



Crossings Reflection #8 ¹

Gifts of Time ²

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What is one of God's most precious gifts to us? At least a dozen times a day, we all take just a quick glance at a watch or clock to observe it—it is the gift of time. I would argue that time must be a very precious gift, because most of us are complaining that we do not have enough time, would give anything to have more time, or that we pay too much for time when we subscribe to a mobile phone calling plan.

When you notice that you don't have enough time, or that time is slipping away too fast, have you ever given thought to *quantifying* the time you *really* do have? By doing some quick math and making some basic assumptions, you will gain an appreciation for the time you have. In case you are a little strapped for time (and because I was curious myself), I recently completed the math for you. Here are the results.

In a lifetime on this earth, you have about 42 million minutes. Those of you whom we welcome to our University of Indianapolis community have already used a little over nine million of these minutes growing, playing, learning, maturing, loving, laughing, crying, and, of course, preparing for the next four years.

In four years at UIndy, you will spend about two million minutes. *Two million minutes.* Of course at least a third of that will be used sleeping, eating, napping, and (we hope) bathing. You now have just 1.33 million *waking* minutes left at UIndy. You have already used 17,000 minutes in the last 12 days! Oh my; you are down to a little more than 1.2 million minutes. Time certainly flies, doesn't it?

Now I must caution you that, in my calculations, I *assumed* you will all live for 80 years. As you all know, this is not a certainty, especially if you do not exercise regularly, eat six servings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day, or look both ways when crossing Hanna Avenue.

Numerous times we all find ourselves saying, "I just don't have any (or enough) time." By calculating and estimating a finite amount of time that you do have, as I have done, you will, of course, come to understand that you cannot control the amount of time you have—but you can control *how* you use that time.

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a story:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii, and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'"

(Revised Standard Version of Luke 10:30-36)

This biblical reading is one of the first I remember hearing *and* actually comprehending when I was a small child. Like most of you,

¹ *Crossings Reflections* are occasional essays by members of the University community on various topics that contribute to reflection about questions of vocation, professional identity, and human flourishing in the context of the University's motto of "Education for Service." Published by The Crossings Project, copies of these occasional papers are available upon request for use on and off campus.

² Dr. Ritke delivered these remarks as a devotional reflection at the President's Convocation at the University of Indianapolis on September 9, 2004.

I usually associate this passage with the Golden Rule; that is, of doing good unto others.

But lately, upon reading or hearing this passage, I have found myself imagining, if I were a mouse hiding behind a rock near the man whom the thieves had assaulted, what might I have seen and heard (beyond the abridged version that Jesus told the disciples) as that assaulted man awaited for someone to help. I have imagined their excuses for not helping had something to do with time.

I have imagined that the priest might have said, “Oh my, I just don’t have time to deal with this. I have a sermon to compose, I have a lecture due for the New Priest Experience class, and because I spent too much time watching the disciples playing basketball I may not have enough time to prepare my 20 papyrus handouts. I certainly don’t have time to help this man. But I will pray for him.”

A little later the Levite passes by, and on seeing the injured man along the road mutters, “Oh, Lord, look at that poor guy. I cannot believe the corruption and crime in this neighborhood. It just isn’t the way it was when I was a kid. I wish I had time to help, but I am late for an appointment with some pilgrims who are planning a welcoming ceremony for a prophet, and then I have to see to the purchase of oil and wine. I am thankful he is still breathing. I will let someone in town know about this man; I hope they will have time to help him.”

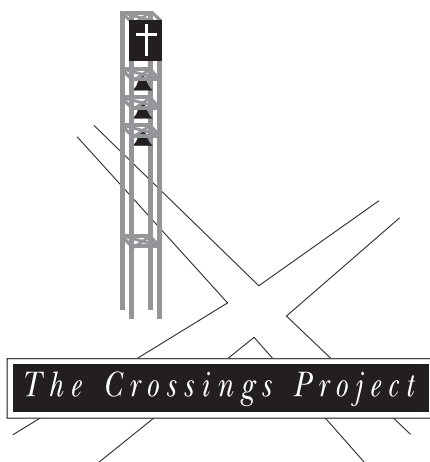
Of those who witnessed the injured man in need, it was the Samaritan, a nonbeliever—someone who was much despised by the chosen people of his time—who decided he could allocate some time to help the man. He had the same 24-hour day and 60-minute hour as the others, but was the only one who had about 240 minutes to spare.

By now, you probably wonder, “Why the emphasis on time during the first couple weeks of school and during this convocation?” Well, these past two weeks of academia are a bit like the first two weeks

of January for the rest of our life. For all of us, the first weeks of the school year represent new beginnings and the opportunity to start with a clean slate. For those of you are welcoming to the UIndy family, your new faces represent to us “veterans” the potential for new friends, new perspectives, new outlooks, new dreams, and new ideas. As you feel more at home, you will find that you will invariably become more and more busy, time will fly by way too fast, and you will find yourself saying “I have no time for x, y, or z.” Before you know it, the next thing you will be doing is walking down the graduation aisle between Schwitzer and Lilly Fitness Center saying, “Wow, where did *that* two million minutes go?!”

Let me assure you that in as little as ten years, the test days, the late nights spent writing a paper, the hours spent in the library doing research or studying, the minutes spent agonizing over the C+ that you hoped would be a B-, will be but a blip on your watch. You will barely remember them. What you will remember, and therefore the time that will be the most precious, is the time you took to go out on a limb to help someone in need, to help the person who made a bad decision, the one who is being persecuted, the one who just needs someone to sort through the demons within. The time to help the fellow student who struggles, perhaps with the challenges of adult life, with her classes, or with his career decisions. Perhaps *you* will need the help. Take the time to get the help from this family, who will be there for you for two million minutes.

Finally, take time to enjoy life—because it’s only 42 million minutes, and it will be gone before you know it. Admire God’s other gifts of flowers and trees, appreciate the birds (even the geese), lie on the grass (avoiding the goose poop, of course), and take in the wide, blue, Indiana sky. Think of ways you can make the world a better place for your children’s 42 million minutes. Spend some minutes serving others, and thank those who spend a few minutes serving you. Enjoy your two million minutes at UIndy. But most of all, take time to **thank God for the priceless gift he gave us all—the time of our lives.**



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