

The Minister's Time-Table.

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This is not a subject of my own choosing, but one which has been assigned me. I take it to call for some consideration if the minister's programme for the week in the use of his time beyond the more public exercises of his ministry. As in the pulpit a variety of themes must be dealt with, on one Sabbath a missionary theme, then an educational theme, then a doctrinal, and so on, there must be some system for the preacher's guidance in this respect. But we will not here deal with that, as it might well receive a separate treatment, perhaps under the heading "The Ministers' Sermonic Time-Table."

All will agree that by methodical procedure much more is accomplished in one's work, not only because there is avoidance thereby of that loss which comes of continually having to decide what shall be done next, but because our minds work the better from taking up certain things at regularly recurring intervals. But no minister can make out a time-table for another minister. Any minister, however, may make suggestions to which almost any other minister would do well to give heed. That there is a vast deal for the messenger of the Cross to do we all feel, so that over and over again we are constrained to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Our work has numerous departments, any one of which might occupy all our time. Hence the more urgent the necessity of a wisely framed plan for general guidance. Our wisdom, our folly is exhibited by what we find time for and by what we turn away from. Every man discloses his real self and his worth to the world by what he says he cannot get time to do. He may not find it very difficult to plan our work, but we do find it difficult to work our plan. It is a comparatively easy thing to write a paper, I know; but it is far from easy, amid the much that presses busy pastors, to carry out the suggestions to which we readily assent. The Lord grant unto us devotion to his will and a steadfast purpose to do our best, there being reliance the while upon his wisdom and grace.

Some are naturally so methodical that their lives proceed with more than train-like exactness. You know just when they are going to start, which way they will move, and when they will stop. They are continually consulting their watches to see if the particular moment has arrived for taking up the next thing in order. For my own part I could never do it after that fashion, so that you are not now to be favored with anything sharply marked, telling you when to go to bed and when to get up, how many hours to spend upon your sermon and what day to go a fishing.

Under the glow and momentum of the Sabbath labors, some preachers get speedily before them on Sunday night the outlines of sermons they may preach the coming Lord's Day. But more preachers, I venture, with feelings of exhaustion, wondering, perchance, if they can ever preach again, will dismiss thoughts of sermon-making for a day or two that strength and heart may be gathered for arranging the next messages. Let each discover and take the way that is best for himself. In general it may be said that a period of physical recuperation and mental diversion should follow hard upon the Sunday's toil. The bow must be unstrung for retention of its power. Forenoons of the week are usually accounted best for study and afternoons for pastoral visitation. It is often difficult, since the pastor is at the beck and call of so many, to avoid running on into Saturday night with pulpit preparation, but that should certainly be avoided if at all possible. It makes a vast difference in the result whether in a buoyant or in a jaded spirit the pulpit is entered. But we will go no farther in suggesting when this thing ought to be done or that, unless indeed it may happen that something additional in this line is dropped by the way while considering some half dozen things which must somehow and somewhere be given a place in the preacher's weekly time-table, whether the pastorate be in city or country.

First: The Minister's Time-table must have respect to his own spiritual and intellectual enrichment.

Who of our number does not feel that while moving among tables well laden with what is nourishing we may fail to take sufficient nourishment for ourselves. There is no right serving of others without bountiful receiving and hearty enjoyment on our own part. Hence the oft-repeated counsel that good men give us to be careful to study the Bible for devotional purposes, for the feeding of our own hungry souls, and not merely with thought of getting something to say at the next public appointment. The prime and constant need is to maintain intimacy with the Lord, by learning his mind as it transpires in His Word, and by sweet communion with him as a friend communes with a friend to whom there is ardent devotion. If in this particular readjustment are desirable they should be made at any cost. Quite common is it for us to be substituting the good for the best. It is in private that we first fail or succeed, and the success or failure of solitude is carried over into publicity. A world of meaning is contained in that saying which is credited to Luther, to the effect that at a certain period he had so much to do that he could not get along with less than three hours of prayer a day. The

more work we have on hand the more need of praying much that our doing may be God's doing through us instead of our own independent and profitless effort. Fellowship with God is the mother country of the strong.

The mind must be enriched as well as heart. There need not be weakness on the intellectual side, and so there ought not to be. It is not necessary that we should be omnivorous readers, nor is it even desirable, Robert Hall is said to have remarked concerning Dr. Kippis that he piled so many books on his head, his brains could not move. Very easily may energies be dissipated, and real strength and courage must be exercised to keep well into what is central and vital. There is a pride of intellect whose working is subtle and mighty, but we must always have open eyes and open minds. Touch must be kept with thinkers and we ourselves must think. Attention must be paid to worthy scholars in our own department of thought and investigation, and to those too, who are engaged in other lines as far as due devotion to the paramount will allow. Our own spiritual furnishing and our own intellectual furnishing—both must be looked after, carefully and patiently looked after, day after day, month after month, year after year. A heart right toward God does much more than is commonly realized toward securing a vigorous and proper action of the mind; while a fitting engagement of the mind reacts most favorably upon the heart. When this two-fold furnishing is to be done, and how it is to be done, are matters for each individual man to determine for himself, but done it must be if the obligations of the minister's high office are to be honorably discharged. If dawdling and listlessness are anywhere out of place it is among preachers of the Gospel.

Second: The time-table must find place for general and particular preparation for the pulpit.

No matter if this point somewhat overlaps the other, it will assist us to put it just in this way. There may be too much of the general preparation and too little of the particular. Besides a good gun and plenty of cartridges, there must be a cartridge in the gun. But I apprehend that the greater danger lies in having back of the particular too little of the general. The preparing of a dinner is lighter, where, to begin with there is a good fire, and abundance in the larder. Some thing is wrong with the programme whose hours for study are all occupied about what is to be spoken in the approaching Sabbath. There is too much of the living from hand to mouth about that. The multiplicity of demands upon the ordinary pastor may be urged in extenuation of this habit, nevertheless we repeat that every preacher should read and study and think quite apart from what his immediate relation to his next sermons. With what ease does the deep wide river bear onward the tiny boat that rests upon its bosom, and what a difference there is between the sermon that springs of nature and varied consideration lying far back of the delivery and one that has been hastily worked up under pressure of approaching appointment, with but little in the way of previous accumulations to draw upon. It is by abundant general preparation that the particular is lightened. Happy he who maintains proper balance between the two. Not only does he avoid the fretting of his one sided neighbor, but his preaching is more likely to be to edification. Perhaps additions to general stock would better be made in the earlier days of the week, in part, as diversion from the Sunday's strain of indeed to the wise and zealous worker all days yield new increments to the store, increments which at the moment of their addition he may have no idea how he is to employ in his ministry of love, while out in the field or on the busy street, while glancing over the daily paper or moving through the chapters of a romance, as surely as when busily engaged in the quiet of his own study, he is laying by for the expected and unexpected requirements of the future. One of the advantages, afforded a young minister who has for his first pastorate a small and comparatively easy charge is found in the opportunity there granted him for that breadth and thoroughness of inquiry, in matters pertaining more or less to his calling, whereby he is enabled to serve efficiently in that special locality for a protracted period, or equipped for removal to much larger responsibility.

Third: Our Time Table must set over against the pulpit ministrations a due amount of pastoral activity.

This certainly is a hackneyed statement, but like thousands of other things it must continue to have repetition. Love of novelty must prevent presentation of the old things which are as much needed to day as they were yesterday and will be as much needed to-morrow as they are to-day. Modern breakfast foods are not equal to the plain oatmeal which was so prominent in the diet of our fathers. Some neglect personal contact with the people for the concentration of power upon the pulpit, while others incline to slight the pulpit in order to get about among the families. But neither service can be at its best unless the other is also. Subjects may be well discussed without visiting, but there can hardly be a coming home to people's hearts in sympathy and practical helpfulness without meeting the pastoral part of the obligation. On the other hand, the house to house visitation will be wanting in effectiveness if the pulpit part of the one great undertaking is not duly sustained. I knew a man who reveled in pulpit preparation and delivery while he abhorred the ringing of door bells; and that which he loved he attended to while that which he

disliked he omitted. But the preaching scarcely fitted into the needs of the congregation. It was one of the cases of having the food too high for the sheep to reach it. There was, if we dare judge, more of pleasure to the preacher and the occasional hearer, than there was of actual profit to the regular attendant. Then over against this, all of us have known men so much on the move among their flocks that those seated before them in the sanctuary have not there been provided for in so excellent a manner as they have had a right to expect. It goes without saying that there is much calling and conversing that is of very slight worth, and that consumes very much of valuable time. Its connection with the great end is quite too remote. May its kind decrease, that more time may be available for decidedly helpful contact with the troubled and discouraged, with the wayward and the lost. It is hand-picked fruit that is called for. Public effort requires a preface and supplement of private effort for the best results. When affliction comes into a home the pastor cannot reach there too soon thereafter. Access may then in a few minutes, by genuine Christian sympathy, be gained to hearts that have withstood the preaching of years. And after that piece of tender shepherding in an hour of extremity, preaching in no way better than it was before is a hundred times better to him whose whole attitude has been changed by the prompt personal touch amid a bitter experience. A pastor may well ask himself in which direction he is too much inclined to yield, and upon learning the fact, or having it brought to remembrance afresh, he cannot too soon subject his present time-table to modifications. The man who walks the tight-rope is not alone in requiring skill for right-balancing. Personal preferences and unworthy ambitions are so apt to creep in for the marring of our work that a good beginning easily slides into a wrong continuance. Not only must the servant get his time-table from his master, but at the master's call, to which an open ear is kept, he must speedily return from the deflections to which all are ever prone. By-path meadow was never too quickly abandoned.

Fourth: The Time-table should indicate a deep interest that extends beyond the minister's own immediate charge.

Matters that concern the different churches of our own denomination in the same city where we dwell, or in the same county or association or convention, call for the sympathy and co-operation of all the pastors therein found. It is exceedingly unfortunate when a man is so absorbed with what relates more immediately to his own local church that he thinks he has no time for these wider claims. To work only for local success is to make sure of missing in any worthy degree, the very thing that is aimed at. The heart that is so circumscribed that is not entirely fit for service anywhere. Each must exert himself for a wide extent if he would be most useful on his own garden patch. Every man's field is limited to a narrow area and yet every man's field is the world. Until we take the world into our affections, and until we study and plan and pray and labor for the world, we do not our best for the little section especially allotted to us. Our light must be of some worth in remote quarters if it is to be of much worth near by. It must shoot its rays afar else it is dim at the particular spot where it stands.

Possibly there may be special need of urging that there are moral and spiritual matters of such general moment to the communities where we severally dwell, that pastors of different religious bodies should cordially combine in connection therewith. Such for example, is the demand for suppression of intemperance or for the bringing about of a better observance of the Lord's Day. What one preacher and congregation cannot do alone, all preachers and congregations may do together, and when done all are gainers through the greater prevalence of righteousness. Emphasis should be placed upon the oneness of Christian people rather than upon their differences and this oneness may be exhibited to marked advantage in united effort wherever practicable. Want of time may be pleaded here as elsewhere. But if our welfare is so intimately bound up with those around us, if we are responsible for our neighbors as well as for ourselves, ought we not to take time for rendering assistance in the directions suggested? Is there not an expenditure in some other quarter that ought to be transferred to this? The same love which prompts us in our foreign missionary enterprises, which nerves us to give the gospel to the heathen in India, also incites us, does it not, to join our forces as far as we can, with those of other religious bodies for suppression of the wrongs that abound in our midst and for the winning of the neglected at our very doors to paths of virtue and holiness.

(Continued next week).

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I was taught from my childhood to believe in a local heaven. We shall be there with these eyes of ours. I never see this glorious river rushing by us, pure and clear and strong, but I think—I think—how many hours have I sat thinking! Are there no rocks in the streams that flow in the celestial fields? Is the river that runs clear as crystal always a calm, smooth stream, or does it not sometimes leap and flash in the holy light and add its voice to the grand harmonies? No, no, it cannot be there a long calm, a never ending uniformity of existence. Oh, for a breath of the wind that toss the hair and fan the cheeks of the white-robed! Oh for a drop of the spray from the crystal streams! Oh, for an hour among those hills where the winds blow tempests of joy, where cataract answers to cataract in riotous music! —Prime.