

Chapter 12 (The time heart)

“When a man's an empty kettle, he should be on his mettle and yet I'm torn apart. Just because I'm presumin' that I could be kind of human if I only had a heart”- Arlen Harburg

Years ago, I was looking for a church closer to home. For months I had been driving around 100 kms to a friend's church. It was late April and cold here in Canada. I had just come from coaching soccer outside and I was completely frozen. There was a church just ahead as I was coming home. “I'll just stop for a minute” I said, to check out the service times. It was late and the church looked closed. I went to the door to see the times when a rather large man came down the hall towards me. My eyes went as big as walnuts.

Church was still intimidating to me at that time. I had only been a Christian several months. That man was huge. He came to the door and asked if he could help me. I just sheepishly told him I was just looking at the times. He invited me in to get warm. The other Elders were coming down the hall too for a board meeting. That night I fell in love with that man instantly.

He wrapped his big warm hands around my frozen icicles for fingers and said “you must be cold; this will warm you up.” What would warm me up” his hands?” No, his heart. This was one big warm-hearted friendly man. It was something I had never witnessed in my life. You could tell in his hands, eyes, and heart that he genuinely cared for me. How could I fall so hard in two seconds for a stranger?

It's what he gave unconditionally that impressed me. He spent his time on me. His eyes looked at me. This man noticed my needs and gave me all he had to take care of them. Sure, it's just hands. Yes, but did he have to notice me? Did he have to open the door? The most amazing part is that he did not know if I was a Christian or not. Frankly, he didn't care. What he saw was a person in need. From that day forward I have tried to emulate that man.

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That marker in my life made an impression on me. I am forever changed. That is exactly what Christianity is all about. A stranger making your life better without strings attached. He chose to love because he could. How is it possible that I could love him as a brother within seconds? He used two things the right way. First, was his time. He took his time to warm my hands. He had a meeting to attend yet, he stopped and grabbed my hands. The second is he reached for my heart. He asked about me and cared for my cold hands. I want to know if you have a time heart like he does?

Time is on your side. As long as your breathing you have some amount of time. Time to live. Time to love. Yet, it takes time. If God is outside of time, does that change things? He could pluck from this and that point (in time) to make the future his way. Is it cheating? Yet, if God has placed you right here and right now, why is that? What if he purposely plucked your soul from outside time and placed it right where it was needed the most?

Is that a game changer? Your placed in a specific time and place by God. I do come back to Yoda talking about Luke *"This one a long time have I watched. All his life has he looked away...to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing."* So many church leaders do the same thing. The next big project. We'll commit when the numbers hit this point. If only we had more people or money. Do you really think people can't see you looking past them to future endeavors? Yet, a man might be looking through your church doors.

There was an incident one of my former pastors experienced. He was at the church late one night. There was a knock on the door. A homeless man was standing there. In my small town that would be odd. The man asked for some help. I got to tell you, that never happens in my little

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town. The pastor was taken back. What to do? It hit him straight away that this man might be Jesus testing him.

So, he made a decision. He took the man to a hotel for the night and paid for his supper. That pastor was so scared that this homeless man was Jesus. Yet, he was criticized by other church leaders for using unauthorized church funds. They say that the heart of God drives us. We could never love at all if our heavenly loving Father did not exist. What drove that pastor to take a chance and love first?

Did God put that man in a certain place and time? Was it dumb luck, fate, or predestination? Does it matter? The man was there. The pastor was there. Together, these two men did exactly what God wanted. To share the love of God. I bring up this story because humans think they control church. They believe that they built Christianity over time. These leaders were inspired by God to make a church. Yet, what if, God placed you inside his plan for a church? It was never ever yours, he just placed you there in his timeline.

I contend that it's not for you to grow a church. It's God the Father's job. He draws. He builds. For some reason we think it's all within our hands to do Gods will. Yet, he is outside time plucking and planting. 1 Corinthians is ringing in my ears. *"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."* Somehow Jesus saying that he is preparing a place for us means so much more. Is God constructing our time?

I do believe God gives us time and people. However, Christianity, theology, and the church are his. He works them through his people. Sometimes it's found in a church and other times we find it working miracles in the wilderness of Africa. Yet, church leaders park in a designated

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spot. They put their office deep within the church. The weekly board and staff meetings highlight what they have done and will do. Yet, how much of your God given time is squandered building your church and making sure the revolving door isn't squeaking. Swoosh, swoosh it goes.

If God is omnipresent (there always), omnipotent (all powerful), and omniscient (all knowing), then we (finite creatures) are not in control. God gives and God takes away. A relative of J Paul Getty was asking the doctor what the rich man left right after he died. The Doctor said he left it all. He took nothing with him. Why is that? We come into the world with nothing and we leave with nothing. What we do have; however, is God given time.

What happens when a pastor is working late on a Friday night? His boys are out. His wife is home waiting. What is really going on? Does he really know what is going on outside his office? Of, course he says God knows. The Father in heaven is really their father. He doesn't need to be home. What a twisted logic. I can hear a pastor say "I was created for a purpose", Yet "what I created" is put in the hands of a different creator. That totally makes sense. Why doesn't God do that? Put us in the hands of a different creator? Yet, we are made in his image. Do we really reflect the image of God when we ignore our own created family?

God provides work, a spouse, children, church and many other things. Some of it you tend to just like Adam did in the garden. Yet, the garden is Gods. Do you think it's a good idea to concentrate on the garden management while leaving the harvest to chance? If God asks us to tend to what he gave us, then why are you giving it back to him to take care of? Let's face it, many ministry leaders are trying to play God. They build the kingdom but ignore the harvest (people).

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There is a way to manage your God given time better. It's not found in a three-step formula. No sabbatical away from your family will help. Adding another board meeting to announce you are stepping away from ministry will not do. No, I need you right where you are. First things first, move your office to the front. Be where the action is. You don't attend financial meetings anymore. Leave that to qualified men in your church. Lastly, by a chocolate bar.

What? What does a chocolate bar have to do with time and the heart? Years ago, I went to counseling for my split-up. The lady insisted I work on me. It was very un-nerving. Her one question was "when was the last time I bought myself a chocolate bar without feeling guilty?" It was hard for me to do that. My point to you is this. Get out of the four walls. Smell the roses, talk to people, and buy yourself something. Do not deny yourself life because you're a minister.

I had a pastor tell me he writes his sermon late Friday night and Saturday morning. That's pretty gutsy considering he has to preach Saturday night. Why did he do that routine? So many of his sermons reflected his week. One sermon in particular was the best he had ever preach directly because of a Friday funeral. We are put in a certain time and space for the moment. While everything else is going on in the world there we are right among the living. I love his sermons because they reflect how the Bible affected him daily. Be an "alive" in the moment pastor.

I love the idea of writing human sermons. I don't love the idea of spending countless amounts of time, at night, with my sermon. Your heart is key to a sermon. The Bible reading and studying changes the heart. Yet, doesn't a funeral and family time change a heart too? Why is it really that you can't study and write a sermon during your week day? Church and timelines are busy patrick. Yes, we so busy managing the institution that the little things get lost. Like being in

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places that change the heart. You can't be there if your buried in meeting in the day and a sermon at night.

You chose to be a father, be there. You chose to be a pastor, be there. Yet, that's not how we roll. Let's send money and people overseas. Do you concentrate on the poor, lost, and needy right here at home? Not if you're thinking only about missions somewhere else. Are you being an adulteress to the place God has placed you? A wife and kids are married to you. Yet, the bulk of your week is being an adulteress with your church. For God? Tell that to all the kids and wives that left the church directly because of a distant adulteress father. Paul said you can't have it both ways for a reason.

It would be easy to say "Patrick, they married the church too." Yet, I had a conversation with an elderly pastor that told me in confidence that he would have spent more time with his wife in hindsight. Radio pastor J, Vernon McGee said that when he was very sick, he had to spend time with his wife. He then glowingly reported that it was a honeymoon all over again. He soon realized that time with his wife was important too. He regretted not doing that more years before. It took cancer to wake him up.

Growing a church family means putting numbers, timelines, and spreadsheets a distant third. Spending time with your family is number one. Spending time with your church family is second. A corporate boss sits in his office late at night. His wife is at home with the kids. Who is he kidding? What are you married to? Many of us think our hands must build the ship. All hands-on deck. Yet, God is there trying to run the ship. Are you really going to tell him you got this?

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We are given people, not a church. Yes, the church needs to be kept floating. Yes, it takes time and work. When it takes more time keeping it afloat than your family time, Houston you have a problem. The church is just the conduit that we use to gather in the name of Jesus. We grow Christians there. We serve the community through a church. That church building is the God hub. How many pastors love the hub more than what God gave them? People!

Where does your heart lay? It's very interesting that Jesus said he had no place to lay his head. Why not at home with his mother? I feel that Jesus was cast out and misunderstood. Why did his mother and family try and claim him as crazy? At that time, it looked that way. As a man, Jesus went his own way. Heading slowly to the Father in heaven. He never married. He never welcomed guests at home. Jesus (instead) went out and visited them all. From his home town of Bethlehem to visiting Mary and Martha, Jesus spent time at other people's homes. He could because he chose to marry the mission and not a human girl.

So, Jesus set up shop and preached? Uh, no he did not. He went from town to town and synagogue to synagogue talking, eating, and visiting. Jesus was found at wells, weddings, and dinners. He spent time with people. We have a limited Bible. Certainly, there was more to tell. We do get to read that Jesus was alone praying. How often does it say he was weary, yet when the people came, he felt compassion? Why on earth does Paul say we should remain unmarried? Jesus knew. Paul knew. If you marry both then you're an adulteress to one.

Yet, here are church leaders having late night meetings. They go on sabbaticals without their family. Minimum forty hours a week in church and he can't finish a sermon? You can't go home? I know why you don't. It's your ordained ministry. You were sanctioned by God. So, your hands steer the wheel, row the boat, and keep the chickens roasted. Yet, it's Gods house. Your God given house waits at home doesn't it.

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It all comes back to time. We are stewards of the time we are given. How many people pass a pastor's bubble during a day? Further to that, how many places does a pastor pass? Why is it that about 9 pastors passed a low-income housing project every day but had never been there? It's all got to do with time. Why does a pastor work 60-80 Hrs. a week? To swallow the time. You have to ask yourself why Jesus was at the well? Why Jesus passed that tree Zacchaeus was in? Time well spent encountering people? Was Jesus looking for people to share Gods love?

I am doing a study on the seven deadly sins. So far, I have noticed that gluttony, greed, and lust are bed fellows. Why did a pastor report the numbers (for about 10 minutes) in church? I contend that lust, greed, and gluttony are fed by pronouncing what you have done in public. He then ended by saying that within two years he wants to split the church in two. 4 non-blondes have an album titled "Bigger, better, faster, more." The perfect song for seven deadly sins. That tune is played during your 60hr church week on replay.

The church needs attention. Really? When you go away for vacation does your church crumble? When you go on sabbatical for three months are you out of a job? Time moves forward regardless of where you are. However, are you a good steward of time? What about booking time with your church and spending time with your family? Any church that requires you to work a ton but have a family waiting (all the time) is not a good church. They are family abusers. I will say this plainly "sure as hell they are at home more than you." Let's continue to stay late at church blasting 4 non-blondes bigger, better, faster, more!

I did look at a bunch of statistics done through the Barna group. They report high numbers of pastors that are lonely. According to the Barna group only 34% of pastors said they have a meaningful relationship outside of church. Pretty much every stat I've seen on pastors' wives are marred in loneliness, regret, and un-satisfaction. I know that Chuck Swindoll's wife struggled.

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Charles Stanly's wife struggled. James Dobson's wife struggled. We are given time to serve and time to love. Didn't I mentioned that we are given people? Gods church will stand. It has for two thousand years. Yet, how many religious families have fallen in the name of God in those last 2000 years?

As a human, you are only given a finite amount of time with people. After you die the church does not necessarily die with you. Yet, within your allotted time are people. I know a friend who was looking for me in a church. He realized I was not a pastor in a church, so he sought me out on-line. He was looking for me more than the church. God gave us people. He also gave those people "us." In our limited time, are you really going to spend the majority of your time building a building rather than people?

"Where two hearts are gathered"

Many ministry leaders say this is a church verse. It's a people verse. I said before that two souls might look like two parts of the Spirit on a heaven GPS tracker. We say that our mission is to grow God's church. The mission is people inside and outside the church. Without people you have no church. Christianity is Jesus ministry. Yet, if he has no people then he has no need to minister. Two hearts gather for a reason. There is fellowship and service. We are here to serve each other. Ministry leaders need to separate church and life.

A church only grows if life grows. Life should be about love and a sense of deep service to those around us. In church we gather, worship, and listen. Sometimes it's overwhelmingly impactful and powerful! Why? It's not because you were entertained. No, you were overwhelmed because you were among people flowing with passion. The most powerful stories that have impacted people come from those on the outside of church. We worship God in a

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church directly because of those redemption stories. People stories. People have witnessed lives changed.

How to grow a heart? I mean yours and theirs. We can't talk about the heart, discipleship, or ministry without first getting "time" straight. It takes time to grow a heart. It takes time to disciple in love. It takes time to have a strong ministry. However, if you don't take time, then the heart is not there. The love, compassion, and heart-felt ministry remain hollow. Just crank them through. Swoosh goes the revolving door. Is that real Christian work? You must allow for time. If God gave us so little time then what are we doing? It's either touch as many as you can with little effect, or it's touch a few so impactfully that they spread the gospel for eternity. What on earth are you doing with the time you have?

Ministry leaders need to see this. Why did 1% remain in church after a Billy Graham crusade? Think about it. 100,000 attend the Rose bowl. 10% came forward with a decision for Jesus. Ten years later 1% (100 people) still attend church. Why do less than 20% of Sunday school children go to church after they turn 20 years old? Why do 5% tithe? Prayer meetings have attendance struggles. Attending church twice a month is the norm. Ministry leaders are so consumed with the numbers and next big thing that they miss it all. All the time is spent growing the brand while the people suffer.

Where is your heart? Is it better to have a growing church or deep Christians? You're not being honest in the slightest if you think life groups grow deep Christians. Time grows deep Christians. Time you really don't have. How many pastors have told me they wished they could have done this or that? They all said they got caught up in time. Why does J Vernon McGee say his greatest ministry is in radio? Why wasn't it his first 40 yrs. in church ministry? It's because

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all those hours spent in the church were a calculated rat race. All that lost time was spent in needless board rooms and financial discussions. While the lost walked on by.

I know the answer. Do you have time to grow someone? Paul had a Barnabas or a Timothy. Do you? That Barna statistical report said 34% of pastors have meaningful relationships. Let's say that is off by 10%. Less than half of ministers allow the time to love. It's that simple. They are told to guard their heart. In university, they told seventy young students (on the first day) that ministers are introverts. Really? Sheppard's of the flock must hide? Were we being groomed to build a church more than building people?

If the 1st century church took around three years to baptize someone what does that mean? Will you allow your church to grow at a snail's pace to groom a Christian for three years? What if you made a church identity? One thing and were good at it? What if you worked really hard at one thing? What would it be? Admit it. One thing would not be enough. You lust for juggling ten things. Look at your church. What is the one thing you do really well? It's the staple of your church. The honest answer is that you have ten little staples and no real identity. Your just another Sunday morning option twice a month. Try making a disciple of Jesus strong if your moving at light speed? The honest answer is you can't.

If you don't believe me then take a survey at church this Sunday. Ask them to write down only the one thing that identifies this church. No pre-speech or gimmick. Just ask first thing "*what does the community think this church stands for?*" You won't because you know the answer. I was in a church that spent probably 9 months building a core of values and identity. It was one of the most amazing church doctrines I have ever read. The committee was headed by a few elders and congregational members. They took their time seeking God. At the end they were

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so pumped to present it to the church. Each one of them said repeatedly that they had never felt the presence of God like they did in that nine-month committee.

What they came up with is Believe, Become, and Belong. It impacted me so much because it was really good. They posted it in every bulletin. The pastor preached on it over and over in a fabulous series. We were going to move the world. One year later it was taken off the bulletin. I asked the secretary why? She said the people didn't get it. They couldn't identify the church with those words. That is exactly why I am writing this book. All nine months or so trying to come up with a mission. All the prayer and seeking of God. You printed and presented it. Then somehow, within a year, you missed the mark?

Revelation 3:2 *“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God.”*

Sometimes a certain verse in the Bible grabs me. I was asked to preach in that very church on Revelation 3. Yikes, my second sermon there and they ask me to preach on revelation? Then I slammed straight into this verse. I knew they had unfinished work. Most churches do this. They create a three-point vision. Then before it can take hold they move on to the next mission. I was reading a book for university that said that very thing. It's the job sustainer to always be moving forward. Always inventing, searching, and seeking. All in the name of finding Gods will. Do you really think it is that hard to find Gods will? Seriously? Is God that mysterious or recluse? Yet, every Sunday we tell the whole congregation that God is ready and willing to meet them where they are. Apparently, just not leadership.

Oddly enough, I attended another fine church that a mentor of mine got hired in. As I sat down with the bulletin what do you think I saw? It was those words Believe, Become, and

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Belong. I kid you not. My pastor friend said they came up with that slogan in a committee. It's just stunning what we do. Do they still hold that motto? Well, no. Now it's Knowing God, loving others, reaching neighborhoods, and Serving the world. Wow! They now have four amazingly new slogans no other church has.

Just for fun what do you think Saddleback church in California motto is? It's Belong, Grow, Serve, and share. How long did it take to come up with that? You wonder why the unbelieving world is unbelieving. The amount of wasted time your church allots to ministry is astounding. An idiot could have come up with belong, believe, and become. I'm betting an idiot could come up with Belong, grow, share, and serve. It comes back to the joke "how many Elders does it take to screw in a light bulb?" They can't: they must be in an agreement first. Way too much time is wasted in church. Way too much!

It's not rocket science. Jesus gave. Jesus believed. He served and said God loves everyone. How much time does it take to create good words to describe your church? How long should God take to answer that stupid question? If he takes nine months then maybe you are asking a stupid question. Do you have the stomach to do one thing well? What if you did not have four mottos' but one mission? Champion of a mission field at home. We are the food bank. We are the hospice or the prison ministry. Don't you realize that there is no heart in become, believe, and belong. For heaven sake, all churches claim that status. Really, who are you?

I'm going to insist that it takes time. I am sitting here wondering how to get church structure to change? It's a monster. How can you move Godzilla? In a perfect world a church board should pay their pastor well and demand they only work 40 hrs. Like everyone else! There is a fallacy claim that a pastor is expected to work like his business board members do. Is that really true?

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I know that one church I preached at demanded I preach 35 minutes because they believed it meant I did the work. Yet, they paid less than 10 dollars an hr. If you put in the total time spent, I was paid below the poverty line. Let's take this further. A pastor must marry the church. He must be married to a woman too. This person should be somewhat poor like Jesus was. Who said Jesus was poor? Who says Jesus worked 60hrs a week? To me it's Christian abuse.

The troubling part is the heart. Why do we run pastors into the ground? Why do business leaders run themselves into the ground? I have heard that statistically speaking, elders burn out faster than the pastoral. We need pastors. I believe we need elders. A church does need to run well. Yet, the distribution and overlap of duties is killing churches. What are we doing to our life line? Spending time killing people who love the church? Is this Christian?

A know a pastor that started a church plant. He is a very good man. Unfortunately for him, his church took off running. They attempted to go to two services within the first two years. He travels a ton promoting his church planting ideas. Yet, I am beginning to meet a few people that have left. Why? They all report that this church is good, fun, inviting, and one small other attribute: hollow. Running a pastor into the ground is plainly dumb. A pastor allowing a church to run them into the ground is dumb too. Yet, it's not all the churches fault. We have trained our leadership to live for bigger, better, faster, more. When it comes to having a heart in a church you must slow down.

What happened to trusting God? Trusting your heart? Building a church heart takes time. How do you know if it will work? Cut board meetings in half. Spend more time with family and church friends. Building the heart of a church begins with the pastor. Force him or her to love

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more. Be exposed to people more. You do not want an introvert pastor. To know your Bible is to live your Bible. Be the very things you study. Expect that from your leader: the pastor.

You can have a vibrant church of 25 if they all tithed. 25 loving Christians will, in time produce 25 more loving Christians. Years ago, I met a man who created a discipleship book. It was very good yet; it lacked a few things. It was an 8-week program. Biblically it hit all the high points to give a new Christian biblical knowledge. Yet, it misses the mark totally. Meeting a disciple 8 times? The reason it did not work well is directly because it was hollow. The human element was missing.

Pastors are told to keep their distance. I am suggesting we change our view of pastoral. Our view of discipleship. We are given people. Take a chance on growing as many lifelong friendships as you can. Fill your week with people that attend your church. Visit their homes. Have them visit you. Life is short. Just shake enough hands to keep your job is not winning. It's sustaining you but not growing the kingdom. It's dangerous to love many. They all may love you back.

Will it crush all your time? Well, if you continue to fart around within your 60hr week then yes, it will crush you. If you leave running the church to others and just pastor the people you will have life overflowing. You will have more time than you think. You know it's interesting in Malachi 3. God said that if we give to him then he will overflow our storehouse. We are way too corporate. People assume this is talking about money. What if it was talking about who you invest in? Is it all about piling people into a store house? Counting the souls?

Having a heart is heart breaking. It's dangerous to you. Giving your time to people could appear taxing. Yet, it's the cup half full thing. We assume it will take from us. What if it added?

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What if giving your heart to people boosted the church? What if having time to love more produced a bigger storehouse? If you focus on love and people, won't they love you back? Instead we spend great globs of time devising ways to engage people. Why not just engage them?

Taking time is dangerous to your job. You will appear to be doing little. Your job will always be in jeopardy

“Let us practice the fine art of making every work a priestly ministration. Let us believe that God is in all our simple deeds and learn to find Him there.”- A.W. Tozer

Read Jesus, don't just quote Jesus. I knew a fella that was over thirty and frustrated that he was single. Yet, he could quote the Bible like the wind. He let everyone know it too. Yet, he was alone. Why? I believe it was because he knew about Jesus and the Bible but he lacked the Spirit of the Lord. I have said in many of my writings that most churches are spiritually unplugged. They know church and the Bible but they lack the Spirit.

God's Spirit is not something that can be wielded. It's not a power to attain. Assuming God will just provide just because we are good Christians is stupid. Assuming God will give because we are ordained or sanctioned by men is ridiculous. Do you really think that a church is sanctioned because it has a cross on it? Peter told Jesus “no, you won't die.” He believed that because he was chosen by Jesus. He thought he knew how it rolls. Yet, years down the road he writes an amazing set of letters.

1 Peter 1:22 *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”*

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At times I have attended different churches just to change things up. One night I heard a pastor challenge us to read the Gospels four times each for four months. It's a really tough assignment. When I finished, I saw Jesus more clearly? I got it. The pastor that had me read it 4 times got it. Peter fumbled with Jesus for three years. Yet, in his letters he got it. Paul tried to be a good pharisee and man of God. With Jesus he got it.

It's like the 3D steno grams. Those pictures that you stare at and another picture appears within. Jesus taught everything through the heart. He spent time to grow the kingdom. If you think about it, he did very little within three years. He concentrated on twelve men in a very small area. Jesus did not set up ministry or a home church. Actually, he always took too much time teaching, preaching, and eating. You would think he needed to move fast for three years.

Ask yourself. How many years did Peter, Paul, James, and Mary struggle with the person of Jesus? It took time to get it. They knew of God but Jesus drove them deeper. Church is a place of the time heart. A place where people need time to know of God but gain a heart to go deeper with Jesus. It takes time. It also takes a heart to walk with people. A board room builds a church. A coffee date builds a person. A Bible study gives understanding. Time getting to know someone builds love. What do you think runs a church? Is it knowledge, numbers, and meetings or love? Do you have a time heart?