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THE HERALD

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Confessions of a Latecomer

By Pastor Del Miller

As we enter a new year on the calendar, it seems like a good time to share some thoughts that have been “on the back burner” for a while (they nearly fell off the stove!). It is truly not my desire to alienate anyone. This will simply be based on what has happened in my life and how the Lord has used various presentations of truth to guide me.

As a boy, I don't know exactly when I noticed that our family was almost always late to church events, family reunions, school programs or anything else that required us to get five Millers into the same vehicle and on the road. It may have been soon after the 14th time of trying to find one of my sister's shoes on a Sunday morning or it may have been after the 7th time of sitting way too far up front at church because we got there too late to get the back seats, or it may have been sometime after I graduated from boyhood, got married and found out that my wife had the silly idea that “on time” meant being at a

destination 30 minutes before it actually started!

I am undoubtedly qualified to start a chapter of “Latecomers Anonymous” because I was late, or at least coming in just under the proverbial wire, most of the time. Over the years (I was 52 when I wrote this) I have become increasingly convinced that punctuality, or lack thereof, is more significant than many people realize. It is a window into our priorities.

Somewhere along the way I discovered that my goal, in many cases, was to just be on time. More often than not, I was late! Even when I wasn't technically late I was often mentally late. For example, zooming into 1st period English class with 3.8 seconds to go, does qualify, and yet it does not qualify as being on time!

Being “on time” is only a theoretical possibility and that realization has made a very big difference for me. There really is no such thing as being “on time.” I am early or I will be late. The only way a person can be on time is to be early. Now before you stop reading this, or throw this article away, please give me an opportunity to explain where I am coming from. In order to be ready for any event there are certain other events that must happen to

make it possible for you or me to be in place and ready for the main event. We could call these smaller events, that lead up to the main event, preliminary events, or prelims for short.

Let's create a realistic scenario that many people encounter. You are planning to go to a baseball game. Here's a quick list of likely prelims that you will have to process in order to be at the game on time for the first pitch: money, transportation, parking, walking time, ticket purchase, a quick "pit stop", and maybe a little backtracking to get a program or a bag of popcorn. Not mentioned in that list were unknown variables like congested traffic, detours, missed turns, mechanical problems, and fender benders or worse. The average person will estimate the amount of time that all of the prelims will take and will begin to make plans based on that time estimate. Generally speaking, the tendency toward a generous time allowance for prelims is directly proportional to the cost of the ticket for the event. In other words, the more a person spends on the ticket, the greater the motivation will be to get as much "bang for the buck" as possible.

If you were to have the mindset of getting to the game on time how would you define "on time"? If the game starts at 7:05pm where do you need to be at that time in order to consider yourself as "on time"? I realize that this starts to get into an area of personal preference, but this should be a thought provoking question. How would you define "on time"? Does "on the parking lot" at 7:05pm constitute being on time? What about being at the

ticket window or walking up the concourse toward the section where your seat is located? Are you really "on time" if you're there for the first pitch, but not for the national anthem?

As you mull this over (if you're still reading) you will possibly conclude that in order to be at the baseball game at the appropriate time, it will be important that you plan ahead and try to anticipate potential delays to insure that you will be at the right place at the right time. Now you may be bored silly with this whole baseball game scenario. That's fine. Just plug into the equation a trip to the airport to catch a flight to Honolulu. That will, in some cases, get the "juices flowing." As I mentioned earlier, the cost of the ticket will have a large bearing on how much mental energy goes into the whole issue of prelims and how much valuable time they will demand.

When something is important to us, whether it is baseball, tropical weather, a visit with a valued friend, or a trip to grandma's house for Thanksgiving dinner, we will need to do some planning in order to be available and undistracted when things get started. Most of the time, the only way you will succeed in doing this is by being early. That was indeed a "bitter pill" for me to swallow some years back. I think that in the back of my mind I was afraid that I would waste a tremendous amount of time if I was early more than a couple times a year.

I have had a number of pleasant surprises as I have moved more and more into the realm of the early arrivers. There is

less stress. There are less slow drivers, school buses, and slow moving vehicles on the road when I am driving early than when I am behind schedule. I have time to visit with people more as we wait for the door to open, or the music to begin, or the whistle to blow, or the speaker to step to the microphone. There are interesting things to be learned just about anywhere if I take time to look around and take note of my surroundings.

Another observation worth mentioning, is that both earliness and lateness tend to compound. There are limitations, but to a point, if you are early you will find yourself becoming earlier still. And, yes, you guessed it. If you are late you will very likely become later still. When we are ahead of schedule, the traffic lights are often green as we cruise through town. When we are behind schedule it seems that there is no end of red lights. And of course the red lights are most stressful at a time like that. As one gets closer to their destination, the latecomer will find no parking spaces very close at all to the door. On the other hand the early arriver will have numerous parking options to choose from and still will have plenty of time to hang up his coat, get a drink, comb those stray hairs into place, and help someone else in the family with a need they have.

Being early sends signals to others who are coming to an event. It indicates that the event is important. Being early can also show that the early arriver is placing others ahead of himself (This one's not foolproof. It can mean someone wants the best seat available). For the most part, it

provides availability and encouragement to others. Being early creates an opportunity to meet others and to reach out to them.

Wherever you are at on the spectrum, this is an area worthy of some thought and prayer. Consider the words of Paul to his friends and fellow believers in Philippi: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

When I look back over the years I have to honestly admit that most of the time my tendencies toward lateness were motivated by what would work out the best for my schedule and preferences. I subconsciously thought that it would be a horrible waste of time for me to be early and find myself waiting aimlessly for the appointed starting time.

I never even thought that my late entrance would be a distraction or a discouragement to others. Realizing that being early can be a source of encouragement to others has been a source of motivation for me. The options for early arrival exist in just about any realm you wish to consider: school, employment, supper time, visits with friends, church services, wedding rehearsals, practices of all kinds and many more. With some time to observe people and events around you, I think you will come to agree that the most effective way to be on time is to be early.

FUNNIES

Farmer Tanner rang up a neighbor on the telephone. "My best milking cow has a fever," he said. "How did you treat your ol' Bessie when she got sick last winter?"

"Well, I made up a mixture of half cod liver oil and half turpentine, and put it in with her food once a day for four days."

"Thanks, I'll try it."

Famer Tanner hung up the phone and proceeded to treat his cow. Shockingly, after four days of the medicine compound, the cow died.

He rang up his neighbor again. "Hey, I did exactly what you said with the cod liver oil and turpentine mixture, but my cow just died."

"Yep, So did ol' Bessie."

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One of the little boys said to the candy store owner, "I want a dollar's worth of jelly beans."

The candy was stocked on the very top shelf. The proprietor moved the ladder, climbed up, found the jar, brought it down, counted out the beans, then put the jar back up. He climbed down and moved the ladder aside.

"I want a dollar's worth of jelly beans too," said the second boy. Irritated, the man went through the same routine again getting the jar down again. Then turning toward the third youngster, he said, "Before I put it back, do you also want to buy a dollar's worth of jelly beans?" the boy shook his head. The man climbed the ladder,

replaced the jar, climbed down, and put the ladder away.

"I'll take seventy-five cents worth of jelly beans," the third boy said.

There were two identical twins born in Greece, put up for adoption and separated. One was sent to Saudi Arabia, and he was name Amal. The other one was sent off to Spain, and he was named Juan. Many years late, their relatives arranged for a reunion. It was a big event, and everyone showed up at the airport in Greece to greet the twins. The plan from Spain landed, and off came Juan, to the delight of the crowd. Then they waited for the plane from Saudi Arabia. Soon it arrived, but Amal wasn't on it—he'd missed the plane. One relative said to the other, "Well, they're identical twins. And if you've seen Juan, you've seen Amal."

Before leaving for Europe, a man drove his Rolls Royce to a downtown bank in New York. He went in and asked for a loan of \$5,000, offering his car as collateral. The loan officer gave him the money and promptly had the car driven into the bank's underground parking for safekeeping.

Two weeks later, the man returned. The interest on the loan came to \$15.40, which he paid, with the \$5,000. The loan officer then handed him the keys to his car.

As he was leaving, the loan officer said, "Why would a wealthy man like you need a \$5,000 loan?"

The man smiled and said, "I don't need the money, but where else can I park my Rolls Royce in Manhattan for two weeks and pay only \$15.40?"