

Buying Up That Opportunity

By C. H. Zahnizer

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its pleasures fade
away;

Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou who changest not, abide with me."

The chime of the clock reminds us that we live in time concepts. Life is divided into centuries, decades, years, days, hours and moments. It is the unmeasured portion between man's creation and his termination. Since we cannot deal with time in toto, it must be for us the present moment. Hence, to redeem the time is simply to use the present moment to advantage, or to buy up the opportunity. We are all in the market place of life where time is offered. We can buy it if we will, or lose it if we choose.

Opportunity lies in the present, for the past is spent and the future is uncertain. Jean Paul Richter has taught, "The future is nothing but a coming present, and the present that thou despisest was once a future that thou desiredst." The present moment holds the opportunity; yea, is the opportunity.

"Catch, then, oh, catch the transient hour;
Improve each moment as it flies;
Life's a short summer, man a flower,
He dies, alas; how soon he dies."

Time wasted is existence; time used is life. The one is a wretched existence; the other a glorious life. Killing time is the occupation of a fool; using time is the business of the wise. Wasted time is a red ink entry in life's ledger. It is the fearful blot of idleness upon the pages of our diary. How much better to use the moments in true living—using them to live and not abusing them to die. Being wise. A Christian is "a miser of the minutes."

Use Time Proportionately

It is not enough to use time, we must use it proportionately. Each interest must have its due proportion of time, greater interests receiving the more time, lesser interests the less time. The mother of Methodism, Suzannah Wesley, so wisely distributed her time as to become a worthy mother of nineteen children. The Holy Club with its exact partition of time was the cause of its members being derisively called "Methodists." John Wesley was noted for his methodical use of time. One morning about five o'clock he lost ten minutes through the tardiness of his coachman, and mourned over it more than over lost treasures. Rev. Albert Barnes wrote sixteen volumes of his commentaries in less than an equal number of years, devoting to them only the hours before breakfast. General Booth programmed his time months ahead and so did almost an incredible amount of business. We do so little because we plan so ill. Let us invite God in on our planning, as well as petition Him for performance.

The Most Important Things

In rules for a preacher's conduct, we read, "Be diligent; never be unemployed; never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary. You have nothing to do but to save souls; therefore spend and be spent in this work." Using Wesley's phraseology, we exhort you, "Buying every possible moment out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure and worldly business" let us give ourselves to soul winning. "He that winneth souls is wise."

The King's Highway

That blessed young saint of God, James Brainerd Taylor, met a traveler at a watering trough one day, and during the five minutes their horses were drinking he preached Jesus to the stranger. Those words were like apples of gold in pitchers of silver and that stranger became a Christian and a missionary to Africa. One day in Africa he received a box of books, and on opening a small volume of memoirs, he saw the picture of the saintly and sainted young man who had been about his Father's business.

We win souls not only by talking but by living. The correctness of our lives is like the straightness of the barrel of a gun; it gives greater directness and certainty of results. "Make straight paths for your feet" and give warm messages from your heart that souls may be won.

Questionable Things

We pass from a consideration of what is profitable to amusement and so "pass the time." Peter says, "Pass the time of sojourning here in fear." Moderns interpolate what is questionable. Can a Christian engage in worldly "pleasure" for "fear." The true Christian sings concerning all worldly pleasures,

Its pleasures no longer please,
Nor happiness afford.

Far from my heart be joys like these:
Now I have seen the Lord."

Everything that a Christian says, does, or wears, has a moral tone. The excesses of our pleasures may testify to the heart of our delights. One minister of a certain church was reported frequently to be across the street from his church playing checkers for two hours at a time. Even as a boy of fifteen the Lord spoke to me about an undue wasting of my time in a certain innocent game. However, the innocent play and mirth of children, and even the relaxation of saints cannot be interpreted as a needless or heedless waste. Even Jesus said, "Come ye apart into a desert place and rest awhile." Rest for the body today, that there might be greater activity tomorrow, becomes a blessing. My end is to serve Christ. Everything must minister to that end, even my recreation and rest.

Invest Those Moments!

We can only use time profitably as we invest it for Jesus. If I buy up the moments I must in turn invest them and, moreover, they must be invested as they are bought. When I invest in time I am investing for eternity, so that we may well say, "Lost time is lost eternity." How necessary, then, to put our time in his hands:

"Take my life and let it be,
Consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise."

Francis Ridley Havergal who wrote the poem, urged us to put our time in His hands. She says, "We are like little children closing our fingers over diamonds. How can they receive and reflect the rays of light, analyzing them into all the splendour of their prismatic beauty, while they are kept shut up tight in dirty hands? Give them up! Let our Father hold them for us, and throw His own great light upon them. Then we shall see them full of fair colors of His manifold loving kindness.

Let Him always keep them for us, and then we shall always see His light and His love reflected in them." I hear one say, "Lord, take my days for thou art Lord of the day." The Master replies, "But child, I cannot take thy days unless thou dost give me thy moments." Let it be so, my Lord!

Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise."

Not only take them but keep them, for I am investing them for thee. If I invest my moments in pleasure they yield sensuous gratification; in business they give gold; in politics, fame (perchance, ill fame); in intellectual pursuits, knowledge. But if sown in the Spirit, they that seek for glory, honor and immortality, find eternal life; life which is translated in terms of joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory; life which brings heaven's gold, God's warm approval, and the fullness of His infinite knowledge as we can comprehend it. "Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God." Millions of blessings in moments of time if we invest them for God!

The Devil's Bid

The devil is bidding for your time. Do you not hear him whispering, "Young man, I will let you sip the nectar of my pleasures. I will write my name on the hall of fame. I will give thee the applause of thy fellow men. All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Every blessing that he offers (note this carefully) is for this life alone—to feed thy lust, to dazzle thine eyes, to minister to thy pride. What are these but "wandering lights floating away over dark marshes" and then disappearing. Satan would lead you into a "deep dark cave whence there is no issue, where poison flows instead of water, and where serpents hiss and crawl." He would have you wastefully,

"Sowing the seed of a lingering pain;
Sowing the seed of a maddened brain;
Sowing the seed of a tarnished name;
Sowing the seed of eternal shame."

He would send thee on the toboggan of the moments into the shades of eternal light.

Jesus Bids Also!

Jesus Christ is bidding for your time. He is crying, "Young man, take up thy cross and follow me, and I will make you into the man that earth admires and heaven owns. Give me thy old self and I will give thee back a better self made not only for time but for eternity. Invest with me thy hours and I will weave them into the pattern of godliness which hath promise not only in this life, but of the life to come. Earth shall yield thee her richest treasures and heaven shall pour into thy heart its deepest joys. Saints shall fellowship thee, angels shall support thee, and God Himself shall love thee and be thy God. Joy for your persecution; a hundred fold for your labor; bread for your hunger; and a well of water spring up into everlasting life for your thirst, is your portion. I give peace on earth, joy in the highest, and a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

What then shall be your decision? "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

"From earth I rise (on the wings of improved time)
And seek the joys at thy right hand.
I all on earth forsake,
Its wisdom, fame, and power.
And Him my only portion make,
My shield and tower." —A. H. Journal