

Time Economics

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16).

“A Stitch in Time Saves Nine” was a saying characteristic of people living during the Depression. With no money for replacement items, repair and maintenance were done out of necessity. The origin of “a stitch in time saves nine” literally dealt with sewing. A small tear repaired at once prevents a larger tear from forming in the future – thus saving nine more stitches. The idea, of course, has come to mean that you will do yourself a favor by taking care of small problems when they appear. If you wait, repairs will be more time consuming and expensive.

An example of this would be car maintenance. Stay on top of engine tune-ups in order to guarantee that your engine will last as long as possible. Check your tires periodically for wear and make sure they have the proper amount of air and they will last longer.

Routine maintenance can prevent damage and save you time and money. If you clean out the gutters on your house each year, potential expensive repairs to your home can be avoided; removing lint from the dryer every time not only keeps your dryer running more efficiently, thus saving electricity, but potentially prevent a dangerous fire caused by excessive lint build up; vacuuming the coils of your refrigerator can prolong the life of that appliance; pulling weeds as soon as they appear can prevent you from having to do a widespread spraying or spending days removing overgrown patches; backing up files on your computer can save you enormous headache in redoing projects and losing some important information forever. When traveling, calling ahead for information or printing your boarding pass at home can save unpleasant surprises or a long wait in line. Repairing small leaks when you first notice them can save you a lot of time and money later. Carrying a small tool kit when traveling by car can make the difference between being able to fix a minor problem or having to call a repairman. Packing a mending kit when traveling can prevent you from having to buy a new item of clothing if something happens while you are on the road. Packing essential prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines can keep you from having to go to the emergency room.

Often maintenance is a matter of cleanliness. Metal items, such as automobiles, barbeque grills, iron fences and farm equipment last longer if cleaned regularly and checked for rust. Once rust sets in, the repair job is lengthy. When it is first noticed (like on the fender of a car) and taken care of, that “stitch in time” saves not only nine more stitches, but expensive repairs. It is more than a dollar saved.

If you don’t know how to repair certain items, there are more resources available than ever before. An online search will usually turn up a “how to” article that will walk you through it. Even when you can't repair an item yourself, you can often extend its life by having it repaired by a professional.

After the Crisis of 2008 hit, there were many news reports on how people were coping. Sales in stores were down because people were making what they had last longer, repairing those items rather than buying new ones. This actually resulted in an increase of revenue for some businesses such as shoe repair shops, auto repair shops and home improvement stores. Some items need to be fixed by professionals, but even that cost is cheaper than replacing it – most of the time. There are some notable exceptions, such as computers and other electronic items.

In addition to saving money, your “stitch in time” can save your time. The less complicated the repair, the quicker it is done, the more time is left for other things.

Time really does have value. Somewhere, someone else is employed for services as an accountant, an auto mechanic, a bookkeeper, a cook, a driver (chauffeur), electrician, gardener, housekeeper, nurse, etc. As you balance your checkbook, change the oil in your car, prepare meals for your family, drive your children to and from activities, repair the wiring in your garage, maintain and adorn your yard and garden, clean your house, take care of your family members when they are sick, you are performing tasks routinely that someone else might be paid for.

Procrastination in maintenance and repairs leads to the “nine other stitches.” Procrastination also makes your “to do” list longer than it needs to be.

In many ways, time is of much more worth than money is.

In every area of life, it is better to take action on issues as they come up. For instance, a misunderstanding between family members, friends and neighbors can fester if not dealt with immediately.

Even if you don’t have money or a job, it is good to remember that you have the same amount of time as everyone else. What you do with that time will help you move forward or allow you to stagnate.

During the Great Recession, many people were forced to seek employment in areas they had never imagined they would work in. Sometimes this involved schooling. Sometimes it meant doing manual labor instead of office work.

In a few cases, the forced adjustment led to a happier lifestyle. Their time was now allocated more towards family or church or their community.

These changes involved spending time learning a new skill, competing in a job market that was new to them, and not giving in to the temptation to give up.

It is understandable to be disappointed with unforeseen negative circumstances, but what you do with those circumstances is up to you. Procrastination is not a good thing, but having such a full schedule that you cannot enjoy family or life is not either. There must be a balance.

Only you can determine the proper balance of time in your life. Many who have had money, though, and made it their priority, have regretted it in the end. Prioritize according to what really matters and your time will be of more value to you than money.

“Waste your money and you’re only out of money, but waste your time and you’ve lost part of your life.”
– Michael LeBouef

God expects us to be good stewards of every gift He gives. How we spend our resources and how we spend our time are indicators of how we view His gifts. Jesus made that point very clear in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The lazy servant wasted his time and his master's money.

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(This devotional was adapted from a chapter of "Money, How to be Rich Without It and How to Stretch It Using Ten Hints from the Past and the Technology of Today")