

47 Seconds Is All We Give Anything

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Date: 19 April 2026

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. If you have a Bible, you can flip it open or turn it on to the book of Acts chapter 1.

Acts chapter 1. We have started a new sermon series called Everything We Carry, and it's a series about a stewardship of everything.

So, yes, stewardship often gets connected with talking about money, but we're not just talking about money. We will, but not only. We're also talking about, last week, a stewardship of the ordinary. Ordinary things like the breaking of bread and going on a walk with friends. Now, I was on vacation this past week, so this sermon is what you would call a just-in-time sermon, which means the sermon notes are not on Table.Center, so you'll have to take notes the old-fashioned way with the Notes app on your phone.

If it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us. So, we're in Acts 1. Last week, the risen Christ shows up on the commute at the table on an unremarkable Monday.

[1 : 05] And this week, we're going to talk about the stewardship of time, how we spend our attention, and what our attention and our time costs us, and maybe something about what God has to say about it.

Acts 1 is this conversation, the last conversation the disciples have with Jesus before he ascends. And they spend this time asking the wrong question.

But before we get to that, let's talk about time and attention. So, in 2004, the average person could spend about two and a half minutes looking at a screen before they felt the need to look at something else.

Okay, about two and a half minutes. Now, for some of you young folks out there, yes, in 2004, we did have screens. We did have things to look at on those screens. Yahoo.com was thriving. MSN was doing great. We were looking at screens, but we spent about two and a half minutes on average before we looked at something else. Okay, so you had a television, you had a monitor, you had, I had my HTC Diamond, which had like Windows Mobile on it before Android and iOS were a thing.

[2 : 14] It's two and a half minutes. But skip ahead. And according to researchers at UC Irvine, the average is now about 47 seconds. Okay? 47 seconds before you feel the compulsion to go and look at something else.

47 seconds before your brain says, thank you, next. And after you switch, there's something called a switching cost with your focus and attention.

And your focus, that switching cost, takes about 23 minutes to get back to full focus on whatever it is that you want to pay attention to. So if you're in the midst of a conversation and you get the text message and you look at the text message, it costs you about 23 minutes to really get back in the flow of that conversation.

Which you may listen to that and think, well, geez, that's a long time. It sounds like we never focus on anything. Exactly. Because we're always looking for the next thing every 47 seconds.

The text message during the conversation, the notification during prayer, the interruption, costs you all this time. Now, I am probably the last person who should be preaching the sermon.

[3 : 25] I have installed an uninstalled Instagram and threads on and off of my phone like a dozen times this week. All right? Because as I'm writing this sermon, I feel this sort of guilt of like, man, I am wasting my time.

Uninstall. And then like 10 p.m. rolls around and I'm lying in bed. And I posted something in the morning that I want to know, did anybody like it? Did I go viral? I don't want to be alone with my thoughts.

Well, reinstall. Listen, you don't get thousands of followers on social media by spending your time wisely, okay?

So, Acts chapter 1. Acts chapter 1, verse 6. It says this. So, when they, being the disciples, Jesus' followers, had come together, they asked Jesus, Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?

To which Jesus replies, it is not for you to know the times or the periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[4 : 46] And when he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

And they said, men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

God, I pray that you would give us the illumination of our minds and our hearts, that your Spirit, which is in this place at this time, at this moment with these people, would speak to us. That your Spirit, she would be able to abide with us and that we might sense her presence in our midst.

God, as we pay attention to our tick-tock time and clocks and the seasons that we are in, God, I pray that you would give us wisdom to know what it is that we are meant to pay attention to.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. So, this text happens 40 days after the resurrection. Jesus has been appearing and teaching and eating with them.

[6 : 02] 40 days of private tutorials from the risen Jesus. And the question that the disciples are left with after all of this, is Lord, is now the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?

They want a date, a timeline. Is it now? Is this when you're going to fix everything? Now, from their perspective, this is a reasonable question.

Their expectations were not that God would come in the flesh as a human being, be crucified by the Roman Empire, and then be resurrected in the middle of history.

Their expectations that the Messiah would be resurrected, well, wouldn't die at all, but would rather bring about the new age, the new era, God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, and that everyone would be resurrected at the same time.

And that it would be a political victory, a mere political victory, that Israel would be restored to its own power, no longer be under empire. So, their Messiah is killed, they're disappointed, their Messiah is raised, their hopes are raised, with the expectation that things are still going to go the way they thought it was going to.

[7 : 14] There was a little blip there with three days of Jesus being dead, but after the blip, great, now let's get the kingdom back to Israel. Israel, that's their question. And I don't want to make fun of the disciples, because we have our same versions of these questions.

When is our political nightmare going to end? When is it going to be safe for me, or for my friends, or my family again? When is God going to do something about anything, right?

For me, I don't know about you, this may or may not be relatable, doom scrolling, the 10 p.m. reinstall of Instagram and threads, is my modern version of Lord.

Has anything good happened yet? Refreshing the news feed, looking for a signal that something has changed, that the news that we want to happen has happened.

Checking if the kingdom has been restored yet. Refresh, refresh, refresh. 47 seconds later, switch to a different app. Refresh, refresh. 47 seconds later, close threads, open up back threads, all the time.

[8 : 22] So I'm not making fun of the disciples. I ask the same question every morning before my feet hit the floor. Is it over yet? Better yet? But Jesus does not answer. He says in verse 7, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons that God has set by their own authority.

I don't like that answer, Jesus. But it's the answer that Jesus gives. It's not for you to know. To know two things. The Greek has two words for time here. Kronos and kairos.

Let me hear you say kronos and kairos. Kronos. You usually hear it pronounced kronos, but in Greek an O or an Omicron has an A sound, not an O sound.

But if you mispronounce it, forgiveness and grace is here. Okay. Kronos and kairos. Now, kronos is tick-tock clock time. All right? Second by second by moment. And in Western European white culture, we are obsessed with tick-tock clock time.

We see time as having a trajectory, that it moves forward, that it's not necessarily cyclical, that things are always getting better, and we're disappointed when they're not because our expectations are broken.

[9 : 32] We have calendars and time blocking, and we set appointments, and we want things to start on time and end on time. And if somebody does not do that, then we are disappointed. Kairos is harder to sort of define and wrap our minds around.

It's time outside of time. It is a charged moment, a breaking in of a different kind of reality into this reality, a something-has-just-shifted kind of moment.

And although kronos exists, we rotate around the sun and seconds tick by, it seems that a lot of key moments in God's economy are kairos moments.

As the New Testament puts it, the culmination of the ages, the end of one age and the beginning of another, or the new age breaking into the old age.

The surprise encounter, the angel at the tomb, the stranger on the road, the fire at Pentecost. The reason why that when you try to put together the chronologies of the Gospels, they don't always seem to match up because they weren't obsessed with kronos in the same way that we were.

[10 : 39] They're obsessed with kairos. That yes, there's three days. Is it after three days? Is it on the third day? I don't know. But something monumental has shifted on the day. A kairos moment has happened.

Kairos breaks in when kronos says there's no more room. There's no more time. So the disciples' question is a kronos question. When will you, is this the time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel?

They want a date on a calendar. And Jesus says, hey, that's in God's hands, not in yours. And then there's a shift. There's a however, a but.

It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, the kronos or the kairos, that the Father has set by their own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria to all the ends of the earth.

It's a hard pivot. The sentence turns. So what Jesus is sort of removing from the responsibility is the timeline. The knowledge of when God is going to act.

[11 : 48] The mastery over kronos. But what Jesus gives instead is power. Power not to take over and to take charge, but power to be a witness. Jesus gives the spirit an identity, a vocation, a geography.

They asked when, and Jesus answers with where. Jerusalem first, and then Judea, and then Samaria, and then the ends of the earth.

These ever-expanding circles of witnessing. To begin with where you are. You're in Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives.

Start there and move outward. And that's the scope of your yes. Now there's this proverb. It's actually a saying of Jesus. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

And here it ceases to be a proverb about honesty. And rather it becomes a survival strategy. So for me, my no is I say no, because Jesus tells me to, to not be the manager of God's calendar.

[12 : 57] I am not responsible for knowing when the kingdom arrives in its fullness. I don't control the outcome of the next election, or the next crisis, or the next breaking news notification.

But my yes are these people, and this place, and a Holy Spirit I did nothing to earn. The witness begins in my own zip code.

And this, I think, is the foundation of a stewardship of time. Of knowing what is mine and what is not. Because when I lose that distinction, I try to carry everything.

And my attention fragments into a thousand tiny pieces. And I end up refreshing Twitter at 2 a.m. Trying to manage something that God told me wasn't mine to manage.

How many of those commitments that I'm going to make this month, I'm not going to keep? And sometimes I can feel shame about that. I want to say yes. I don't want to disappoint people.

[13 : 57] But then I end up disappointing myself because I end up saying a thousand yeses that eventually I have to break promises to. I say yes to the committee because guilt was louder than wisdom.

I say yes to the extra project because I thought it would make me indispensable. I say yes to carrying someone else's emotional crisis because I confused compassion with codependence.

And now my calendar is filled with other people's priorities. And I get exhausted and I check my phone every 47 seconds because I don't have the bandwidth for sustained attention on anything. So the proverb of Jesus, let your yes be yes, means pick the thing that's actually yours, hold it with both hands, and then you can let your no be no.

Trusting that the rest belongs to God who set the times and the seasons by their own authority and quite frankly did not ask for my input.

[14:57] Ashley Williams, a professor at Harvard, studies what she calls time poverty. And in her research, you can argue with it if you want. It's her, not me.

Her research found that feeling like you don't have enough time harms your well-being more than unemployment and more than financial poverty.

The perception that your time is not yours is one of the most corrosive things that can happen to a human being. Which means that the ability to say no, a hundred no's, in order to hold on with both hands to one yes is stewardship.

Every yes that doesn't belong to you costs you something you cannot get back. And every honest no creates room for a whole ass yes.

Room for the spirit, room for the person that God placed in front of you to get more than your distracted leftovers. So Jesus gives the commission, the spirit is coming, you will be given power to be witnesses, go.

[16:05] And then, verse 9, and when he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sights. Jesus ascends, a cloud takes him, he's gone.

And the disciples do precisely nothing. They stand there, they stare at the sky, and Luke stacks the verbs.

They watch, they gaze intently. The phrase into heaven shows up four times in two verses. Luke is hammering the point. They are locked upward. It's been about 30 seconds since Jesus said, you will be my witnesses, and nobody has moved.

They're failing the commission before the spirit even arrives. By standing still, by staring up. So, two men in white robes show up.

These are the same two who appeared at the empty tomb when the women came looking for a body. And at the tomb, they said, why do you look for the living among the dead? And now, they say in verse 11, why do you stand looking into the sky?

[17:09] It's like these two angels' whole job in God's heaven is just like, hey, can you tell people to stop just doing nothing? Take that job.

So, two redirections in one passage. Jesus redirects their question, and the angels redirect their posture. A double diagnosis. First problem, you asked about a timeline, your attention was on the clock.

The second problem is that your gaze is stuck upward, and your attention is on the sky. And both are directed at real things, okay? The kingdom is coming. Jesus is ascending. They aren't staring at nothing.

They weren't just scrolling their phones. They were looking at the holiest thing they'd ever seen, and the angels interrupt them anyway. I think one of the most well-disguised forms of avoidance is devotion.

And this can show up in Christian spiritual spaces. This is the whole thing about the rapture. It's a form of escapism, right? Let me set a time when Jesus is going to come back. Let me waste my life waiting for the return of Jesus, not caring about the circumstances of my neighbors and the people across the globe, because Jesus is going to come back and fix everything, and that's not my responsibility, okay?

[18:23] That's a form of escapism. But it also can show up in progressive spaces or any sort of spiritual space. I can be guilty of praying instead of acting, of doing Bible study instead of showing up, and spend three hours in my Bible, Greek, and Hebrew software, and not call the friend who told me that they were struggling last Tuesday.

I can sit in therapy every week for a year and never have an honest conversation with the person I'm talking about in therapy. I can learn all the right language and get the pronouns right and read the books and share the posts and never talk to a single person who disagrees with me about anything.

We can all outwoken each other in a group chat and never say hello to our neighbor. We can binge a podcast about community and eat alone every night. I can spend two hours crafting the perfect Instagram story about being present and miss the entire evening that I was supposedly documenting.

I can volunteer for the protest and skip the potluck. I can show up for the march and ghost the friend who asked for moving. I can know everything about the genocide and nothing about the person who sits behind me on Sundays.

I've done all of these. I've used quiet time as a shield against the harder work of showing up, of being present, of caring for the person right in my eyes of you.

[19 : 53] The angels did not say that the disciples were looking in the wrong direction. They said the disciples were standing still. Why do you stand here looking? The standing is the diagnosis.

Holding a posture past its usefulness. Maintaining an orientation that started as worship and became a stuck hiding place. Now our phones, and you can insert a different word if your phone is not particularly your distraction of choice, but our distractions do a version of this in reverse. Instead of one sustained, holy gaze that never turns into action, our phones can give us a thousand tiny glances that never turn into sustained attention.

47 seconds of news, and 47 seconds of a text thread, and 47 seconds of a meme, and 47 seconds of someone else's vacation. And each one might be a legitimate thing, but none of them get enough attention to truly matter.

The disciples stared at one thing for too long, and I think many of us tend to stare at everything and nothing long enough. Both replace the particular, located, spirit-given thing that God has put in front of you.

[21 : 11] I don't want my phone to disciple me. Every time I pick it up, it teaches me that nothing deserves my complete attention. That whatever is happening right here is less interesting than what might be happening somewhere else.

I didn't choose the curriculum, but I'm enrolled in it. It's grading me every day. The angels ask, why are you standing here staring at the sky?

And they could ask us the same thing about the screens in our hands, or all of the things competing for our attention. So, two practical things.

I'm preaching to myself here. Number one is give yourself a yes audit. Audit your yeses. Look at your calendar and your commitments.

How many of these things are legitimately yours, and how many did you take on because you couldn't tolerate the guilt of saying no? If a commitment does not belong to you, sorry, it's okay to set it down.

[22 : 14] That's the not for you to know piece. It's applied to a random Thursday. Some things simply belong to God's authority, and our job is to stop volunteering for God's job.

Number two, name your Jerusalem. Jesus didn't say, be my witnesses everywhere all at once, starting yesterday, a little bit of everything, all of the time.

He said, in Jerusalem, start where you are. And so your Jerusalem may be the person right across from you at dinner tonight, or the friend that you've been meaning to check on, or your kid who keeps trying to show you something on their iPad, but you're too busy scrolling on your own.

Jesus, oh. Stewardship of time starts in one room. Okay, story. Our kids, they were on spring break this week, and they created a semi-make-believe hair salon called Time to Die, D-Y-E.

And so they created this whole price chart, and, you know, it's like 25 cents to get your hair styled, and 50 cents to get your nails did, and all these things, right? And so it's like me and Emily, we're all home with my, Emily's parents, my in-laws, their grandparents, here for spring break, we're all hanging out.

[23 : 40] And they're like, hey, time to die, it's open. And like, no one's taking them up on it, okay? So they disappear into Wesley's room, and they come out with like, I don't know, two dozen of these little sheets of paper, and they get some painter, tape, and they go all over the house.

And on the paint, I took a picture, on the sign, it says, it says, help! Help! Help! It's time to die.

They're running out of money. Laughter To which then we all obliged them, and we got our hair did, and even my father-in-law got his nails painted.

It was very, very sweet. But what did it, you know, to give them that attention. For them, it was everything. For us, it was a very little bit of time, but to feel so distracted by so many things all at

once, it can be difficult to give, to start with my own kid, minutes of my attention. Stewardship of time starts in one room, a single conversation, one text you've been putting off. Third, let your phone, and again, phone is in brackets, whatever your distraction of choice is, disciple you less.

[25 : 01] I'm not going to tell you to throw your phone in the river. I've tried the delete everything approach. I last until bedtime. But we all get to decide when your phone, or your MSNBC, or when your whatever, talks to you.

To turn off notifications during meals, to leave it in the other room when someone is talking to you, to give your attention back to the person in front of you. That is all a form of witness that we've actually believed that the Imago Dei is here, in this place.

And when you give someone your full attention, you're giving them the gift of believing that they're worth more than the next notification. Fourthly, to practice the holy no.

To let your yes be yes, and your no be no. And Jesus said this on the Sermon on the Mount long before anyone had a phone. It's not just a verse about honesty.

It's bigger than that. It's about the architecture of our lives. That when we say yes to something, a commitment gets more than the 47-second version of us. That when we say yes to something, it gets more than a thin coat of attention spread across too many surfaces.

[26 : 14] A holy no creates room for a whole yes. One real conversation instead of six half-hearted ones. One meal where you're present instead of three where you're distracted.

One prayer where you stay long enough to hear something instead of ten where you checked a box. The disciples asked about the kingdom. Is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?

And Jesus did not say the kingdom is not coming. He said the Kronos is not yours. The kingdom is coming. That is the promise. And nothing about the attention, economy, or political chaos, or a fragmented Wednesday cancels that promise.

God's will and reign on earth as it is in heaven. It's a prayer that means something. It's not merely wishful thinking. It's a description of what is already underway.

And every meal we share with someone, every time we give someone the gift of attention, we participate in the arrival of that kingdom. Every time you stay in the room when you want to leave, every time you put your phone down and look at the person in front of you, every honest yes, every holy no, the ascension did not end the story.

[27 : 25] It opened it up. Jesus goes up. Ten days later, the spirit comes down and the witnesses scatter from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and the kingdom unfolds across centuries in a pattern that we would never be able to control or predict.

And we are somewhere in the middle of that unfolding and our job has never been to figure out when it's done. Our job is to be here with these people and carry only what we can carry and nothing more and saying a yes that we can keep.

The angels told the disciples that Jesus would come back the same way he left and that promise holds. And so between the going and the coming is time.

This time, your time, our time. And the question is not how much do we have left, but what will we do the time that we've been given? Amen.