we can do, right?

So, what does that say? Just logically speaking, you analyze that and you say, well, there's some stuff in our day that is not God's will for us, right?

[8 : 52] There's some stuff in our day that either we gave ourselves or somebody's given us to do that is not God's will for us, okay? Now, here's the difficulty.

The wisdom we're talking about is discerning what are those things. We all have more in a day. Not all of it is given by God. Not all of it is God's will for us.

We've given some to ourselves. We've definitely done that. And other people have given some to us. So, let's discern what are those things. So, let me just analyze.

Why do we have so much in our day? Or why do we have so much on our plate, okay? I'm just going to say there's a few macro issues going on. So, I'm going to talk about that. And then a big internal issue, okay?

Let me talk about a couple of macro issues. Firstly, globalization, okay? Globalization, basically, we're talking about, I mean, I think about 10 years ago, there was a guy, Thomas Freeman.

[9 : 52] Some of you may have read his book. Wrote a book called *The World's Flat*, okay?

Basically, he's talking about globalization. And what he's talking about is basically anybody who can get online can compete for your job, okay?

So, you know, there was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. So, you know, the whole of the Eastern Bloc of Europe suddenly came into the marketplace.

China opened up. India opened up. Basically, you've got about three, three, four billion people suddenly entering into the marketplace competing for your job. In fact, he had this saying.

He said, when he was young, his parents used to say to him, eat up at your dinner table because there are hungry people in China and India who want your dinner, okay?

Now, he said, now what he says to his daughter is, finish your homework because there are people in India and China who want your job, okay? So, you know, but I'm not kind of talking about, this is not a Trump political speech.

[10 : 59] We're not talking about moving jobs and bringing jobs back to America and all that stuff. All I'm saying is we are in an ultra-competitive global environment, okay?

The second thing is technology and global logistics is allowed outsourcing. Outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, outsourcing of service jobs, okay?

So, that's a couple of macro factors that are happening. One other thing that is happening is technology, okay? Mobile technology, smartphones, tablets, cloud technology, all that is actually causing a bit of a problem for us.

And that is we're not truly disconnected. In very few places in the world that we are actually able to totally disconnect from our jobs. A company, Adobe, did a survey last year and said 90% of the people check their work emails at home.

Not surprising. 42% survey said they check their emails way too much. The other thing about technology, and I have to say I'm guilty because I'm part of that.

[12 : 10] I work in the technology industry. It changes the competitive landscape, okay? Jump into a taxi anywhere in the world.

And, you know, their jobs are not getting shipped to India or Malaysia or anywhere, right? But they will tell you immediately their business is down 25% because of Uber, okay?

Now, that's a global statistic. Down 25% because of Uber, okay? You go into any hotel industry, they will tell you their biggest competitor now is Airbnb.

In fact, Airbnb has got a higher market cap than the Marriott, which is the biggest hotel chain in the world. So taxi rides, hotel rooms, these are the things that we thought were going to be immune to technological change, right?

But technology is disrupting all of that and it's causing an ultra-competitive environment, right? So you've got both your jobs, other people, a lot more people competing for your jobs, as well as your industry is being attacked from different directions.

[13 : 18] So those are kind of a couple of macro issues that's making us work harder, right? We've got to work harder just to keep our jobs. We've got to work harder just to even stay half-competitive.

But the last and certainly not least is an internal issue. It's a big issue. And I think Arthur Miller, the playwright, the famous American mid-century playwright, said it best in his 1964 play, *After the Fall*. The character in it, Quinton, said, For many years, I looked at life like a court case. It was a series of proofs. When you were young, you prove how brave you are or how smart.

Then what a good lover. Then a good father, a good husband. Finally, how wise and powerful or whatever. But underlining it all, I see now there was a presumption that one moved on an upward path towards some elevation where I would be justified.

I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was an endless argument with oneself.

[14:37] This pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench. Which, of course, is another way of saying despair. What are we trying to prove?

Last month, Graham talked to us here about this concept of meritocracy. Meritocracy is a system where you're rewarded for your merits, right?

Your value for what you can do, what you can produce. Arthur Miller, in his play, reminds us, one of the reasons we work so hard is we want to justify ourselves.

To prove that we are good enough. That we should be accepted. So there's a work underneath the work. And that work is to prove that we have worth.

But the Bible reminds us that we are valued. But not because of what we can produce or what potential we have to produce. But because we are a creation of God.

[15:37] We're created in the image of God. And that is the reason we have worth. So in summary of this section, there are some external issues.

Globalization, technology. That is driving hyper-competition. But there's also an internal issue. And that is our need to feel justified.

Our need to prove our self-worth. And that is one of the reasons why we drive ourselves to overwork. Now, the answer to the problem, thankfully, thankfully, as I was reading through and studying for this, thankfully, the Bible foresaw Uber and Airbnb.

It foresaw that we will go into this cycle of self-justification. The key principle in the Bible to help us to be good stewards of time is the Sabbath.

In Exodus 20, it says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But on the seventh is the Sabbath to the Lord your God.

[16:48] So six days you shall labor and do all your work. The verse is stressing that the key to maximizing the return from our time at work is to observe the Sabbath.

You cannot be effective in what you do at work for the six days unless you take a break from it, both physically and emotionally. We need to be able to separate our identity from what we do.

And the Sabbath was designed to remind us that we are not only what we do, but the true value in us is because we're created in God's image.

We need to be able to walk away from our work, from our grades at university, or from our need for approval from others, from our bosses, or from our peers. So what do you call somebody who can't walk away from their work?

Well, Deuteronomy 5 actually tells us, You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

[17:57] Therefore, the Lord your God commands you to keep the Sabbath day. We've talked a lot about slavery in the last month, right? Especially the Israel slavery under Egypt.

And we're no longer under the Egyptians, but we do have a new slave master. The Oxford Dictionary tells us a definition of a slave is a person who is excessively dependent upon or controlled by something.

A person who is excessively dependent upon or controlled by something. Anyone who can't put down his work, anyone who can't walk away from his work, anyone who overworks is a slave by this definition.

We can be our slave to our own expectations, our own need for success, materialism. We can be our slave to unreasonable bosses. Some of us can be a slave, you know, in Asia especially, to parental expectations, right?

Both Angie and I work a lot with our young adults within our congregation. And there's a lot of pressure for young people to meet what their parents are expecting from them.

[19:10] Now, some of you are parents. I'm going to get to you in a second to talk about, you know, some of the... Sometimes it's very easy for us to put a lot of expectations on our kids.

So, Deuteronomy 5 tells us that Sabbath is actually a decoration of freedom. Sabbath was given to us by God to give us rest, the rest that we all need.

More than physical rest, it's a rest from self-justification. And as Arthur Miller said, it's a rest from this pointless litigation of existence.

What we all want is we want that rest. We long for that rest. So, in summary, in terms of what the Bible says about Sabbath, God knew long ago that we were going to get caught up in this cycle of self-justification.

As a result of the fall, really, if you can go all the way back to Genesis, the way we want to be justified is we want to succeed in our work.

[20 : 13] We want to get good grades. We want to get that big bonus. Okay? So, let's own the problem. The Sabbath was designed to free us from the cycle of self-justification by setting aside a time that we can be reminded that our worth comes from being a creation of God, not from what we produce.

So, let's go down to this application piece. This is the piece I like. Okay? What could Sabbath look like in 2016 for us?

Okay? I mean, Sabbath is such an old word. It's kind of an Old Testament word. And, you know, what does that look like? So, two natural questions that come from application is, how much time do I need off?

Okay? And what should I do with that time? What activity constitutes, you know, a good Sabbath? Right? I mean, when you talk about Sabbath, you automatically kind of have this vision of, for the Jewish community, you know, there's a whole list of, I think, 39 things that they can't do on the Sabbath.

And, you know, you shouldn't play sports, and you shouldn't ride in cars, and so forth. So, let's deal with it practically in 2016. How much time off do you need?

[21 : 33] Well, Tim Keller, in his talk on the Sabbath, suggests you should have one and a half days off a week. So, if you are at church today, and you are busy in the morning, you could be teaching Sunday school, or you could be helping music, and so forth.

You have the afternoon off. You should have one entire day off. Say, for many, it would be Saturday. Okay? So, 1.5 days. If you can't get 1.5 days, what he suggests is you should have one day off, plus three evenings.

Okay? Three nights off. So, after 6 o'clock. Now, what should you do on the Sabbath?

Okay? We all need some veg time. We all need some time to just chill. In Hong Kong, we are terrible at this. Okay? Because as soon as we get any time off, we go and schedule it to the last microsecond.

We're going to do this, this, this, this, this, this. Okay? Now, as a parent of three kids, I have to admit, as parents, I'm going to speak to parents now, we also over-schedule our kids.

[22 : 47] Okay? Soon as they have any time off, they've got to go to Tudor, they've got to have music lessons, they've got to do tap dancing, and then, you know, after that, they can, like, go and do, you know, revision on Kumon, and other things.

So, we totally over-schedule our kids. Okay? And this is just a sidebar, right, because it's really another sermon. But I would just say, we spend so much time in preparing our kids to overwork for the rest of their lives.

So, we build their resumes, okay, for work, or to get into that name brand university. Okay?

But we don't prepare them for life. We don't help them build their character. And character building takes time. And it's not about activity. It's more about experiences.

It's more about learning from failures. We're also not very good at letting them fail. So, sometimes we do need to let them fail. But anyway, I'm diverting. That's another passionate topic of mine.

[23 : 54] But we do need some unstructured and unplanned time. Okay? So, we, it's okay to go and watch Zoolander 2. Okay? It's okay to go and play League of Legends.

Okay? That's not all your Sabbath, but it's okay to go and just get some veg time. Okay? So, Leviticus 25 tells us this analogy of letting the field live fellow.

Okay? So, you know, for every time, you should let the field just have nothing grow on it. That is veg time for us. Okay? So, the second part of Sabbath, apart from the veg time, so I'm not suggesting you should veg for 1.5 days because that would make you kind of sad.

You should have some avocational time. Okay? What's avocational? So, these are more structured time. Okay? Okay? Doing something you enjoy. Okay? And I'll break that down into three sections. Okay? So, one is you need some time for contemplation. You need time to spend with God. You need time to read the Word of God or listen to the Word of God and meditate on the Word of God and prayer.

[25 : 02] Okay? Second, you do need some recreational time. So, you should go and do some sports. Right? It could be dragon boat. It could be just go for hikes. Beautiful day this afternoon. You know, just go for a walk.

Right? Or go and enjoy whatever sports you play. Okay? And then the last is aesthetics. You should have some time to be exposed to the creation of God.

And that could be in Hong Kong. I mean, there are beautiful trails. You can go outside and look at the nature of God. That could be spending some time with music, with art.

Okay? With theater. You know, Hong Kong, I mean, here's another little advertisement. You can go to a concert with the Hong Kong Philharmonic for under \$200 Hong Kong.

Okay? It's like \$150. That is the cheapest in the world. Okay? You cannot go to a Philharmonic anywhere in the world for \$20 US.

[26 : 00] Okay? So, you can do that in Hong Kong. But every time I go, it's empty. There's nobody there. Okay? I mean, there's like me and the orchestra. And it's like a private thing.

Right? Which is kind of weird. But I'm just saying, there's just so many cool things to do in Hong Kong. You could go to a play in Hong Kong in a theater company for about \$150 Hong Kong dollars.

Okay? So, aesthetics. It's important to be exposed to the creation of God. And art is one of mankind's expression of our dreams and our hopes.

And sometimes with good art, if there's a piece of music that you love and there's a painting you love, by looking at that painting, listening to that music, you actually get a little sense, a glimpse of what heaven's going to be like.

I know, I don't mean like Belinda Carlisle's song, Heaven on Earth. Okay? I just mean, there are some times that it touches your soul with good art.

[27 : 03] So, contemplative, recreational, and aesthetic. Okay? Now, there's a few things to take into account when you kind of shape your Sabbath.

Firstly, are you introvert or extrovert? Okay? So, the introverts, you probably need a little bit more time by yourself. Maybe reading or listening to music.

Extroverts, you can probably spend more time with, you know, groups and larger groups. The problem comes when an introvert marries an extrovert, which happens all the time, by the way, because opposites attract, right?

So, at that point, you do need to find the right balance. And, you know, I think after 22 years, oh, 21 years of marriage, we are finding that balance.

Okay? So, introvert, take more time to be by yourself. Extrovert, it's okay, you can, you know, be in group activities. The other thing is, we go through different seasons in our lives.

[28 : 05] Okay? So, if you're in a new job, you're starting a new business, okay, you're parents of little ones, okay, you're not going to get a full Sabbath. That is just the reality.

And don't feel guilty about that, don't feel too bad about that, okay? I know there's some doctors out there, if you're starting in your medical career, you're not going to get a full Sabbath. Okay? You're going to work long hours.

You work in the finance industry, you're going to work long hours. But be careful, that can't go on forever. That's a season in your life. Make sure you have somebody accountable in your life to say, hey, you know, it's been going on for like 17 years, maybe the season's over, you know?

So, you know, we've got to be honest with ourselves, right? I mean, they are, and by the way, because both Angie and I work with a lot of young graduates, when you first come out to work, you do have to work hard, you've got to put in your hours, you've got to earn your stripes.

I mean, sometimes, I don't want to be too harsh on the millennials, you know, they come out, and I have heard a few of them say to me, you know, six months into their job, my boss don't really values me, I'm not getting a work-life balance.

[29 : 22] I said, dude, you're six months in, okay? You know, and then they start describing what they're looking for from their job, and they say, you know, I want to be valued, I want to be useful, what I'm talented at, and I said, I don't know what you're describing, but it ain't a job, okay?

But the fact is, when you first come out to work, you do have to put in the hours, and it's not for two years, not for three years, it's more like ten, okay? Before you get some credit, before you get some kind of brand equity, at that point, you can start dictating a bit more what you can do, you know, what I don't want to do.

But you know, don't try and do that after six months, oh, I don't want to do that. That's, you know, come, we'll get you fired, and you will be in fellow for a little while. So, you know, there's some practical issues.

The other thing is, Sabbath is very vocation specific, okay? So, it's not helpful for a doctor to try to advise an accountant how to manage this Sabbath.

It's not helpful for a banker to advise a full-time ministry worker on how their Sabbath should look like. You should look for somebody in your own field, who may be a couple years ahead, maybe 10 years ahead, and talk to them and start working through them what your Sabbath looks like.

[30 : 44] So, it may be worthwhile for us in Watermark that, you know, we could have groups that are more vocation specific that can get together and talk about, hey, what could Sabbath look like for, you know, bankers or lawyers and doctors and, you know, people in full-time ministry.

So, I'm very careful to say, you know, because of the stress of the different industries that we work in, Sabbath could look very different for different folks.

So, just to sum up, okay, on today, we have a tendency to overwork. We have a tendency actually to enslave ourselves.

for multiple reasons. There are kind of global, competitive reasons, but deep down, underneath, there's the work under the work. We need to feel justified.

And we need to feel that we matter. We need to feel we're important. But, without the Sabbath, we're not going to find that rest. So, in summary, Arthur Miller's character said, disaster really began when I look up one day and the bench was empty.

[31 : 53] No judge in sight. In John 19, 30, it tells us, when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, it is finished.

He bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And in Deuteronomy 5, we read, with his mighty hand and his outstretched arms.

If we were Arthur Miller's character, Quintin, and we are all in that courtroom, we're all arguing our own case, we're all arguing a case for justification, but we can look up and that bench is not empty. Because up on there, we will see Christ, with his outstretched arm, not like this, but like this, with our outstretched arm, nailed, outstretched, and he said, it is finished.

Sabbath was designed to remind us to look up on that bench and see Christ with his outstretched arms and to remind us that it is finished.

[32 : 57] We no longer need to strive for that justification. We no longer need to strive for that sense of why do we feel important. Because of what he's done on the cross, he's already given that to us and used the Sabbath to remind ourselves that every week.

Let us pray. Father God, we just want to give you thanks that we can come together today, Lord, to discuss your word, to be reminded of the gift, this ultimate gift that you've given us.

That is the Sabbath day. That is a day that we can look up on the cross, that we can know that we no longer need to work for our salvation, but our salvation is granted to us because of what you've done on the cross.

On the cross, we are reminded that we are much worse than that. We believe you we are because it took the Son of God to die on the cross for us. But we are loved much more than we can ever imagine because you were on that cross and you died for us.

For all that, we lift up to you, Lord. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.