

Time to Think

They say “Time is money.” But I disagree, because if I ask “How much money do you have right now?” most could answer fairly accurately. But if I ask “How much time do you have right now?” no one would have any real idea. Time is not money, but it is a valuable currency that we must take care how, when, and where we “invest” it.

Most everyone has heard of the three levels of learning: **1) Knowledge** (data, the facts); **2) Understanding** (seeing the relationship between these facts); and, **3) Wisdom** (knowledge and understanding applied).

One of the critical factors in working through these levels of learning/comprehension is **time**- both in the sense of *maturity* and *contemplative consideration*. Though essential to mental acuity, there’s nothing we can really do to *mature* except keep living and learning. But regarding *contemplative consideration*, it is up to us to really *take time to think*. Not just to be *concerned* or *worried* or even *frantically “freaking out,”* because most of those don’t result in good decisions (perhaps because they’re too *emotionally-based?*), but *time to think*- to *collect data*, *organize* it our minds so that we see how the different pieces “fit” together (or don’t), and *formulate* a reasoned plan or course of appropriate action.

Most of us don’t really give ourselves that kind of time to think. Perhaps we’ve become accustomed to “split-second,” “off the cuff,” or what we might call “decisive” decisions, and then dealing with or excusing the consequences of such later with “I had to make a decision.” Or perhaps these are just “short-cut” excuses for mental laziness to avoid the time and effort to truly thinking requires. We don’t just sit quietly and really focus our minds on a particular issue, problem, or course of action, do we? In fact, we’ve either *been trained* or have *trained ourselves* to have “constant distractions” of input or output. Do you seemingly need the television/computer/phone on constantly, or at least some music playing? Or one who says (perhaps without thinking), “I have to be *doing something*, I can’t *just sit*.” Perhaps not, but it might provide you time to think.

The shower, the bath, coffee on the patio, and even mowing the lawn provides me “time to think” with limited distractions.

Eccl.3:1-11 provides *knowledge*- that there is a *time for everything*; *understanding* is comprehending *which time* is *which* (what *time* it is *now*), **Eph.5:15-17**; and *wisdom* is *acting appropriately* at the *right time*, **Col.4:5-6**.

There’s the rub: having, or more usually **taking** “time to *think*”... to assemble and assess the *facts*, to ponder and “see” the *relationship* between them, and then to have the courage to *act according* (in wisdom) to the conviction/conclusion reached.

But we sometimes hinder ourselves in these regards when:

1. **We think not at all- we choose to act without thinking** (or at least to *act now* and *think later*). “Don’t think about it- just do it” is usually terrible advice. And, “If I have to think about it, I won’t do it, so let’s just go” often ends in regret. Younger people, or older people trying to act younger, are especially vulnerable to this, assuming that such is a privileged right of passage to which youth entitles them; that being “young and foolish” (or rash) is not only allowed but expected of them. “The Preacher” of **Eccl.12:1ff** says that *youth* is a time to think, before thoughtless actions produce a lifetime of regret, v.14.

2. **We think not enough- we choose to act with *insufficient data***, or without *understanding* (seeing the relationship between the carefully assembled facts). We sometimes adopt the “I’m tired of *thinking*- I want/need to *do something*” course. The word translated by the NASB as “**consider**” (katanoeo {kat-an-o-eh-o}) is an interesting one. It basically means *to perceive, observe, to consider attentively, to fix one’s eyes or mind up, to understand*. Note some other examples of its use:

- Matt.7:3, “...**but do not notice** the log that is in your own eye?”
- Luke 12:24,27, “**Consider** the ravens...” and “**Consider** the lilies...”
- Luke 20:23, “**But He detected** their trickery...”
- Acts 7:31, “**When Moses saw it** (the burning bush, PCS), **he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely...**”
- Acts 11:6, “**and when I had fixed my gaze upon it and was observing it I saw...**”
- Rom.4:19, “**Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated** his own body...”
- Jas.1:23, “...**he is a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror**” (to observe fully)

All of which enjoins upon us the responsibility to take the necessary time to *notice, consider, detect, look more closely, observe, contemplate, and observe fully before* we act! How many problems, and even tragedies and regrets, could be avoided if just **took the time to think** before we *decided (jumped to a conclusion), spoke (without thinking) or leapt (into a foolish act without looking)*.

3. **We think too much- we choose to put off acting indefinitely while we presumably think**. We choose to go down various *rabbit holes* of thought never really intending to reach a conclusion, or to act. Sometimes we say “Let me think about it” as a delay tactic never really intended *to think about it or reach a conclusion* about it, cf. Matt.21:23-26. At other times, we do *think about it*, but become so mired in thought, perhaps fearing a conclusion requiring consequential action, as to be *paralyzed*- a so-called *paralysis by analysis*, cf. Matt.21:27a. Then too, especially as we get older and perhaps *retire* from the day-to-day struggles of life that occupy our minds so, that we spend most of our time *too much in our own heads*. All of the *losses, regrets, aches and pains, and worries of life and the world* consume our thoughts, cf. Eccl.12:5a. The problem isn’t so much one of *quantity* but of *quality*. We spend our *thinking time* on: things that we cannot be *undone*; things that we cannot *change*; and things that focus us too much on ourselves (selfishly *inward* rather than selflessly *outward*), Phil.2:1-4 and Phil.4:8.

Conclusions/Applications: **Refusing to think** before we act can have disastrous consequences. **Thinking too little** (before having all the pertinent facts, and properly assessing them) is also problematic. **Thinking too much** or **on the wrong things** can lead to paralysis by analysis. But giving yourself **time to “think so as to have sound judgment”** (Rom.12:3) with a **“sober spirit for the purpose of prayer”** (1Pet.4:7) is the key. Let’s do that! Give yourself *time to think*, and then *do so* in the right way and for the right reasons.