

Love and the Art of Time Management

Psalm 90, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

There are a few great mega-questions about the Christian life. Two of the biggest are *Who are we?* and *How shall we live?*

Two verses in John's Gospel encompass both how to live and who we are. Jesus said *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* (John 13: 34-35) Who we are and how we should live. Today we are focused on *how shall we live?*

Have you heard of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*?

I would like to look at today's psalm and gospel reading in the light of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, with the aim of reaching a similar juxtaposition of *Love and the Art of Time Management*. But don't worry; don't let those eyes glaze over; it's more about life management than time management. It is, however, about love.

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values (ZAMM) is a 1974 philosophical novel, the first of Robert M. Pirsig's texts in which he explores his Metaphysics of Quality.

It was originally rejected by 121 publishers, more than any other bestselling book, according to the Guinness Book of Records. Then it sold 5 million copies worldwide. You will still find it selling steadily in bookshops.

In its introduction, Pirsig explains that, despite its title, *it should in no way be associated with that great body of factual information relating to orthodox Zen Buddhist practice. It's not very factual on motorcycles, either.*

So what is it about? Greatly simplified, it is about quality (or virtue, or good); it's about empirical truth; and it's about attention and balancing the romantic and the practical, bringing quality and truth together. The romantic motorcyclist enjoys his motorcycle, the look, the feel, the ride. He is not much interested in mechanical maintenance. The practical motorcyclist is good at rational analysis. He does what is needed, replacing or repairing or adjusting the things that seem to need attention in order to work correctly.

In the novel we learn that the narrator understands both viewpoints and is aiming for the middle ground. Within the joy of riding his motorcycle, just as a parent knows their child he pays attention to the little variations of look, feel and sound that indicate developing needs. He understands the potentially

dehumanising world of technology, but is capable of also seeing the beauty of technology and feels good about mechanical work, where the goal is not so much to maximise mechanical efficiency but to achieve an inner peace of mind, both mental and spiritual. The book demonstrates that motorcycle maintenance may be dull and tedious drudgery or an enjoyable and pleasurable pastime; it all depends on attitude - a bit like seeing your job as laying bricks or building a cathedral.

Life, whatever its specific circumstances, can be dull and tedious drudgery or filled with joy and peace; it all depends on attitude.

In Psalm 90 we are told that while God is eternal, human lives are as transient as new grass.

We have a short time on this earth and we feel the pressures of time. We rush about to do this and do that. Accomplishment of tasks great and small dominates our lives and devours our time.

Jesus did not fill his time with rushing about and task-oriented busyness, yet what great things he accomplished!

Visual display:

T treasure

I invest

M manage

E enjoy

Aiden Wilson Tozer, a pastor in the first half of the 20th century wrote: *Time is a resource that is non-renewable and non-transferable. You cannot store it, slow it up, hold it up, divide it up or give it up. You can't hoard it up or save it for a rainy day—when it's lost it's unrecoverable. When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection.*

I might add that when you fill time with trash it becomes a waste basket when it could be a treasure chest.

Treasure every moment. You won't see it again.

Matthew 6:21 says, *Where your treasure is, there is your heart.* How you spend your time (including mental time) will reveal your treasure. We may think that we have little control over how we spend our time. We have commitments – work, family and so on but within these commitments we have a choice of purpose and attitude.

In today's gospel Jesus speaks of the 2 great commandments, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.* (Matt 22:37-38)

If we live all of our lives with this purpose and attitude, loving God and our neighbours as ourselves, even our mundane tasks are done in the service of God and neighbour. We maintain the motorcycle, not just for itself but for the joy of the ride.

In today's reading from 1 Thessalonians, Paul said, *We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.* (1 Thess 2: 9b)

We **invest** time and tasks in the love of God and neighbour.

How we accomplish this is a matter of time management. Management is about being in control.

Eph 5: 15-17 says: *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.* ()

Foolish in the Bible usually means ungodly rather than not too bright.

Let us be wise and **manage** our time, making use of every opportunity to live in God's ways.

Does it all start to sound a bit burdensome? Then cut yourself some slack. Say no to the things that *Life is too short for . . .*

Take time for what you love and whom you love. Save some time for loving yourself and the things that give you pleasure. Smell the roses, bless the children, spend time with the God who loves you. Even if it is just sometimes, turn off the TV, mobile phone, or computer; throw out the junk mail without reading it (or put a no junk mail sticker on the mailbox); say *I have a prior commitment* when asked to do something non-urgent or non-essential and someone else needs you. That someone may even be your own need for soul-time!

If you need a reason to cut yourself some slack, it's because you were made for joy.

Enjoy living in God's way. Live in love for God, and others as yourself. That means show yourself some love too.

I close with a canticle based on verses 12, 14 and 17 of Psalm 90:

Teach us, dear Lord, to number our days;
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Oh, satisfy us early with Thy mercy,
that we may rejoice and be glad all of our days.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us;
and establish Thou the work of our hands.

And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us;
and establish Thou the work of our hands, dear Lord.

Amen