

Deadlines

Deadlines are demarcations of time by which certain tasks must, or at least should, be accomplished. They can be on the clock or calendar, or both. Typically, those on the clock are more short-term, and those on the calendar are obviously more long-term, but both dictate an ending of the allowed time for the completion of the work to be done.

Deadlines can be helpful. They focus and prioritize our attention, or at least they should do so. While there may be a lot of projects that we intend to accomplish eventually- you know, when we get “around-to-it” or “have time,” others require more immediate attention and dedication because they have a “deadline” attached. They need to be brought to the foreground of our minds and efforts. This priority may stem from importance, or may come from the mere fact that a deadline has been imposed. Generally speaking, procrastinators hate but need deadlines, while more goal/task-oriented people like or are relatively unbothered by them. Now, let’s shift gears a bit...

What if you knew when, as in exactly when, you were going to die? You see, death is the ultimate “deadline”! It is the time when everything we do in this life comes to an end. All must be accomplished before the sands of “time” expire for us. If this deadline could be and was known, there would surely be some reshuffling of priorities. Things that were on the “when I get ‘around-to-it’ list” might become paramount in our intentions and focus, or might be abandoned altogether in lieu of other tasks which have now become more pressing... made so by our “deadline.”

A dear friend (but one not prone to random “check in” and “catch-up” calls) from Texas phoned me the other day. He explained that he was soon to have major surgery for very serious condition that had only been recently discovered. Though absolutely essential for any hope of continued life, he clarified that his chances of surviving the procedure were about 50/50. For all intents and purposes, he now had a “deadline.”

I have no idea how you might feel about such news if you received it, but I know how he reacted... because he told me. He “put his house in order”! Burial plots were bought, funeral details and costs were pre-arranged, everything that really mattered was “taken care of,” and a whole bunch of other stuff that didn’t really matter but had been occupying his time was “tabled” or abandoned altogether. And, this retired but still extremely hard-working logger took the time to call me and tell me he loved me, how much he appreciated my past and present work in the kingdom, and how much our friendship had meant to him. I have absolutely no clue how many such calls or in-person conversations like that he had with others (and such is irrelevant to our purposes here), but I know how much it meant to me, and not just personally. It also impressed me tremendously that he was genuinely “OK” with whatever happened in the surgery, even paraphrasing the apostle Paul’s words from Phil.1:22-24 (but without the benefit of Paul’s confidence to “*remain and continue with you*” as in vv.25-26). He had done everything he knew to do spiritually and physically to be prepared for his “deadline,” and apparently was finishing up his “list” with the phone call to me. But here’s the thing...

Most of us don’t have the benefit of knowing when our (even *potential*) “deadline” is. “Time” could end for any one of us, or all of us (cf. 1Cor.15:22-28), at any time, Matt.24:36. **We’re living in time with an “unknown deadline.”** What this does, or should do, is to provide us with the ultimate incentive to: 1) put and keep “first things

first,” as in “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*” Matt.6:33; and, 2) put and keep “our house in order” in preparation for our “deadline.” While most of us have no clue when our particular “deadline” is, we ALL HAVE ONE (cf. Heb.9:27), for “*that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart,*” Eccl.7:2. Will you reach your “deadline” prepared or unprepared for it?

P.S. The surgery was a success, and my friend/brother is recovering nicely. But there’s something about “near-death experiences” - at least for those willing to learn from them: You’re NEVER the same afterwards, and that can be a good thing.

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