

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 25:1-13.

INTRODUCTION:

1. Do colleagues refer to you as "the late John Smith," even though you're very much alive? Do the clocks at work always seem to be 15 minutes fast, except when it's time to go home? If you starred in "High Noon," would the producers change the title to "12:30ish"?
2. Peter Bregman, *Optimize Transition Time (And Stop Being Late)*, **Harvard Business Review**. "At 6 pm, my wife Eleanor was looking tense. 'We are so late!' she said. After a great day of skiing in the Catskills, we were driving back to New York City, for a dinner party that was called for 7 pm. 'What do you mean?' I responded, 'The party doesn't start for an hour; we've got plenty of time.' 'Peter.' She didn't hide her annoyance. 'We're 100 miles from the city. There's no way we can make it on time.' 'We're not late yet.' I smiled. 'We're still an hour early.' This explains why I am always late and Eleanor is always on time. Eleanor, you see, plans for transition time. The night before the party, she figured out that we if we needed to be there by 7, we should plan to arrive by 6:45, which meant leaving our apartment in New York City at 6:15, which meant arriving at the apartment by 5:30, in time to drop of our bags, take showers, and dress, which meant arriving in New York City at 5 to give us time to park the car, which meant leaving Windham at 2:15, in case there was traffic, which meant stopping skiing at 1:15, giving us time to pack up and clean the house, which meant starting skiing at 8 am if we were going to get in any decent runs, which meant waking up at 6:30, which meant going to sleep by 10:30 so we could get our full eight hours. 'Uh oh,' I had said to her the night before, as I looked at my watch. 'It's 11 pm. We're already 30 minutes late for tomorrow night's party.'"
3. The elders have asked me to preach a sermon on lateness. They and other members are becoming increasingly disturbed by how lateness to Bible class and worship is becoming a growing problem.

IS CHRONIC LATENESS A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM?

1. **It can involve lying.** Ephesians 4:25.
 - A. If we are chronically late, we tell other people and ourselves that we can do more things than we have time to do them, that things take less time than they actually do. We are deceiving others and lying to ourselves.
 - B. Maybe we could do things in the time we allow under ideal conditions, but conditions are rarely if ever ideal. "Most late people engage in 'magical thinking,' consistently underestimating the time necessary to accomplish everyday tasks. Magical thinking is the unshakable belief that you can drive the 10 miles to work in seven minutes flat, even if day after day you fail to do so. If once five years ago you actually did make it in seven minutes, from that day forward, seven minutes is cemented in your mind" (Diana DeLonzor).
2. **It makes people unfaithful, untrustworthy, unreliable.** Galatians 5:22.
 - A. We don't depend on people that we know are not dependable. For example, teaching duties. "It really isn't that difficult to be on time, or early. When you decide that other peoples' time is as valuable as your own and you want to demonstrate it, you stop whatever you're doing, get up and move. Being punctual is a very gracious thing to do for the people around you. It let's people know that they can depend upon you. It takes the stress off of others. Just stop what you're doing and get to where you have promised to be. It's a decision not a trick. I guess I can't have much sympathy or patience for people who are dependably late" (From a blog by J. James, Jan. 26, 2010).
 - B. Some people are so dependably late that they tempt other people to tell them they need to be places long before they do just so they might actually be on time.
3. **It is inefficient, wastes time.** Ephesians 5:15-16.
 - A. Many chronically late people see transition time as a waste of time. "Here's my problem: I have a very high need to be efficient and productive. And transition time is neither of those things; it's annoying. I'd rather just be somewhere. I don't want to waste the time getting there. So, even though I know I should leave more time, I push it, clinging to the illusion that I can get places faster than is humanly possible" (Peter Bregman).
 - B. It is far more efficient to do things in the time we have because we are early than in the time we have because we make ourselves late. What could we be doing if we were early to Bible class and worship? Encouraging members and visitors by our presence. Greeting people. Catching our breath and getting ready for Bible class and worship. Reading our Bible, praying, preparing our lesson, reading the *News & Notes*, etc.
4. **It is rude, selfish.** 1 Corinthians 13:5.
 - A. "People who are always late, are rude. They feel what they are doing is more important then the people waiting for them to arrive. Take a time management class. Oh yeah, don't be late for the class!" (From a blog by Rob Miller, January 29, 2010).
 - B. Chronically late people irritate other people, interrupt class and worship, cause people to miss class, worship, opportunities to serve. By hurrying to Bible class and worship, running late can actually put lives in jeopardy!
 - C. Many chronically late people irritate themselves. "My intentions are good. I don't like being late. Most people who are late don't like being late. And I never plan to be late or intend to be late. I understand that it's disrespectful and unprofessional. Not to mention uncomfortable" (Peter Bregman).
 - D. Comment regarding leaving worship.

5. **It demonstrates a lack of self-control.** Galatians 5:23.
6. **It reveals seriously misplaced priorities.** Matthew 6:33A.
 - A. Few if any people are late to everything. Even chronically late people are on time when they don't think they can afford to be late.
 - B. Is an Olympic athlete late? Second, does s/he go right from the cell phone to the starting line?
 - C. As David is often says about worship, "There's no better place in the world for us to be than right here, right now."
 - D. "My lateness frustrates me, aggravates me, and makes me very, very cranky. However, I'm still prone to doing it, even though I know arriving early or at least on time allows me one second to breathe and collect my thoughts. The bigger the meeting, the more punctual I am. The bigger my role in the meeting, the significantly more punctual I am. And the more respected the person (business or personal) to me, the more on time I'll be. Maybe it's about priorities? Hmmm..." (From a blog by Angela Mattson, January 26, 2010).
7. **It sets a bad example, encourages others to be late.** 1 Corinthians 5:6.
8. **It can be a willful sin.** Hebrews 10:26-31. This is not the first time I've preached on this subject. In 2005 I preached a lesson entitled, "The Punctually Challenged." We make jokes, but it's really not a laughing matter.
9. **It's not just about being late to Bible class and worship.** Matthew 25:1-13.

IS CHRONIC LATENESS A SOLVABLE PROBLEM?

1. Chronic lateness can be deeply ingrained individually and culturally.
2. There are many different reasons why people are chronically late. Nature, nurture, adrenaline rush, control, passive aggression, overachieving, perfectionism, laziness, etc.
3. Regardless of the reasons why people are chronically late, there is no excuse for chronic lateness. People who are chronically late can and must change. No, they may not be able to change completely overnight. But, if they want to, they can definitely change and much sooner than they might ever imagine.
4. It's not just about being *chronically* late. We should try our best to always be early.
5. It's about being early, not just on time. "If you are 5 minutes early, you're on time. If you're on time, you're late. If you're late, then you've got a lot of explaining to do." Old military adage: If you're not 5 minutes early, you're 10 minutes late!
6. It's about repentance, not rocket science. It's not about moving our clocks ten minutes ahead, it's about changing our hearts. It's about admitting we have a serious problem and once and for all deciding to do what it takes to change.
 - A. We could spend a considerable amount of time talking about what we can do to learn to be early and quit being late. There are all kinds of books. I've never read to following so I can't recommend it without reservation, but here is just one example: **Never Be Late Again, 7 Cures for the Punctually Challenged**, by Diana DeLonzor. You can find several good suggestions in an article entitled, *How To Be On Time*, from wikiHow.com.
 - B. Brethren, if worldly people can quit being late to work, Christians can certainly be early to Bible class and worship.
7. Chronically late people need us to help them change, not enable their bad behavior.
 - A. Don't make light of chronic lateness. It is not a laughing matter.
 - B. Don't be self-righteous or sinfully angry, but do be honest. From "*How to Stop Dealing With Someone Else's Lateness*," at WikiHow.com. **Call it what it is - a respect issue.** When it comes right down to it, that's what it's all about. Why is your time any less valuable than your friend's? Why should you put up with a lack of respect for your valuable time? The answer is, you should not. Your friend saying, "I'm so sorry, I'm so busy, I had to etc.," should not fool you. What your friend is really saying is, "What I was doing was more important to me than the fact that I knew you were waiting for me." That's disrespectful, rude, and wrong. There are no excuses to justify this kind of behavior, and you need to make your friend clear on that. **Express your anger or frustration about it.** Letting your friend know that, while you love your friendship, this really hurts your feelings, makes you angry, makes you feel disrespected. If you just accept it without expressing displeasure, this friend may cluelessly continue this behavior indefinitely. If you express your feelings about it, and there is no apology and nothing ever changes, at least you will have clarity - your feelings are not as important as whatever it is s/he is doing."
 - C. Don't wait for chronically late people. It doesn't work. We just enable their bad behavior.
 - D. Don't let chronically late people manipulate us.
 - E. We must praise signs of progress far more than we rebuke chronic lateness.

CONCLUSION

1. The five foolish virgins were late.
2. Why didn't the foolish virgins take extra oil with them? We can only speculate. Maybe some didn't think about it; maybe some thought they had enough oil; maybe some hoped the bridegroom would come during the day; maybe some intended to buy oil later; maybe some thought they would be able to borrow oil from the other virgins.
3. Why were the foolish virgins late? If they were like some of us, some of them might have blamed the wise virgins. "If they had just shared!" Others might have blamed nature/nurture. "That's just the way I've always been." "My parent's were always late."
4. Why were the foolish virgins late? Here's the bottom line. They were late because they didn't prepare to be on time!
5. Brethren, we need to prepare to be on time for Bible class, worship, everything, and especially judgment!