

Boy Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: James Tang

[0:00] So we started in December to go through the book of Luke and we've been trying to be investigators and basically track what the Holy Spirit is doing and he was fairly quiet for 400 years at least to our knowledge and then boom Christmas hits and he starts and then he first of all angel Gabriel shows up as a work place and then basically gives him the shock of his life and then he goes to show up at Mary Mary's house and then gives her the shock of her life and then Elizabeth is just overwhelmed of joy and so she goes to meet Mary and they have a little kind of celebration and then after that we see we see the shepherds we see the wise men we see all these people are just just overwhelmed with this wow what's happening and last week I shared hey they were confronted with Christmas and when you're confronted with Christmas it brings about conviction it brings about change and sometimes we are just simply just comforted by the mulled wine when really there is so much more to Christmas there is almost an offensive message to Christmas that we neglect to actually think about.

And if we're not offended by the message that actually we need a savior that actually there is no peace and that someone came to bring peace into this world that maybe we have missed the point of Christmas and now we reach an account that is fascinating and I wasn't quite sure whether to go through this because it is the last Sunday of the year and I was in a very reflective mood but then I realized actually it really does match this passage that Cuban just read for us is fascinating it's the only one in the Gospels and it gives us a glimpse into the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. Because it's the only one where we see him as a tween where he's like oh actually he's not full grown miracle working adult he's just this teenage boy and it's funny because Luke kind of does it so casually so he just we're in chapter 2 by the way chapter 2 verse 39 onwards but just before that we had that scene that I shared about two weeks ago where Mary and Mary and Joseph take baby 40 day old Jesus take baby 40 day old Jesus to the temple and Simeon and Anna are just this is the thing that they've been waiting for.

Simeon says I can die now because of this. And so it goes from baby Jesus and just without anything more than a sentence Luke travels from baby Jesus to tween Jesus.

Almost as though it's nothing. I mean there's a stark difference. There's literally the difference actually even more so than my baby MJ and not so baby RJ. So literally, if you're thinking about a 12-year-old, we're looking at someone like Reuben's age, who's now suddenly, he went from being in the temple held up like this to now being trusted with the freedom of just wandering around the temple during the festival to the point where each parent thought that the other person had the 12-year-old Jesus, and it was only into their travels into the third day, they were like, hey, who has Reuben?

[2:51] Who has Jesus? And they're like, oh no, we've lost him. And so then they spend three days going to look for him, and I just find it interesting because we see the divinity and humanity of Jesus on display here, and I think there's something that we can learn from this.

I think there's something that we can learn from seeing how Jesus grew. That actually, he didn't come out as the perfect savior with the blonde hair and the blue eyes and the beard.

There was a process. There was a process, and as we reflect on time, maybe especially at the end of 2024, I want us to think about, well, actually, what's this year been like for me?

How have I grown? Or rather, if we look at it as a church, how have we grown? We were sharing as leaders yesterday. Actually, the only KPI that really is deep in my heart is actually, are people getting closer and closer to the Lord?

That first mission statement. Are we knowing him and enjoying him more? And as leaders, are we growing in our humility? Are we growing in our capacity to love?

[3:50] That's really all that, at least personally, I am praying for and that I care about. So I ask you, what is your KPI and what does that look like? Because time is a very funny thing, and they say that time gets faster and faster as you grow older and older.

Right? I think there's a psychologist, Ruth Ogden, who did a study, and she found that 77% of people keep thinking that Christmas keeps coming faster and faster each year.

It just happens that way. I shared a picture with the Rodgers the other day of last year's Christmas service with our four kids just sitting there. That's a year ago. That was one year.

And, of course, I think as you get older, I think you do realize that time just seems to go faster and faster. Part of it is actually just logical. One month for my baby Micah is a significant portion of his life, whereas one month for someone who is significantly older is much smaller.

Just even percentage-wise is different. And they say something, actually, there's another theory when it comes to time, which is as you are learning, time moves slower. I found that.

[4:52] That's an interesting one. Maybe the one I related it to was, do you know when you're traveling to a new place and you're learning a new route? It seems to take longer. You're just trying to figure out your way to get there.

But somehow the way back seems a lot faster. Right? Because when you're learning, this is the theory as it goes, is when you're learning, time just slows down a little bit. So maybe as children, of course, one, your percentage of each month is different.

And the other thing is you're just learning so much. And when you're learning and when your mind is processing so much, time just seems to slow down a little bit. But then as you get older and older, you start to realize, wow, time is flying.

The question is, as we get older, can we still keep learning? Can we still keep growing? And I think there's something from this passage here that is interesting.

And I'm going to ask you to have a little bit of input here. But maybe the first question I just want to get us thinking is actually, what's your definition of time? What do you think of when I ask you about time? How do you even define time?

[5:50] What does that look like to you? Nathan, I haven't picked on you for a while. Maybe we'll start with you. When I tell you to think of time, what do you think of? Death.

Death. That is true. Expand. Tell us more. It's a countdown towards that.

It's a countdown towards death. So every time we celebrate a birthday, we're just actually celebrating our death getting closer and closer. I guess that's one way to look at it for sure. Of course, is that wrong?

No. Psalm 90 says, teach us to number our days so that we can have a heart of wisdom. So we can know actually there are limited days to what we have. And time in some ways is the thing that kind of gives us the framework of what life is about.

I'm going to go over this side. Gabs, let's go with you. What do you think about when you think of time? Oh, life. Wowzers. Tell us more.

[6:56] I think it's just everything you're saying. It's experiences. It's not the experience of film. It's not the experience of people. All of that is a part of life.

Yeah. Not time. Yeah. Experiences, life. Wow. Jojo, you're in a very special season of your life and time. What do you think of when you're thinking about time?

No doubt you're in a reflective mood as well. Ticking. It's ticking. Time is running out. Save yourself. Yeah.

Yeah. It's just constantly moving. It doesn't stop. Time stops for no one. Right. I did a bit of a Wikipedia search. Time is a continuous progression of our changing existence that occurs in an apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future.

A dictionary version is the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in past, present, and future. Now, humans, we didn't invent time. We didn't invent time.

[7:56] We did invent the clock, of course. Actually, I've been deeply influenced by a sermon by John Tyson where he talks about time. And he was talking about, actually, we didn't invent time, but we did invent the clock.

In the 14th century, the monks invented the mechanical clock. Do you know why? To remind them to pray. So they created this mechanism to be able to remind them to pray.

Isn't that amazing? They created a clock to measure time to remind them to pray. They wanted their lives to revolve around prayer and worship. And yet we've moved into a time now where, well, not

only are we not controlling time, we're not on top of it, we're not the masters of it, it feels as though we're slaves of time.

And suddenly, our lives aren't really revolving around prayer at all. But these clocks, these devices that we have are tracking and pushing us forward and forward to the point where it keeps ticking and it never stops.

And we just have constant experiences. And maybe Hong Kong is probably the worst of these ones. I was in, and I think I've shared this with people before, I was in Nairobi a couple of years ago and I was just watching these kids and these communities in these slums.

[9:06] And I was like, the poverty here breaks your heart. But then I was thinking, but one thing they do have that is so blessed is they have time.

And I look at the people of Hong Kong and we are so time poor. There is a poverty of time here where we don't have time. Think of the people that you really want to spend time with. And actually, this is something that growing up in England, I did not have a problem with because the people that you spend time with, you do life with, you see them every week.

You see them two, three times a week because there's no one else to see. That's just the people that you have. Whereas here, the people that you really want to spend time with, you'd be lucky to spend five, six times a year with them because you have to fight for it.

We've developed a habit where if we want to spend time with that family or with that person, at the end of the meeting that you're having with them right then, you both get your phones out and you go, okay, let's make sure we put another one in.

Because if we leave here without putting another one in, it'll be three months before we see each other again. There's a time poverty here that we already struggle with. It reminds me of the proverb that I've heard.

[10:07] Again, I think it's someone in the continent of Africa speaking to someone in the West saying, you may have watches, but we have time. And I was like, oh, that cuts me deep.

Because we do have all these fancy watches, but do we actually have time? The thing that maybe matters the most. And so the question I have for us today is, how are we using our time?

Because we may not have that much time, but are we using it well? William Penn, the English author, said, time is what we want most, but what we use the worst. Time is what we want the most, but what we use the worst.

And we have people who are just constantly struggling with procrastination. Especially when you know you have an exam coming up or when you have a deadline coming up. Suddenly you're just compelled, compelled to do the daily chores in your house that you haven't been doing for the last six months.

You're like, today is the day. Today is the day that I need to Hoover. We procrastinate. The studies show that, I mean, you can look on this on your phone right now. I think the average person spends three to five hours on their phone.

[11:13] Three to five hours. And then on top of that is three to five hours on Netflix or whichever TV show you want to watch. That's six to ten hours. And yet we don't have time.

But then there are other people. There are other people that I was speaking to even yesterday who just, we seek to maximize every single minute of every single day. And every activity that we do, every commute that we have, we try and stuff in other things so that we double up, triple up, so that we can maximize that time.

And John Tyson was the one that said, actually, all the regrets that we have are time-based. We have these regrets that we didn't do this or we didn't do that well enough or we didn't maximize this. They're all time-based.

Our relationship with time is so poor. So, so poor. And then we wonder why we're not really actually growing. Maybe we're approaching even time in the wrong way.

And so as we look at this, I want to ask us a few more questions about what that actually looks like and how have you prioritized your time in this last year? What does that look like? And another one of my favorite quotes is from a Wall Street Journal article.

[12:19] This lady, Laura Vanderkam, talked about this idea that actually when we say, when you say, oh, I'd love to do that, but I don't have time. Have we said that before?

I would love to read the Bible more, but I don't have time. I would love to join that group, community group, but I don't have time. I would love to go to the gym, but I don't have time.

And she said, actually, those four words, I don't have time, are completely inaccurate and unhelpful completely. Why? Because what you actually mean is not I don't have time. What you actually mean is it's not a priority.

Actually, more recently, I had a quote that was very similar to that, which was, actually, when you say I don't have time, what you really mean, and just be honest with yourself, what you really mean is I don't want to. That's what you actually mean.

But you just say, I don't have time because it just makes you feel better. So the question for us is, are we using our time well? Psalm 90 teaches to number our days so that we may have a heart of wisdom.

[13:18] What is that heart of wisdom? That we would know how to use our time and what to use it for. And surely the objective in all of this, how we use our time is that we would grow, that we would grow to become more like Jesus, that we would grow to know him more.

And that we would grow to enjoy him more. As you look back at this last year, again, I'm not going to put anyone on the spot. Have you grown? Have you used time in the way that you wanted to? And if not, I think this is a perfect time for us to look at this. There's something else as we look at this account of Jesus is that I'm just fascinated always with how Jesus used time. He came to save the world.

And he only really kick-started in the last three years of his life. And he was always interruptible. He'd be going somewhere, but if someone else comes in and asks for something, he'd be willing to stop and he'd go that way instead.

Actually, that's maybe one of my naive dreams and objectives that I have as I live in Hong Kong here. It's can I be busy but unhurried? Can I go from thing to thing to thing, which seems to be just how we have to live here?

[14:23] Well, maybe it isn't. But can I be unhurried? And I've tried different things in doing that. Maybe when I travel between things, when I'm so tempted just to catch up on all those emails on those two MTR stops, I try and just stop and keep my phone in my bag.

And can I be unhurried? Can I plod along to the next thing? And as I meet this person, that person, this person, can I be fully present in that moment with that person?

Can I be unhurried but busy? You can hold me accountable then. You can ask me, hey, James, how's that going for you? And I think some days I'll say it's going great. And there's other days I've completely failed.

But I think if we don't figure out our relationship with time, I don't know if we're going to be growing in the right way. And we see Jesus and he was completely in tune. And as he grew, verse 40, chapter 2, verse 40 says this, And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.

If we go to the end of chapter 2, it says again, And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. Increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and man.

[15:32] He grew physically. He grew socially. He grew mentally. And emotionally. Are we growing? And this is whether you are 12 years old or this is whether you are 80 years old.

Are we still growing to be more like him? If the Lord of heaven and earth showed opportunity of growth, we must too. I think that's the question that we have here is, Are we growing in the right way?

And as I look at this account of Jesus, this tween, And of course, every parent has that nightmare of losing their kids. I find it just interesting why he does what he does and where he goes. So let's start with a little bit of this.

So his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover. And when he was 12 years old, they went up according to custom. And when the Feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know. But supposing him to be in the group, they went a day's journey.

And then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. Now, they would go there. And of course, Jesus is reaching age. Like, he's nearly becoming of age. He's approaching his bar mitzvah.

[16:34] He's going to become a man very soon. So he would have been allowed certain freedoms that maybe younger siblings couldn't have. So he would have been wandering around. And the thing that he chose to do was to sit at the temple to ask questions, to talk.

And he would amaze them. I think it says here, After three days they found him in the temple, verse 46, I love this.

Why do I put you on the spot and make you answer some of my questions? Apart from the objective of trying to keep Danny awake, just in case I ask him a question one time, is because I truly believe there's something to do with just actually you learn when you engage.

Don't worry. I remember a time. I know I'm stood here right now. I remember a time when I'm approaching Sunday morning church and I've got these things to do. Oh, don't worry. I'll do it during the sermon. Because that's when I have some uninterrupted time.

About 40 minutes or so. And I grew up in a church that had a trilingual service. So sometimes that could be an hour and a half. This is the time where I catch up on all the things that I need to catch up on. And I see here that I don't know if that's the best way to learn.

[17:46] I don't know if that's the best way to grow. You see Jesus asking questions and them asking questions back. And if you're an educator, the pedagogy here is different.

It's engaging. It's interactive. It's actually engaging with each person going, hey, where are you at? And let me see if I can help move you from where you're at to somewhere higher, to somewhere closer to the Lord.

And you see him engaging in this way. And that's my hope. Now, I think we're getting a little bit too big. And I don't know all your names anymore. So if I don't know your name, then I guess you feel safe that I'm not going to ask you any questions. But the question here is this.

Are you putting yourself in the right place and asking the right questions to the right people? Because if you're sitting here going, I don't know if I've grown this year. Well, maybe that's where we start.

Maybe, look, this is impossible to be able to meaningfully know each other and to help grow each other. But in smaller groups, that's why we have our life groups. Do you have those safe spaces where you can actually talk and challenge each other and ask those questions and go, oh, I don't really understand that.

[18:53] I love it when someone says, hey, I read that passage and I have no clue what it meant. I thought that is the same. Me too. Let's find out together. Let's study together.

Let's engage with this because I think that's the only way that we can grow. How do we use our time? Are we putting ourselves in the right places at the right times, asking the right people the right questions? And then something else.

And Jesus not only knew where to go, he also knew his own identity. Because when finally mom finds him, she's like, what are you doing? Why are you here? We've been looking for you.

And he's like, don't you know that I'm supposed to be in my father's house? Can you imagine Jesus' voice as a tween, just barely, just about breaking? Don't you understand? This is the first time we hear Jesus acknowledge his identity as the prince of heaven.

Don't you realize I'm supposed to be in my father's house? And of course, Jesus just sat there going, awkward. Well, yeah, your father's been looking for you, by the way. Now, he's not being rude here.

[19:55] He's not being dismissive, because actually afterwards you see he goes home with them and it actually says, and then he was submissive to them. But what he was simply doing was trying to highlight to them, hey, I have an earthly father, but I also have a heavenly father.

Jesus knew his identity, knew who he was, and knew why he was here. Hence why he was investigating and asking questions and growing and learning and using his time in such a way. Are we putting ourselves in the right places at the right times, asking the right people the right questions?

And do we know who we are? Now, it's interesting here. He's not being rude. And then afterwards, I find it interesting. Verse 51, and he went down with them. So he says, don't you understand I'm supposed to be here? But then he does follow them.

And he shows us, hey, actually, that's what I wanted to do. But now I submit and I follow you. And he submits and he goes home with them. And his mother treasures up all these things in her heart, because mothers remember everything.

Everything. For how long? For 18 years. He was submissive to them for 18 years. Can you imagine? This is boy Jesus.

[20:58] He's growing. He's impressing everyone. And yet he goes home for another 18 years to be submissive and to lie low. This teaches me something else, that he had a good relationship with

time because he just simply wasn't rushed.

He wasn't eager to impress the people around. He knew something about timing that actually requires patience. In the book War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy says the two most powerful warriors are patience and time.

Can you imagine meeting? Okay, he's 12 then. Can you imagine meeting Jesus at 26? How old are you, K1? 25. Imagine meeting Jesus at 25. 25. Jesus.

The Prince of Heaven. And you meet Jesus at 25. Hey, Jesus, how are you doing? I'm cool. Just hanging out, working with my dad. That's it.

I'm pretty sure he would have had certain powers then. Sometimes I try and imagine what kind of powers. Like, later on he starts turning water into water. Can you imagine? He knows it's not time yet. Because he tells his mom at the wedding, hey, it's not time yet to do this.

[22 : 06] But he knows he can. Can you imagine teenage Jesus? It's just like, I know I can do this. That classmate that really annoys him. He knows he can make that chair fall and lose balance.

Mom's told him to do the chores. Mom's told him to sweep the flat, but no one's there. Mom says, cook.

When no one's seen. But I also get the sense that 25-year-old Jesus was just willing just to sit and just, it's not time yet. And yet how many of us are always just waiting, craving, yearning for immediate impact and growth?

God made me for great things, and I'm supposed to do them right now and save the world. Yet Jesus was submissive and went home and hung out for another 18 years, just learning what it meant to be a human.

Growing in stature, growing in wisdom, growing in favor with God, and also with man. I find that interesting. He was just committed to this path of growth, and he was patient about it.

[23 : 17] Do we have that same kind of patience and trust? Even the Apostle Paul. In Acts 9, he has this moment where he meets Jesus, and he completely goes 180. He goes from Saul to Paul, right?

And then he has a few days where he's kind of blinded. He's like, what? Jesus is real. And I find it fascinating. What does he do after that? He actually goes home, and he doesn't go and reach out to Peter for another three years.

If we take the time to look at the events of what happened in the early church, you can see that there is just a patience and a slow and steady growth that happens that is completely different to our experience of church and growth now.

He waited three years before he even went to introduce himself to Peter. Whereas if I had had something like that happen to me, hey, I'm not Saul anymore. I'm Paul. I would have announced my arrival and said, hey, let's do this.

Let's bring his kingdom come now. And yet he goes home for three years and waits. There's a patience that's involved. Not only that, it's actually he waits 14 years before he goes on his first missions trip.

[24 : 24] 14. That's a lot of time. Sometimes our relationship with time is so poor, we're just so impatient.

We just want to grow now. We want to be healthy now. We want to be useful now. We want to be a leader now. And we completely neglect that actually there's a process.

There's a journey. And I'm not saying that just to kind of hold you back and go, hey, you're not ready yet. Because I think you should wait. I just look at Jesus.

I'm like, oh, he had this just, he had this patience about him. He had this curiosity about him. And he was eager to grow. But he was also so, so patient.

Why? Even at the wedding, when his mom's like, okay, now's the time. You are about to announce your arrival. He says, it's not the time. Even then he was reluctant.

[25 : 24] Why was that? Why did he have such patience? I think we get a hint of that in John chapter five, when Jesus says, I'm not here to do anything of my own accord.

I'm not here to do what I think should be right. I'm here and my eyes are on the father. I'm only looking at the father. The son does nothing apart from the father.

He only does what he sees the father doing. His eyes were completely, completely on God. Think about the moments where you're impatient.

You're like, I should be better by now. I should be more mature by now. I should be growing this way by now. I should be super holy by now. I should have a girlfriend or a boyfriend by now. I should have this kind of job by now. I should have this kind of salary by now. I should have this kind of lifestyle by now. What are you really, really saying? If your statement of I don't have time is really, I don't want to, or it's not a priority, when you're saying I should have these things by now and I'm just behind, what we're really saying is actually, God, I don't think I trust you.

[26 : 35] If we really boil it down, it comes back to that same thing. God, look, I trust you, but can you just hurry up? Which therefore means I don't actually trust you.

I trust you and my life is in your hands, but could you just do this, please? Can I just have this already? What we're really saying is, God, I don't actually trust you.

So what we see then, actually, our relationship with time is actually really just a reflection of our relationship with God. How we deal with time, how we use time, how we perceive time, how we maximize time, how we think we waste time, really comes down to actually what our perception of God is really like.

And I've been recently very inspired by what I think a quote that John Marker quoted from someone else in his book, *Practicing the Way*, and it was just let's discover the art, art of wasting time with God, which is completely counterintuitive to how I normally operate, which is, hey, I'm going to spend, God, I'm going to spend 30 minutes now.

I'm going to maximize my time with you. I'm going to pray for 10 people. I'm going to read this chapter. And I'm going to tick this box, and it's going to be a good time. And our time is up.

[27 : 50] And I realize, oh, I've approached that the wrong way. And then I started, okay, I'm just going to, what do I want to do when I want to hang out with a friend? It's actually not to do much at all. It's just to spend time just to be with them.

And it's not, we say wasting time with God. It's just in a way that we can understand. But really, it's not wasting time. It really, again, comes down to how we perceive time, which really, therefore, comes down to how we perceive God.

How do you use your time? Or how do you perceive God? And does that ultimately lead you to a path of growth? That's what we're here for. Why are we here?

We are here to become more like him, to spend more time with him, to know him, and to enjoy him more, to grow in him. Do we use our time wisely? And what does that actually look like?

Because God cannot be rushed. 2 Peter 3 says this, right? You think he's being slow, but he's not. Why? Because to him, a thousand years is like a day.

[28 : 51] That just shows you he is just completely far beyond our perception of time. So you have a body clock that is ticking. Well, God doesn't even get affected by that. And you see time and time again in scripture, that is not a thing for him.

Why? Because he isn't flesh. He is spirit. He transcends time. Because he doesn't operate in our realm. Genesis 1, when he was just a spirit, just hovering above the waters, he spoke creation into life.

He is not really part of that. He's not rushed, because he's the author. Sometimes we look at this book and go, he's the main character of this book. He's more than the main character of this book. He is the main character, but he's the author of this book.

Pull yourself out even further. He's not Harry Potter or Hermione Granger. He's J.K. Rowling. In that sense, maybe. Not that helpful. Maybe I'll retract that one.

Can we delete that off the recording? But just that relationship, let's say, that J.K. Rowling has with her book. She's the one orchestrating it.

[29 : 56] She's not rushed. She's not impatient. Sometimes we look at everything, even God things, from our own earthy lens.

From our own flesh and trapped within our understanding of time when God is far above that. I think that's how he could be unhurried and busy.

Because he just pulls himself out. And he sees the past, present, and future all at the same time. And no, we don't understand that. If any preacher or any pastor or any scientist tells you, I understand that, well, you don't believe them.

Because our minds are not capable of understanding everything in creation. And yet here we see divinity and humanity just held in just perfect tension where he's patient.

He's perfect, but he's growing. He's young, but he's sinless. He's the author of everything, and yet he's still learning and growing in wisdom and stature and favor.

[31:07] Patience. Time. Let us not be enslaved by time. Let us not be trapped by it. But let us live by the spirit in the sense that we are just not rushed. That is why solitude is so important.

That is why spending time on your own, pulling yourself out of the daily grind of life is so important. And putting your phone away and taking your watch off. Because in that moment, that's when you pull yourself out of the responsibilities that you have on a daily basis.

And you sit and you realize, wow, creation is so much bigger than me and my schedule. That's why my personal favorite on solitudes is to sit by the ocean.

And you just watch the tides come in and out. And you're like, wow, I am so small. If I died right now, there may be a few people who shed a tear, but it's not as though the world would stop.

But there's a world happening outside that just keeps happening. Regardless of what we're actually doing here. And that's not to say that we're insignificant.

[32:13] But that's just to say, just to take that pride off of our shoulders that everything is about us. And I think only then do we understand, God is the creator of everything.

Everything belongs to him. We're a vapor in the wind. And that actually freezes. Freezes to grow at the right time. Freezes to approach time with the right mindset. Freezes to actually spend time on the things that we think we truly believe are the most important to us.

And so I think it's a good time for us this week to do an audit on our lives and go, actually, where do I spend my time? Let me have a look at my phone. And I go to settings and I go to screen time. If you have an iPhone.

And go, well, actually, how much time am I using on this device? And you'll be able to see. Oh, wow. That's a lot of time.

As a mid-twenties young man, which was not that long ago, I started realizing I had a problem, which was, look at these guys. One hour?

[33:19] Bro. That's impressive. How did you hack it? Use my iPad. Use your iPad. And the more experienced in life people, older people, people who are over 40, don't just look at the young people and go, oh, those young people are always on their phones.

I see you on the MTR playing Candy Crush over and over again. It's not just us that are addicted. It's not just the young people that are addicted. The old people are addicted, too.

Just because you deem what they're doing to be useless doesn't mean Candy Crush is meaningful. But it's the same.

How are we using our time? How are we growing? Have a look and just see. Yeah, so anyway, as a young, mid-twenties, I realized I had a problem.

I'll call it a problem. I was a teacher. Actually, one of the problems with being a teacher, who's a teacher? Do you have this thing where after school you just can't function? Like your brain just stops?

[34:29] And actually, for the sake of my marriage, I actually had to explain to my wife. I said, I love you so much. But when I come home, the next 30 minutes, I actually can't talk.

I can barely breathe. I just need to play FIFA. 30 minutes. Just give me one game. Just give me one game.

And I'm all yours afterwards. Right? Because I just can't. I don't know which side of my brain I've been using. It's just, yeah, which. And then I just need to stop.

And then I started to realize, oh, actually, no, it's not really just half an hour I'm playing. Because suddenly I, and then I move on to 2K, and then I play playoff mode, and I play my play. And then just, and then it becomes two hours. And then, so I started to have this rule. Hey, actually, I love those things, and those are technically not bad things.

I think. I think. If you're an addicted gamer, do not take that as your final statement of the sermon today. But I was like, I've got to spend more time with God than I have with my PlayStation.

[35:30] That's, like, that's got to be a non-negotiable. Like, how could that possibly be? But that's the thing. And then it became, oh, social media. And then it became just being on your laptop.

Or then it became, and now I'm kind of more of a middle-aged man. It's just scrolling on Amazon, just looking for items that I don't need so I can buy them. But I started measuring and going, okay, actually, how much time am I spending with this?

And how does that compare to my time with God? James, you're free to play three hours of FIFA. So long as you pray for three hours and one minute and spend time in the word.

So how much do you want to play that? So that's how I started to kind of put things in place to kind of work on my relationship with time. Of course, once you get married, suddenly you have this amount of time and suddenly it's cut in half.

Because now you only have this amount. And each time you have a child, you just have less and less time. And so those of us who are married with kids and you're young and single and look at me and you go, yeah, I just don't have time.

[36:37] I just have many bad words in my head when I look at you. And I'm like, you have no idea. You have absolutely no idea. And then it gets to a point where actually, no, this isn't a, okay, Pastor James says, spend three hours reading the word.

No, that's not it. It's actually in your season. What is it that you want to do? And can you reach that yourself? And actually, what would make you a little bit uncomfortable?

What would cause you to grow and go out of your way? What would instill a bit of discipline in you? And honestly, at this season of your life, if it's 60 seconds, then it's 60 seconds.

And that's okay. I love the quote by Thomas Merton that says, the very thing that pleases God is just our desire to please God. And that's it. So it isn't, oh, I only spent one minute with God today. That sucks. I'm a bad Christian. That's, again, we're dealing with a God who transcends time. He sees the heart. So he's like, oh, my child tried to spend time with me.

[37:41] Got distracted, but that's okay. Because today it was 60 seconds, but tomorrow it might be 70 seconds. And again, it's not a time thing. Suddenly, straight away, it creeps in. Just our worldly approach.

Can I keep growing in this? But if we realize that God is spirit and he is completely far above that and transcends time and space, then we realize he cares about something altogether different.

He cares about our hearts. He cares about, are we curious enough? When we look at a passage of scripture, and let's say we're reading through Chronicles. That's the hard one.

And you read, they carried off their livestock, 50,000 of their camels, 250,000 sheep, 2,000 donkeys, and 100,000 men alive. For many fell because the war was of God, and they lived in their place until the exile.

Right, my devotion's done for today. Let me go back to Instagram. Can we ask the Holy Spirit to go, well, you may not understand that passage about the cattle.

[38:48] But God, you're here. Why was that there? Give me just enough so I can be actually curious to go, actually, what is there something to learn from there? Why were you so meticulous and detail-oriented in the Old Testament?

What was that all about? And pray that the Lord would just grant you that heart of curiosity to grow and just go, well, and honestly, there are passages, okay, well, right, I think we're done today.

We're good. Because we're not governed by the law, we're now operating in grace. And God only looks at the heart. So can we pray for a heart of curiosity as opposed to complacency?

Can we just be curious? And honestly, I think someone was sharing with me the other day, actually, it's really hard reading the Bible on my own. It is absolutely hard to read the Bible on your own. Find someone to read it with.

Find someone, anyone. Read an easier translation to start with. Whatever it takes, start with the message. Start with the Passion Version. Start with the NLT and then move on to the ESV. Do whatever you need to do just to get going.

[39:52] Just to start. And be curious. And ask questions. Just like Jesus did. Just like Tween Jesus did. The second is, let's focus on our identity, on who we are.

Don't you know that I'm supposed to be in my father's house? So next time your friend invites you on a junk boat trip on Sunday morning, you say, don't you know I'm supposed to be in my father's house?

Can we leave from Central Ferry Pier at 1pm? Can we prioritize being in the sanctuary?

Can we prioritize dwelling in him? Because I think that's the only way to grow. When you put yourself in places, in the right places with the right people asking the right questions.

May we be curious. May we know that our identity is that we are children of God. And he seeks to dwell in us, amongst us.

[40:49] And finally, let's focus on direction as opposed to destination. Sometimes we want to just achieve, we want to just get there. We want to be the savior of the world.

Or we want to be the savior of her world. Or his world. Or my world. Jesus went back to Nazareth for 18 years.

As a carpenter's son. What he think, what I think he cared more about was just direction. He grew in stature, in wisdom. In favor with man.

In favor with God. That truth that, hey, you are not where you want to be. But you're also not where you used to be. But can we be a people who are committed year in, year out?

Week in, week out. Day in, day out. Am I growing? Am I heading in that direction? Am I becoming more like Jesus? And can I make decisions that are based on who do I want to become?

[41:50] And this is someone who is whatever age. I want to be patient. But I'm going to make a decision now to become patient. And it's going to take time. And it doesn't happen immediately.

And it also doesn't happen easily. We watched Evan Almighty recently as a family. Which is one of those safe, theologically sound movies to watch over Christmas. And it's just that one phrase that when, who's watched Evan Almighty?

Don't you? I love it. Personally, I love it. It's, I imagine God's voice is similar to Morgan Freeman's. And he sits in that restaurant, right? And he goes, hey, if you want patience, how does God give you patience?

He gives you opportunity to become patient. So when I look at my kids and I'm like, oh, I love my baby right over there. And he gives me ample opportunity to become patient.

My wife's completely, she doesn't need to give me anything. She's just perfect. She's just, oh, but that's where the real growth comes. Can we commit to heading in a direction?

[43:01] Maybe if you're just about to fall asleep or you're just waking up now, this is the quote. What direction do you want to be heading in next year? This is the question you have at lunch.

I love James' sermon. He was talking about direction. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Which direction do you want to be heading in? And how are you using your time to get there?

And know this. Actually, he will be the one that brings to completion that work. In Philippians 1, that's what it says. That what he started, he will bring to completion. And so let's not grow weary of doing good.

But those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength and they will soar with wings like eagles. Let us be in that place where we recognize he is the everlasting God. Have you not known? Have you not heard?

He is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary. Keep your eyes on him.

[44:03] Think about ways that you can change. This is where the practical application comes. Maybe there are things that you need to do to change. Maybe it is to lock your phone on a certain screen time.

Maybe it is to hide your MacBook somewhere else or your iPad somewhere else. Whatever it is, I don't know what that is for you. Do it. I think it was my sister-in-law, Alex, asking me the other week, we keep doing all these things.

We try the reading plan and that sometimes kind of fizzles out. And then we try this and then it fizzles out. Why does everything we do, and we were just sharing just collectively, we weren't kind of targeting anything or anyone.

We just keep failing as a race just when we start new initiatives. I mean, January 1st is our next opportunity to sign up to that gym membership and to start again.

But why does everything that we start always end up just kind of, well, I think that's just the depravity of man. I think that's just our hearts are always pulled. We have so many idols. We have so many distractions. But I honestly think it's okay to drop and then just to get back up and to start again.

[45:08] Because it's not about unlocking. It's not about what you actually have to achieve. It's simply just your heart. It's just the direction that you're heading in. There is no destination until we reach heaven. And so let's keep committing to using our time in the best way possible.

Let's keep committing to heading in the right direction. And I'll spend the final few moments now just to give it back over to you to reflect. As you look, and I'm going to ask Florence that actually Sam can do that little gifted tinkle that he does for us.

Can I invite you just to spend a moment? As you look at the tween Jesus and you see his heart of curiosity, his steadfast knowledge in who he was, even as a teenager.

And then can you just imagine the utter patience that he had as a young adult before he decided to launch himself into the biggest rescue project in the history of mankind.

There was a peace. There was a trust. There was a healthy relationship with time that he had. And let's ask the Holy Spirit. Is there anything in the way that I use time that actually isn't conducive to growth?

[46:33] That isn't conducive to relationship with you. And as a community, can we humble ourselves and go, well, actually, no.

I can't do this quite on my own. And if there are people in your group that actually, no, I need to tell them, hey, I'm going to, this year, I'm going to do this.

Can you ask me every Thursday night whether I'm doing it? Because we just need those safety measures because our hearts are deceitful above all things.

Holy Spirit, we just give these final few minutes to you now. thank you for giving us a glimpse into a Jesus, a boy Jesus that was growing with his eyes set on the Father already.

That's what we want. We want to learn from this 12-year-old. Help us to be childlike and not childish in the way we use our time.

[48:07] Speak for your children listening. Amen. Lord, that truly is the one thing we ask.

One thing that we seek, that we would be here in your love. That we would dwell in your house all the days of our lives. So we want more of you in this next year.

But we want to want more of you. So Lord, can you turn us in the right direction? Just like you, Jesus, as a boy knew the direction that you were heading in.

But that you also actually knew the destination. That you had come, you had been sent to preach the good news. To be the good news. And you ended up on the cross for us.

But we now know that is, that was not your final destination, but you are now seated in the heavenly places. And now every tongue confesses and every knee will bow.

[49:41] And you are Lord. So keep our eyes focused on you. Help us to use our time.

In your name we pray. Amen.