

Chapter 9 (Wasted time)

“Where were you last night?” “...That’s so long ago, I don’t remember.”- Casablanca

There have been pivotal moments in my life where it sure felt like wasted time. After my divorce there was a period of time when I did not have the stomach to date. As it was, my Ex did not feel the same way. Within all this: my boys were participating in a scouting event and wanted me there. The Ex and her new boyfriend were there too. Lovely, we all had a nice family picnic together. Trust me, I wanted to be there like a hole in the head. Yet, it was for the kids.

Afterwards I went on a very long walk. I was formulating a strongly worded letter to myself: *don’t have a family picnic with the Ex and her boyfriend.* At that time, I smoked, and that night I did indeed smoke a lot. I pondered and wrestled with the question- was smoking, family picnics, pondering, and endless pain wasted time?

The knee jerk reaction is no! It was for the kids. Years later one of my boys asked me why I had left. Why did you force mommy to find another husband? Boom! That comment rocked me. He didn’t know. All these years we never told him that she kicked me out. How long did he wonder why I wanted out? I too, have often wondered if my silence had hurt them. Did not telling them the truth serve its justice for me or them? That split up changed my boys. It changed me. Did their view on life change because I never told them what really happened earlier? Was I the good guy for keeping my mouth shut? I’m not so sure time was well served being quiet. The hard discussions that came afterwards, and the fallout, might have been wasted time.

Parents don’t tell their kids certain information directly because of scars and pain. There is a thought that it’s none of their business. Yet, as a divorced kid I still wonder what really went down. The fallout between my parents hurt us all. One child became a drunk while I have some relationship trust issues. There is a ton of wasted time in my life that came directly from my parents’ divorce. I spent so much time wondering what happened. I feel we tend to guard those

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worries too. It's my scar. I am the victim. It's amazing how much time we may have spent dissecting our parent's actions without really knowing what happened. Then there is the time struggling over past concerns within new relationships. Uncertain how things will work out. All the time spent in counseling trying to understand my hang-ups with relationships. A ton of wasted time is caused by someone else's folly.

That is my black spot. I knew a guy in church that was in leadership. He and his wife were the perfect couple. I loved those two. They were so pretty, successful, and full of godly life. Then, one fine Sunday, I sat beside a lady who said "oh there is Steve." I'm like, so what? She said that Steve had not been around because of the divorce. OH, I said, wow! You know (it makes sense) I had not seen him in a while. Curious me went over to chat with him and it was his eyes that gave it away. That eye contact was missing just like divorced me had done years before. He was one of us now: the divorced, stained, and dirty. He had a black spot that he couldn't wash off. How long did he skip church because of the spot?

How much time had Steve wasted guarding his folly? In church circles, I don't think Steve ever really recovered his smile or status. He had the black mark. There are a ton of us wearing that black mark. A mark of failure? Was he now less holy than his peers? Then I started to ponder. How much time is then spent dating, crying, and self-evaluating after the fallout? There is nothing wrong with re-evaluating yourself. Yet, what if you're supposed to be making a family dinner, picking out travel destinations, and buying the next house purchase instead? Instead of what? Steve and I now spent time not the way we dreamed, hoped, and planned. In its very essence it's wasted time doing things you'd rather not be doing.

Hear me out. Tough times do make you better. Yet, who asks for them? We do learn from mistakes. Will you intentionally get fired just to learn? Of course not! Let's say that you watched

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the current presidential debate. Maybe it was one hour long. Did you really change your mind in the debate? Were you shocked at the arguing or lack of concrete answers? No, all you gained is wasted time. You could have listened to an album. Went for ice-cream or (if your good) knitted a sock. I bet there were a ton of things you could have done rather than watching the debate. I knew a guy who bought hockey tickets when his favorite team came to town. They got smoked 8-0, I think. He went on a rant listing about twenty things he could have bought with the money. Wasted time? Wasted money?

I'm not saying we should sit in a room and knit socks productively. I'm not saying that stashing a million dollars in pillows is smart. Especially when we find out you died poor. Yet, there is a certain amount of pointedness or pointlessness directed towards our time. My kids would have loved to be at a hockey game losing 8-0 rather than dissecting the divorce years later. The time spent in counseling might have been better spent in a movie theatre. My Ex and I might have been sipping tropical drinks on a beach rather than being in a court room fighting over money. The damage we cause to our hearts and minds is one thing. The time spent explaining our actions to a judge, friends, and eventually our kids could be considered a pointless waste of time.

How much time would it have taken to have that extra date while we were still married? What time would it have taken to hold hands just one extra time? All that time fretting about marital injustices could have been better spent in bed. Pat Monahan writes "*Should have spent less time making loot and spent more time in my birthday suit with you.*" It's easy to say "avoid the truth." It's easy to say just a few more hours of overtime. I'll be home soon. Yet you're not home are you. In fact, you're giving your spouse time to ponder and think why they are alone so much? If I offend someone with honesty, it will cause a fight. Yet, if I ignore communication in

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marriage, eventually there will be a fight. Why not spend the time talking and working it out? You will spend more time communicating to a lawyer and judge. A lot more time. It's actually pretty easy to create wasted time.

I know what wasted time looks like. Do you know what it feels like? I mean, how does it feel sitting in the principal's office for twenty minutes waiting for his door to open for you? Do you like the other kids whispering about you as they walk on by? Why do they have windows in those waiting rooms? Oh, I know why. It's to humiliate your time. You think your skipping school or pulling a fast one. Yet, each teacher sees you. Friends talk about you in the hallways. I got in a fight once and missed long jump practice. So, fighting and sitting in the principal's office was better than long jump? Was the time spent explaining myself at home better than going to see my friends? What exactly do you do for those long boring twenty minutes waiting for the principle? Many of us do know what it's like to stare at paint drying. I have feelings about waiting for punishment. Yet, do we care that were wasting time?

Do we miss the time we lost? Did it register? I told my Ex once that she was my worst nightmare. I certainly doubt it. I gave her incentive to prove it though. In court she most certainly did become a nightmare. Explaining divorce to my kids was hell. Trying to start over and date was not pretty. If I'd have taken just a few minutes to think about who I was speaking to. This was the girl I said yes to. The one I bought a tux for. All that time spent trying to court her got tossed out in one statement. A statement that I gave two seconds of thought to say. Yet, it cost me years of grief. It felt like wasted time taking those long walks alone trying to understand me. Time spent waiting in the lobby of the distress center. I was crushed in my split-up. Who called her a nightmare? Who wasted my time?

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The question is: do we use time effectively? Yes, I have learned the hard way. Taking a walk alone might be using my time effectively. Yet, I could have been dating and having fun instead. Oh, but I was dating. I went out with me, and I got to know the person inside me. Ironically, I asked myself some hard questions. How did I let it get so bad that I called my wife a nightmare? Why exactly did I get so lost in my first thirty-three years? These questions were wasted time I could have used with a wife I did not call a nightmare. It's not wasted time rebuilding my life. It's not wasted time analyzing my actions. However, this is what I call wasted time. It's dating and having fun while ignoring the hard questions. It's needing to go for long walks to understand myself at thirty-three and not at twenty-three.

One event could be considered constructive time or wasted time. I could be arrested and find myself sitting in a prison cell. It's wasted time in that prison cell when I could be eating popcorn in a movie theatre. On the other hand, I could use that time to think, right? Nothing in essence is wasted time. We are always doing something with our time. Yet, what is better to do with a spouse: fight or have sex? Some smuck will stand up and say fighting builds a good marriage. So, a little fighting and a little sex? What if you made better choices and there was no fight? All you had was a little sex? I'm asking the question: what would you really want to do with a spouse for twenty minutes: fight or love each other?

The struggle is this? We make choices that will determine our next five minutes. Sometimes those choices cause five years of wasted time in jail or a divorce because I called my wife a nightmare. The choice is simple: have fun now and gamble with the time you're using or spend the time making sure you're doing the right thing. Recently, I have tried to distant myself from actions. My pastor made the comment about discipline in a home. Be concerned more about the attitude than the actions. I agree. Why did I think my first wife was a nightmare? Was

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the nightmare there in the beginning? Did I help create it? At one point I marched into a bowling alley and ripped a lady for picking sides. Yes, we are not friends to this day. My actions came from my attitude; my frustrations, helplessness, and inability to control the situation. Yet, I could have spent time thinking first. Spent time working on what I could do. Which “time” are you interested in? The good times, hard times, or wasted times? Would that lady be my friend still if I had paused for just a minute to think first?

In the Bible, people are likened to ants and sluggards. Do we work hard for the family unit or are we the sluggard? Are you the one who bides his time waiting for the easy opportunity, or the one who is working hard to make the best of it? There is another person in the Bible called the fool. They are the one who knows the right path but make their own instead. They know right from wrong but love making rash decisions. Why must people embrace fun in everything they do? In university a boy popped two large power drink cans on the desk. He breathed “it’s going to be a long day.” Did he just say that his time was wasted there? I went to learn. Did I get tired, yes! Yet, the mission and goal came first. Wasted time is derived from supplementing the hard path. The determined person fights the good fight now. There is no deferring it to later. That “later” usually involves some amount of wasted time picking up the fallout. Was that boy more concerned with getting through than what was being taught? Was he wasting his time?

We make wasted time because it’s the easy road. Squandered time rests in rash decisions. Have you ever had a teacher say “I bet you didn’t think of that now did you?” I will give the teenager some slack. At what point does that kid turn into an adult? I know it’s subjective. Yet, headlong we jump into messes regardless of our age. I love the story of Sampson in the Bible. A man given everything he wanted by God. Yes, God provides. Yet, he wanted this girl and that girl. Sampson’s life was one rash decision to the next. His great feats were marred by playing a

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cat and mouse game with fate. Sooner or later God's good grace was going to be used up. In the end he used that great strength to commit suicide while being blind and chained. His easy road became a disaster. His good life became a wasted life.

I love that story because Sampson was toying with people and dancing with time. Imagine being given everything. You got the power, looks, and fame. My goodness, even God ordained you for greatness. Then you looked away from destiny and towards the things you desired. Cast aside you're calling for romance and parties. I can't imagine the gal it took for Sampson to take what God meant for good and use it to taunt your enemies. Just do what you were meant to do. Why waste so much time playing around with fate. How many talented actors and musicians have died by trying to take all of life's offerings? How much do you need to be happy? Yet we grab for as much as we can. It's like we're starved with desires. I know people say

I have to fight against the sensible path.

I have to have sex with that girl right now!

I have to lie, cheat, and gamble today!

So much time is used just to have these fleeting moments. How much time is used picking up the pieces later on?

Just grab it all! It just kills me how ten years pass so easily. Twenty minutes feels like a long time while you're sitting in the principal's office. Yet, it flies past fairly quick. It's bizarre to me that we know from early on that life is precious. Yet, as we grow into adulthood, each moment is cast aside for another moment with little regard to time. It's in those moments that we set up wasted time. I keep harping on the Bible but God says that we will cause trouble for our children into the 3rd and 4th generation. It seems harsh but just look back ten years. How much time was spent in regret and pain over dumb moves? Like I say "it's not about a pity party." No,

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it's got all to do with seeing things as they are today. What does that twenty minutes in the principal's office turn into? Is it more time spent angry against the system? Time in punishment? Geesh, you could have done your homework in class. Now you're wasting time doing it at home.

I mentioned a guy (in chapter 2) who is on his third wife. I think that his first mistake is a mulligan. Fair enough! Yet, is the second wife a mistake? Is all the trouble he received going back to his first wife a mulligan or mistake? What lies ahead for his third wife? One decision was made in his youth, but the rest of it came well into his adulthood. Wasted time is not just a youth thing. We carry dumb decisions and bad paths deep into our adult lives. It's bad habits and the dirty little lies we tell ourselves. The habits we forge from the lies we tell ourselves. You know the ones.

Dreams do come true.

Maybe this one is Mr. right.

I have to be right eventually.

We love playing the odds. Yet, the odds say that you have a way about you. A reckless way of creating wasted time.

From this moment on is a path. I would even say a fork in the road. What is the next decision you make? I'm sure some people will just throw up their hands and say "there are too many choices."

"Some decisions will just be mistakes."

"You can't win them all or make all the right moves."

Yet, we could make more right moves. I have painfully tried to make it clear that there are two types of wasted time. One is spent taking an easy path. Allowing your attitude and feelings to rule your actions. Some of those actions cause future wasted time. The other type is

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cleaning up those future messes. I guarantee the second is probably twice as long. Let's just take a small look at it. Time in jail. Time in court. Time trying to find yourself. How about time in recovery. I would even say time trying to get out of debt. These are just but a few. I have already recounted stories of my friends and I making very poor decisions. Decisions that cost us countless hours of heartache years down the road.

I'm sure you get my drift by now. We could waste time in so many ways. What will you do with wasted time? The flip side of all this is making the time you have left a reclamation project. Taking wasted time and finding a use for it. I went for some very long walks talking to myself. They were constructive. All the self-help books I read have inspired me. I went to university at forty-one. How many courses, seminars, and programs did I try that were designed to change my habits. I have taken them all. Some of my bad decisions caused me to read those books and take those courses. What's the difference if you did that in the early years? You see, that's not the view I'm leaning towards. It would have been awesome if I had taken the time all those years ago. It is what it is. That time is gone. No, I'm leaning towards time spent trying to understand what went wrong. Is a multiple divorcee just unlucky? I doubt that very much. Wasted time from bad decisions might be staring at you right now. Will you accept its sentence? Does the sentence insist that you spend more wasted time regretting and crying over spilt milk?

There are those who didn't take the time, in their youth or adult life, to just stop. Just breathe and look at the roads they had traveled. We should have made a map of where we have been and where we want to go. Imagine you entering the European Grand Prix. How many years were spent gathering funds and gaining sponsors? All those extra races just learning how to drive like a professional. Did you realize that a race like this is timed? Timed? There is always a fastest time. Generally, that's all the time you have. Just cross the line in and around that record

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time and you have a good shot at winning. The engines roar as the flag comes down. This is the race of a life time. The twists and turns. What could be better than the smell of burning rubber and diesel to a Grand Prix driver? You will go as far and as fast as your mind will let you. Turning, bending, and cruising through the European countryside. Then all of a sudden, the scenery looks unfamiliar, you need a map. Where am I? Why does it look unfamiliar? It's because you have never been down this road before. Ah, the map! The thing you tossed into the trash. "Who needs that in the beginning" you boasted? The car stops, time stops. The race stops. Oh, you needed it now!

What if I'd have taken two seconds to throw the map in the glove compartment? Now, it could possibly take hours to find a map. To get back on the road. The race is won and lost by seconds. Precious seconds you don't have now. Then the car grinds to a halt. Something is wrong. You lift the hood and realize the transmission fluid is way down. The timing belt needed replacing. If only I'd taken an hour to lift the hood. There you stand stranded. You'd call someone but you thought you could do it alone. The phone is in the house. The map is in the trash and the car is not working right. You are not working right. Yes, you have time now. Someone said "*If you do not make time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness.*" You must take the time to prepare a strong chance to win the race.

So, we come out of high school ready for life. We dreamed of a career, marriage, or both! The world is your oyster. Go find that pearl! We'll date to gain experience. We'll try a few jobs to see what work is like. One night at 10 pm you're getting ready for bed. You must get to sleep early because you have a university admittance interview tomorrow that you waited weeks for. Then the doorbell rings. It's the love of your life. What's wrong, it's late? On the couch (in tears) she gingerly confides that she is pregnant. Boom! Your car just took an unexpected turn. You tell

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her it's ok, we'll make it through. All night you lay there thinking of what to do. Who to call? Where is the map?

It was fun in bed. You love her, but do you love her enough to marry her? To have a baby with her? What about school? Babies need to eat. They need a bed. From cancer to pregnancies life does not play fair. We can see a few miles into the future but that's all. What road still lies ahead of our vision? What if you had taken a few moments to plan? To list what's important to get where you want to go. Patrick, I get to have sex for fun, don't I? School is a right, isn't it? Isn't it her fault too that she got pregnant? I could go on and on. Proverbs 22:6 "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" How about make a plan and have all the right tools to win the race? When you are older you will not depart from it.

I could probably write a whole chapter on a life map. Yet, it's pretty tough to map out what you don't know. However, you do have some sort of a legend to help you map out the future. It's called the past. What were your dreams? There were fun things you loved to do. Why did you like certain people or books? All of these things are pinpoints in your life. A way of identifying who you really are. You can begin to make a map that could navigate your future. Point yourself towards a career you might actually love. The past can be helpful if you let it. There are hints all around your past that can steer you in the right direction from this moment on.

Again, it's not about mourning the past. It's gone. Kids become adults the hard way. I get it. Yet, from this moment on you have another fork in the road. Another race to run and win. Your life is still timed. The fastest time is 120 years. You have somewhere between your age and 120 years to cross the finish line. Make the best time possible with what you have left. What is under your hood? Is your engine running well? Do you have a plan? A map? I can't tell you how many Postal workers die too soon after they retire. I have seen stats that claim it's around five

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years later. Five years! Several have died just before they retired too! I bet most of them did not have a good map of where to go. The National Hockey league has a program for retiring players. Yes, they have money. What they don't have is a plan. So many players don't know what to do after thirty-five years old. Are you really going to stay home with millions or sit on a beach for the rest of your life? Everyone needs a plan that points to the finish line. A map that helps you when you get lost. No amount of fame or money can make that map magically appear.

What if all you identified with was your spouse and they died? What if all you knew was hockey or being a Postal worker? What is on the other side of that? So many people waste time getting somewhere only to find out later that their nowhere. If your spouse dies, do you continue the plan? What plan? You retire, what plan? How many people eat, drink, and smoke like crazy into their fifties? Then their health hits a snag and their gone. Maybe it's even worse and your handicapped for the rest of your life. Is it really time well spent drinking, smoking, and partying it up? Porn Star Marilyn Chambers might have lived the good life. She's a sex star! That's got to be the best job in the world, right? Marilyn died at fifty-six. Was it fifty-six good years? Was that enough time to live? They said she died of natural causes. At fifty-six? What if playing hard drives a body hard? What if defining yourself as one thing is all you are? I think many people die early because they don't have a map when they get lost.

A Movie star sounds like the best life. Maybe it's a sex star or a football player. Yet, time after time we read stories of their failed lives. How often are their lives cut short? I feel so bad for the child star that reaches fame so early only to find themselves washed up at twenty years old. No matter the fame or status you need a life map. A good plan of what to do next. Why? It's because our small life is so long that things change in stages. What you did in your twenties will be changing in your forties. Why not add in a life plan or map that looks toward hopes and

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dreams. Places we want to go and become when the fame and status fade. I had to do that very thing after my first marriage ended. I realized pretty quick that I was more than just a husband, postal worker, and father. Things change. It would have been good to have a map before I got lost!

I sound like a broken record but wasted time is usually our own fault. The baby came because sex was casual. I could easily say promiscuous. That word means hopping from one thing to the next indiscriminately. Oh, what does indiscriminate mean in the dictionary: not careful or mass destruction. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. What about that university degree? Apply of that great job. Do those things happen within an indiscriminate pregnancy? Sometimes you can and sometimes you can't. How much time would be wasted trying to jump through those hoops?

What if, after the first marriage crumbled in divorce, you took the time to make a plan? Could you slow down and take the time to look under your own hood. Why bring divorce, babies and mistakes that could easily be avoided into a new relationship. How to win the race 101? Be prepared for the worst but plan for the best. The past is a good map on what to avoid. A life plan will have its eyes on the prize: winning! Combining a life plan and map will give you a way better chance of not wasting time. Much of our wasted time is avoidable if we just think for a minute before we run.

Speaking of running. I am fifty-five and have been doing the Boston marathon series on my treadmill with Ifit. I heard this quote about the Boston Marathon *your race, your pace*. How do we get to a better place? Look at the past and see what we loved and re-discover the dreams that we had. Then we need to run forward. Make a plan using a life map. We know what we like. We know what we hoped to do in life. Now run towards it. All in one year? Fulfilling dreams

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takes some amount of time. You can either remain stuck and dwell on things that have passed, or you can run into the future making new memories. It's your race, let's do it at a new pace!

Don't waste time lingering in the past. We could conversely attempt to grab at everything we can because life is too short. Yet, precious time could be wasted, after the fact, in both scenarios. That party turned into an unwanted pregnancy. A once in a lifetime scam turned into jail time. A bad comment or reckless decision caused you time hunting for a new spouse. It's not that hard to waste what little time we have. Then there is the "what if." What if we took the time to make the most of the life we have left? What if each of us were a little more cautious and a little more prudent with the choices we make. Could we steal back some amount of wasted time? Might that give us a little more time to live life to the fullest? What if?

In the next chapter I want to look at what's left. I hope I have pointed you towards time as precious and valuable. Don't gamble with it. You only have so much. Let's look at the ways to make a plan. To draw out a map of where to go. How about we waste as little time as possible doing that. Let's begin the rest of the race.