

PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2020

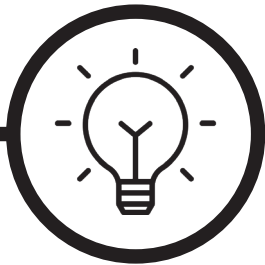
GENEROSITY & OUR TIME



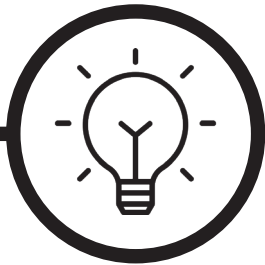
CONTENTS



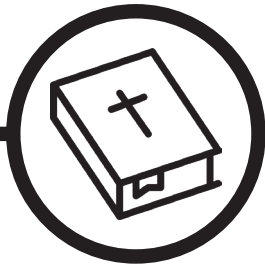
ARTICLE	1
<i>Generosity & Our Time</i>	
Jesse Brannen	



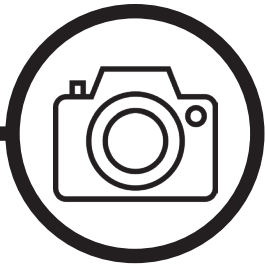
BOOK HIGHLIGHT	5
<i>Plugged In</i>	
by Daniel Strange	
Recommended by James Ruley	



BOOK HIGHLIGHT	6
<i>Competing Spectacles</i>	
by Tony Reinke	
Recommended by Caroline McGill	



BIBLE READING PLAN	7
<i>Take Up & Read</i>	
August	



NEW MEMBERS	8
<i>Margaret Berry, Trevor & Julia Buce, Pierce & Ashley Dempsey, Hannah & Tim Dunbar, Jaime Fulcher, Amanda Merl, Jill Lennon, Joel Rainey, Anabel Salas, David & Jonelly Sharp, Julia Tucker</i>	

Generosity & Our Time

*This thing all things devours:
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats high mountain down.¹*

In J.R.R. Tolkien's classic work, *The Hobbit*, Gollum poses this riddle to Bilbo Baggins, who finds himself in a battle of wits for his life. He accidentally stumbles on the correct response, "time", when he desperately asks Gollum for that very thing so his life might be spared long enough to produce an answer. He is saved.

I like Gollum's riddle because it reflects the way that we often think about time. There is something slightly unpleasant about time. It imposes itself on us, and we find ourselves in a constant race against it. The slow march of time is something we want to fight and resist, and it is something from which we must be saved. In his book, *Your Days are Numbered*, John Perrit argues that when Adam and Eve sinned, they "did not receive an instantaneous death, rather, the creation of time was ushered in. They now had to limit their days. They would expire."² Now, some concept of time seemed to be present at creation, but I understand his meaning. Time as something working against us was ushered in with sin. Our lives and all of creation are heading toward an end.

But that is not all that can be said about time. The Bible also presents time as a gift from God. What a gift it was that Adam and Eve were not instantly destroyed when they sinned; they were given time. What a gift that God is patient with sinners that they might return to him; we are given time. Though time is fleeting and short, it isn't fundamentally something to fight against, but something to treasure, to steward, and to use for God's glory. God gives us time that we might know him and that we might "abound in every good work" (2 Cor 9:8c). Our time is not fundamentally our own; it is a gift of the sovereign and wise Creator. Therefore, like all good gifts of the Lord, our time is to be something we share. Time is not simply an agent of destruction and decay, but a tool, a gift, and a resource to steward for God's glory and the good of others. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to be "joyfully open-handed with [our time] for the sake of those we love—family, church, community, and world."³ We are called to be generous.

MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE TIME

*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,
making the best use of the time because the days are evil.
Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of
the Lord is (Eph 5:15–17).*

Paul's words in Ephesians instruct Christians on what they are to do with the gift of time. Christians aren't to waste their time in foolish pursuits, many of which Paul lists in the preceding verses, but instead, we are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Christians are not simply to make a good use of time, but the best use of their time. Why? Because the days are evil. There is going to be much to tempt us away from worthwhile pursuits. There is going to be much to tempt us to use our time in foolish, selfish, and ungenerous ways. But the way that we use our time should reveal that we have been redeemed and that we live our lives in service to King Jesus.

What does it mean to make the best use of our time? Paul's words are again helpful. It is to seek to understand the will of the Lord and to order our time accordingly. To put it another way, the way we use our time should reflect a love and devotion to God, and the primary subject of this article—a love of neighbor. So again, at least part of what it means to make the best use of our time is that we are generous with it. Yet, doing this well requires great wisdom. The author of Ecclesiastes writes, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecc 3:1). The point is that we need wisdom to know when it is time to weep or laugh, to mourn or dance, or any number of other things (Ecc 3:4). It isn't always obvious.

Developing this kind of wisdom requires a generosity of time towards others. How do we know when it is time to weep or laugh? By spending time getting to know someone else. By entering into their world. By giving of our time. Brothers and sisters, this is what Christ did. He wept at the death of Lazarus because of the time he spent with him. Jesus spent his time on earth among and in the service of sinful humanity, culminating in his death on the cross. Matthew provides this description of the ministry of Jesus, "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:35–36). Jesus was generous with his time. He invested it in others, even when he was tired. He was compassionate. And because Jesus humbled himself and spent time here on earth, we now have a high priest who can sympathize with our

weaknesses. A high priest who can sympathize with the fact that we get tired and often find that we don't want to be generous with our time. So, if we are to make the best use of our time, we must first look to Christ. Only then can we truly model a Christlike generosity with our time.

Throughout the New Testament, it is clear that this sort of posture towards time is to mark those who have been redeemed. Just consider some of the "one another" commands of Scripture:

- Encourage and build one another up (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 5:11)
- Greet one another (Rom 16:16)
- Admonish one another (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16)
- Serve and care for one another (1 Cor 12:25; Gal 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Be patient with one another (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13)
- Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)
- Show hospitality to one another (1 Pet 4:9)
- Pray for one another (James 5:16)

These are only the beginning of the "one another" commands in the New Testament, but it is clear that we cannot live out these commands unless we are willing to be generous with our time. Christians are to be marked by their love for one another, which in part is shown by their willingness to give of their time to one another. It is simply what new life in Christ looks like.

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF THE TIME

I could spend the rest of this article providing some practical ways you might make the best use of your time, but many of the other *Perspective* articles this year have already done that. Those articles have considered how to be generous with the gospel, your vocation, the church, your home, and next month's article will be about how to be generous with your mind. But you will never be generous in those areas unless you are first willing to be generous with your time. If you are struggling to be generous in some of those ways, it may be because you struggle to be generous with your time. It takes more than time to be generous with the gospel, your work, the church, your home, and your mind, but certainly not less. So, if you are looking for some practical ways Christians might use their time well, I encourage you to read those articles. In this article, instead of giving a lengthy list of ways you might spend your time, I want to provide some suggestions on how you might develop a joyful open-handedness with the time the Lord has given you:

1. Learn to number your days:

At my grandfather's funeral a number of years ago, I remember being struck when one of my cousins spoke at the graveside service from Ecclesiastes 7:2: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart." My cousin's point, and the point of that verse, was that we are meant to learn from death. It is good for us to be reminded that our lives will end. When a loved one dies, we are reminded that what we do with our time here on earth matters. The finiteness of our lives and the uncertainty of the time we have on this earth are gifts from the Lord intended to help us see our need of him. This is what happened to the people of Nineveh when Jonah preached that they had only 40 days before they would be destroyed. Jonah's words caused them to number their days and turn in repentance. God used Jonah's words to make them wise.

Wisdom comes from learning to number our days. This is the point Moses makes in Psalm 90:12, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." All people—believers and unbelievers alike—recognize that life doesn't last forever, but only those God has taught to number their days respond like the people of Nineveh. Only those God has made wise recognize that this should lead them to live for the age to come in which their days will have no end. Only Christians recognize that sacrificing their limited time on earth in the service of others is to make the best use of the time God has given. To rightly number our days is seek to live our lives generously for the glory of God, not in pursuit of our own personal pleasure or in an attempt to experience as much as possible of what the world has to offer. I'll admit, this may seem an odd exhortation to give in a discussion on being generous with your time, but if you want to grow to be more generous with your time, don't avoid the topic of death. Suffering and death aren't pleasant topics to think of or talk about, but they are ways God reminds us to number our days. Reflecting on the reality of death helps us to "lay it to heart" and to live differently in light of it.

However, it is not just numbering our own days that encourages us to be generous with our time, but also recognizing that God has numbered the days of those around us. I want to briefly return to the story of Jonah. God called Jonah to be generous with his time. He called him to travel to Nineveh and spend time preaching to the people—time with which Jonah evidently thought he had better things to do. Jonah, of course, was not generous and did not go willingly. And do you remember what the Lord rebuked him for even after he preached? His lack of pity for

those in Nineveh; Jonah didn't care whether they perished (Jonah 4:10–11). He didn't want to spend his time serving them. So, as you think about how to be generous with your time, know that the Lord calls you to be generous with the both the grace you have been given and your understanding that the days of those around you are numbered. He calls you to be compassionate. One of the clearest entry points to the gospel is something you share with all people: your time on earth is going to come to an end. Be generous with the knowledge the Lord has provided. Be compassionate towards those who don't know the Lord, and pray that God would teach you to number your days. When you learn to number your own days, Christian love will lead you to be generous with your time and with the gospel.

2. Evaluate and rightly prioritize your time

As Christians, we understand that we are to rightly order the time we have. We know our first priority should be to the Lord and then we are to invest in our families, church, and community. This priority is even reflected in the definition of generosity we have been using this year: *being joyfully open-handed with what we have for the sake of those we love—family, church, community, and world.*

The question is, does your time reflect these priorities? Are you generous with your time in these areas? One of the blessings of the COVID-19 pandemic is that it has forced us to change the way we spend our time. The pace of life has slowed as activities have been cancelled, and we have been forced to spend more time at home. The Lord has given us all the opportunity to see what it is like to spend our time in a different way. Have you used it to evaluate the ways in which you previously spent your time? Here are a few questions you might ask to evaluate whether you are truly being joyfully open-handed with your time:

- ✦ Is your time so devoted to one of the categories listed above—family, church, community, world—that you are unable to be generous with your time in other areas? Do your kids activities so fill your schedule that you don't have time to invest in church or with your neighbors?
- ✦ Are you using your gifts to build up the church (Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:7)?
- ✦ When possible, do you serve the interests of others by first completing tasks and assignments needed by others (Phil 2:4)?
- ✦ What do you do with the unexpected time you are given? Do you use it to serve others, or is it almost always used for your own pursuits and interests? What have you done with the extra time you have been given during the pandemic?
- ✦ What is your attitude when people take

away your time in unexpected ways? Do you get frustrated, or do you joyfully serve?

There is one more question to ask yourself about whether you are joyfully open-handed with your time: Do you regularly spend time in God's Word and prayer? God has given us time that we might know him, and to use time in that way shows a thankfulness to God. However, it also helps us to be generous to others. At first, this may not seem like an obvious connection, but remember, the goal is to spend our time in a way that serves others. Christians are called, among other things, to "encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thess 5:11) and to "exhort one another every day" (Heb 3:13a). What is it that we encourage and exhort with? Scripture. Therefore, the time you spend in God's Word and prayer is not only intended to grow your relationship with the Creator, but to equip you to be generous to others. In Jesus' time on earth, he frequently withdrew to spend time with his Father. It was important. So, if you struggle to regularly spend time with the Lord, do something different with your time. Change your schedule. Get up earlier. Go to bed earlier. Get rid of less important things in your schedule. Prioritize your time with the Lord. It is a way to be generous to others because true generosity is about both the quantity and quality of the time you spend with others.

3. Plan your time

You may have already learned to number your days and desire to rightly prioritize your time, but you may still struggle to be generous with it because you do not plan how to use your time wisely.

In many ways, Delaine is the time planner of our home, at least when it comes to hospitality and time spent with friends and family. She will come to me once every week or two and ask to spend about 15 minutes doing "calendar time" together. Calendar time essentially consists of Delaine trying to find a time in our calendars where we can have someone over for dinner, or get together with friends, or visit family, and the list goes on. I do not like calendar time, and usually try to put it off for as long as possible. I know once we put it on the calendar, we are committing to using our time in a certain way. My flesh often resists that. I want to guard my time and keep it as my own. But calendar time is important if we are actually going to be generous with our time. Opportunities to make the best use of our time will pass us by if we do not plan them. So, the Lord has used Delaine to help me and help us as a family be much better planners of our time, and in doing so, has helped us be much more joyfully open-handed with our time.

Brothers and sisters, I don't know if you need calendar time, but I do think it is important for you to plan how you use your time. Don't simply be carried along by the way those around you use their time. Be intentional. Build margin into your schedule so that you can be joyfully open-handed when unexpected opportunities arise. Plan to be generous with your time.

CONCLUSION

To go back to Gollum's riddle, time does eventually devour all earthly things, so don't let your time on earth be spent on things that will be devoured. Jesus calls you to store up for yourself treasures in heaven rather than earth (Matt 6:19–20). He calls you to generously invest your time in others.

Now, what I don't want you to do is come away from this article simply feeling guilty for the ways you use your time. For one, our Savior forgives us for the ways in which we frivolously use our time. But it is also true that we are finite creatures. It is not just our days that are numbered, but our energy and attention as well. God calls us to rest and relaxation. Those are good uses of time. My goal is not for you to feel as if you must spend every waking moment serving someone else. My goal is that you would be convinced that the way in which you use your time matters, that you would seek to be intentional with your time, and that you would evaluate your life to see if you are using your time to love both God and neighbor.

Determining how to do this is not easy, but God generously gives wisdom to those who ask (James 1:5). So, as you learn to number your days, pray, prioritize, and plan to be joyfully open-handed with the gift of time you have been given for the sake of those you love.

– Jesse Brannen

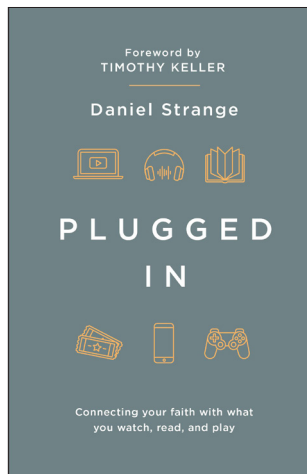
¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, (Ballantine Books, New York, 1966), 77.

² John Perrit, *Your Days are Numbered: A Closer Look at How We Spend our Time & the Eternity Before Us*, (Christian Focus Publications Ltd, Ross-Shire, Great Britain, 2016), 25.

³ Aaron Menikoff, *A Culture of Generosity*, Perspective (January, 2020).

Plugged In

Written by Daniel Strange



If you've been a Christian for a while, then chances are you've heard that we need to be "in the world but not of the world". But what does that even mean? In *Plugged In*, Daniel Strange tackles this issue head-on, observing that Christians historically have mishandled this imperative, responding to the world's culture with angry judgmentalism, total disengagement, or wholehearted imitation. However, by posing and answering three questions, he argues for a better way: cultural engagement.

What is culture? Strange defines culture as "the stories we tell that express meaning about the world." Put another way, culture is the way that we communicate and live out our worldview—what's important to us, what's right and wrong, what is true and how we can know it, and how to be happy.

Why does culture matter? Christians should care about the world's culture—not just because it inevitably affects our lives on a daily basis, but also because we will never effectively be able to engage our non-Christian friends with the gospel unless we understand the cultural stories they consume and create.

How do I engage with culture? The answer to this question is the meat of the book. Strange argues that we need to confront the world's culture with the gospel by showing how the stories our culture tells are ultimately empty. Simultaneously, however, we must connect the hopes and desires expressed in its cultural stories with the gospel because the gospel is the true story, from which all other stories are cheap imitations. In order to confront culture and connect it to the gospel, Strange proposes that we must (1) listen to the stories the world is telling, (2) explore those stories for elements of grace and the idols attached to them, (3) expose the idols as destructive frauds, and (4) evangelize, showing that Christ is the fulfillment of our culture's deepest hopes and desires.

Engaging culture isn't easy! Thankfully, Strange provides not only a framework to use when thinking through how to engage culture, but also several examples of how to apply that framework to everything from adult coloring books to zombies. Cultural engagement is important—not just to aid us in evangelism, but also to point our own eyes over and over again to the beauty of the gospel story in a broken world.

— RECOMMENDED BY JAMES RULEY

Excerpts From the Book

1

"So to effectively engage our friends with the gospel – to give them a reason they'll find "reasonable" – we need to understand exactly what their unspoken assumptions are, and how we can get around them. And to identify their assumptions, we have to understand their worldview. And how can we figure out what a person's worldview is? By looking at the cultural stories they consume and create."

– What Culture Is (And Why You Should Care), p.33

2

"Culture is a calling. It isn't something we do just to fill the time between clocking off from work and going to bed. It's something we do as part of being made in the image of God—and that's true of every human being, whether they realize it or not. And like everything else in creation, all of our culture-making has an ultimate purpose—to glorify God."

– The Story of Culture, p.43

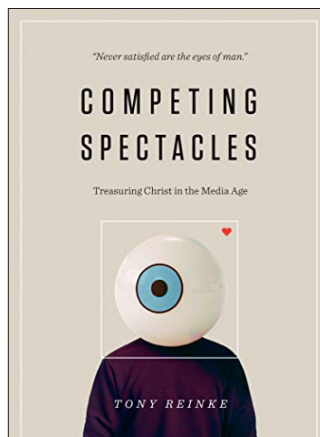
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"Our task is to make people 'stop and think' about their self-deception. To make them 'stop and think' about the commitments they make, the authorities they listen to, the stories and scripts the follow. And from there it's only a short step to get to Jesus."

– Culture as Story, p.74

Competing Spectacles

Written by Tony Reinke



In an age of visual spectacles, how do I thrive spiritually? This is the question Tony Reinke seeks to answer in *Competing Spectacles*. In a day where media and screens are ever before us, competing for our time, money, and affections, Reinke implores the Christian to examine their hearts' inclination towards these spectacles and to set their eyes on the greatest spectacle of history – the cross.

Reinke calls his book, a “Theology of Visual Culture”. Rich and deep, he systematically wades through and examines the various spectacles of our age: social media, television, advertisement, violence, sex, politics, and more. He also goes to great length to show that the struggles brought about by our present spectacles are not unique to the church today. From idols in ancient times, to the Colosseum in Rome, to the theater in the Puritan era, Christians have long been thinking about what is right to put before their eyes because of how it affects their hearts. How do we keep our eyes fixed on Christ? Reinke offers convicting and practical encouragement that points the Christian to the hope of the cross while pushing them to steep themselves in the treasures of Christ and his church.

It is easy to become callous to how much our media intake is consuming and distracting our hearts. Reinke’s book was a much needed refining fire to my dulled soul in this area of visual media. I would recommend this book to any believer who owns a mobile device, uses a computer, or watches television. The distractions of our age are only growing, but they will ultimately wither away, while the glory we have set before us will last eternally. May we not distract our souls to death.

– RECOMMENDED BY CAROLINE MCGILL

Excerpts From the Book

1

“The great spectacle of Christ crucified is a spectacle for the ear, not a spectacle for the eye. For faith comes not by seeing, but by hearing.”
– Is the Cross a Spectacle, p.85

2

“In this digital age, monotony with Christ is the chief warning signal to alert us that the spectacles of this world are suffocating our hearts from the supreme spectacle of the universe.”
– My Supreme Concern, p.143

3

“The Holy Spirit does not convict us of our failing and faltering in this age of intrusive media so that we will sink into a marsh of despondency or get stuck in the sludge of perpetual guilt. Yes, we’ve all been digitally stupid with our time and attention, but the message of the cross tells us that we are free in Christ to live for something greater! We are free to center our lives on him, to enjoy him, to glorify him by fixing our attention on things above, where we find our superior Spectacle, our greatest treasure.”
– My Supreme Concern, p.143

4

“In pushing away from our eyes all sinful enticements and worthless things in this world, we manifest a faith filled longing for the day when we shall see God and gaze at Christ with our physical eyes.”
– The Visio Beautifica, p.148

AUGUST

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

August 1 Psalm 78:56–72

August 2 Psalm 78

August 3 Psalm 98

August 4 Psalm 95

August 5 Psalm 96

August 6 Psalm 97

August 7 Luke 1:67–80

August 8 Psalm 99

August 9 Psalm 98

August 10 Acts 17:16–34

August 11 Acts 15:36–16:5

August 12 Acts 16:6–15

August 13 Acts 16:16–40

August 14 Isaiah 42:5–9

August 15 Acts 17:1–15

August 16 Acts 17:16–34

August 17 Acts 18:1–17

August 18 Acts 18:18–23

August 19 Acts 18:24–28

August 20 Acts 19:1–10

August 21 1 Kings 19:9–18

August 22 Acts 19:11–20

August 23 Acts 18:1–17

August 24 Acts 18:18–28

August 25 Acts 19:21–41

August 26 Acts 20:1–6

August 27 Acts 20:7–16

August 28 Exodus 15:1–21

August 29 Acts 20:17–38

August 30 Acts 18:18–28

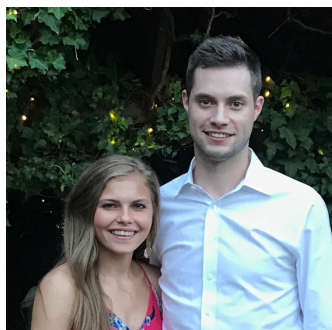
*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



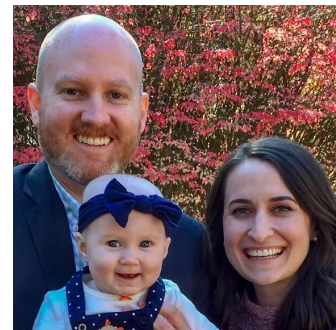
Margaret Berry



Trevor & Julia
Buce



Pierce & Ashley
Dempsey



Hannah & Tim
Dunbar
Kate (1)



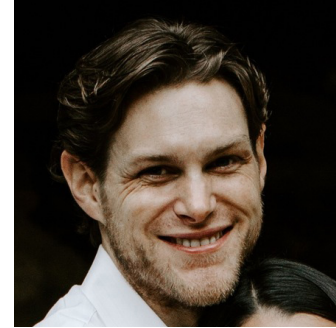
Jaime Fulcher



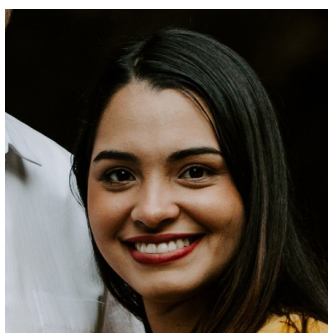
Amanda Merl



Jill Lennon



Joel Rainey



Anabel Salas



David & Jonelly
Sharp



Julia Tucker



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH