

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 27 October 2013

No. T0804

**Speaker:** Mr. Ian Britton

## Help! We are married: Help we're stretched

### Our resources and how to use them

I guess today's title "Help we're stretched" strikes a chord with most of us. Life in the 21st century is often hectic and demanding and, no matter how great our resources are, they always seem to be at full stretch. How we deal with the ever increasing demands on us is important for every believer in the Lord Jesus, but it is especially important if we are married and have children, because they are directly affected by our decisions.

I'm going to split this talk into two major sections:

1. Financial resources;
2. Time resources.

Before I take up those two headings there are a few things I have to say that are common to both.

"Stretched" implies that we have too many demands and cannot meet them all. That might well be true, and I will have something to say about setting priorities in a moment. However, being stretched can also have positive overtones. If you have ever been to the gym, or taken some other form of exercise to try and build up your muscles, you will realise that it is a painful experience! You work hard and the next day muscles that you never knew you had are aching! You might not have realised just how muscles are increased. Put simply, you stretch them with exercise and damage them slightly. Then the body repairs itself and the muscle is renewed, but a little more is laid down than existed before. Then you exercise again and do further, very slight, damage which is also repaired. It is this cycle, of over stretching and repair that gradually improves your physique.

At least it does if you keep on regularly and don't over do the 'stretch and damage' part! We all know that if you stretch a muscle too far, the damage (and pain!) is too much, and the repair process takes much longer, and our exercise regime is halted while we recover from the injury. There is a similar process at work in our spiritual lives. Some 'stretch' is needed for our faith in God to grow. If we always had all the resources we needed, we would never have to turn to God in prayer, so some 'stretching' is healthy. Too much stretch though can be damaging. So let's look at how we can use the resources that God has given us wisely.

### 1. Financial Resources

It is no coincidence that this talk follows on from one about children! Our financial experience as a couple has followed a graph that looks a bit like the classic picture of a heart beat on a hospital monitor. Things started out positively for us, since I already lived in my own flat before we were married, so going from one income to two meant that our joint income was quite a bit more than our outgoings required. The graph went up. A salary increase or two kept the curve moving. Then, as we planned for a family, my wife took a less demanding job and the graph started moving downwards. Then the arrival of our first child meant just one salary was coming in and our outgoings steadily increased. A second child increased the expenses even further and the graph definitely moved below the axis! A few more salary increases down the years have helped, but two teenage children ensure that the graph is nowhere near its early peak! Maybe your experience has been even tougher, but what have we learned from our experience?

#### a. Set priorities early and don't just live up to the limits of your income

It is much easier to establish good habits in the early days. Christians should start with the attitude that they are custodians of what God has generously given them.

When I speak to young people who are planning to marry, I encourage them to consider together how much they think they need to be reasonably comfortable. Any income above that level, they can plan to divide into two parts. One part is what they sensibly need to save for future expenses. This is especially important if they are planning to have a family at some time in the future, and want to reduce the time mum might have to work to pay the bills. The other part they can give away. *"Do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"*,

Hebrews 13:16. If they don't do this I can almost guarantee that they will simply expand their lifestyle to spend all that they earn, and it will be very hard to change later when their circumstances change. *"When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?"* - so said Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:11. It seems that the problem of expenses always increasing to match, and consume, increasing income is not a modern phenomenon!

#### **b. No measurement means no control**

Have you ever got to the end of the week, or month, and wondered where all the money went? If you don't measure what you are spending your money on, then **most** weeks will end that way. Unexpected expenses can always upset our well planned budgets, but most of our expenses can be anticipated and budgeted for, and an emergency fund will help provide for the truly unexpected. If this all sounds like simple common sense and you are thinking it has little to do with Biblical principles, then remember how much advice in the book of Proverbs is at the level of God inspired common sense. *"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep - so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man"*, Proverbs 6:11. *"The borrower is servant to the lender"*, Proverbs 22:7. The description of the "Virtuous Wife" in Proverbs 31:10-31 includes the following: *"She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it; from her profits she plants a vineyard"*, Proverbs 31:15.

The New Testament sometimes picks up the theme as well. In the two parables of the pounds and the talents (Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus pictures servants being commended for using the resources their master gave them carefully and wisely.

#### **c. Don't plan out God!**

Make sure that you are not so meticulous in your planning that you end up relying entirely on your own financial wisdom, and unwittingly arrange your affairs so as to avoid ever trusting in God! When Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:8 that *"If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever"*, he was not suggesting that we have to provide a life of luxury for all, and a pension plan that is secured against all conceivable disasters! Sometimes we ought to give away more than we might feel comfortable with, because *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7) and it does us good to trust Him to provide our needs.

#### **d. Always plan to give**

I said earlier that we should plan our finances from the outset to make sure that we have enough to give something away. It can be really hard to start giving more generously when our standard of living is already using all, or more than all, of our income, but giving isn't optional. Start small if necessary, but plan to increase the generosity of your giving if God is generous enough to increase your income.

### **2. Time resources**

Unlike financial resources, we all start with exactly the same number of hours in the day and even the richest of us can't but any more! That being so: it is absolutely essential that we use this resource wisely.

#### **a. Doing the right things**

Sounds simple doesn't it? We only have so much time, and there are more things to do than time to do them, so we simply have to do the right things - the most important things. The problem is determining what the most important things are. I have often heard speakers use the words of the Hebrew servant from Exodus 21 to show what our priorities in the family should be. If a servant volunteered to be a perpetual slave he was to say *"I love my master, my wife and my children"* (Exodus 21:5). Speakers use this to make the point that our order of priorities should be: God, spouse, children. I don't have a problem with that, but it isn't always clear how this works out in practice. For one thing, people often confound God with the church, or 'spiritual' duties. Thus they give church responsibilities or Bible study automatic priority over family duties. I'm not convinced that kind of simple equation is correct. God's word gives very clear instructions on the extent to which men ought to love their wives (see Ephesians 5:25), and the responsibilities that both mother and father have towards their children (see Ephesians 6:1-4). We cannot fail in those responsibilities and then claim that we were putting God first because we neglected our family to take up other duties. In most circumstances caring for our family **is** putting God and His commands first.

**b. Priorities will change over time**

If we are married with no children yet, we may have more time to entertain and support the young people in our Christian group, or take on some other useful role. If we have small children then we will have to spend more time taking care of them, and we might have to reduce, or even let go, other commitments. As children grow, we will spend less time on their day to day care, but we will have to make sure we make time to share in their interests and pastimes, or just to talk with them. As our children leave home, our priorities will change again. Sometimes couples fail to adjust to these changes, and wear themselves out trying to take on new roles without relinquishing any old ones.

Sometimes other Christians ask them to take on more responsibilities than they can sensibly handle at their particular stage of life. Deuteronomy 24:5 sets out an interesting Old Testament rule that temporarily exempted a man from being called up into the army. *"When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken."* In this way, God declared that at some stages of life there are special priorities that override the regular order.

**c. Sharing the load properly**

In Exodus 18:17-23 Moses' father in law warned him that he had taken on too many responsibilities, and that this was hurting both Moses and the people he cared for (see Exodus 18:13-16). He counselled Moses to find other Godly, responsible men that he could delegate some of his work to. Just because a job needs doing it doesn't mean that I have to be the one to do it! Many of us are too ready to say with Elijah *"I alone am left"* (1 Kings 19:10). When Moses looked around he found that God had prepared others who were capable of taking on some of the tasks he was doing (see Exodus 18:25-26). This allowed Moses to concentrate on the things that were genuinely the priorities that God had given him. Perhaps you are stretched because you are not passing on some tasks to others so that you can give more time and energy to the key responsibilities that God has given especially to you.

Occasionally, there may be nobody able, or willing, to take on a responsibility that you feel is not really meant for you. If this task is really preventing you from properly fulfilling responsibilities that really are yours, then you might have to take the difficult decision to stop doing the task, even if it means that a useful service for God is brought to an end.

For example, if you are keeping a Sunday School class going even though it is causing you to neglect your ministry of visiting the housebound, or lonely people in your church, and perhaps skimping on your family responsibilities as well, it might be time to decide which work God is calling you to do at this moment and stopping the other. Maybe God will use the fact that you have stopped to stir up somebody else to start a new work. Maybe that work has come to an end for now. Either way, don't become trapped into doing things that God never intended you to do through some sense of false guilt.

Couples should also periodically review how they share the family and household tasks between themselves. If one of you is particularly busy, perhaps some of the tasks that you normally do can be handed over to your spouse for a while. It may be that the division of tasks you agreed when you were first married is no longer sensible now that your circumstances have changed. Try and avoid 'Mary and Martha' type situations (see Luke 10:38-42) where one of you feels that they are bearing an unfair share of the burden, and starts to feel bitter about it.

**d. Do ask for help**

That leads neatly into our next heading - make sure you ask for help when you need it. In our house one of us has a tendency to get stressed about the amount of things they have to do in a particularly busy day. That person then struggles on, getting more and more irate, until they explode saying, "I can't do everything round here by myself! Why is nobody helping?" At this point the other people in the room usually point out that no help has actually been requested. This is generally received with an expression of extreme irritation and some remark about how the others should have seen what needed doing and offered to help spontaneously! Now, nobody comes out of this scenario blame free. No doubt we should all be more ready to notice when other people need help and volunteer accordingly. But some of us also need to remember to ask for help before we reach the exasperated stage! The title of this talk is "Help we're stretched" and it does highlight the need to ask for that help.

Remember to ask for help from other people. Perhaps your parents can help out in some practical ways. Maybe a friend can do some baby sitting. Maybe you know somebody who might help with a particularly large pile of ironing, or a DIY task that has been waiting over a year for you to get round to it. Maybe the person you are frustrated at for failing to offer any help is just waiting for you to ask!

Even more importantly, don't forget to take your requests for help to your Heavenly Father. Remember James' rebuke *"You do not have because you do not ask"*, James 4:2. Maybe He will provide help through your family or friends;

maybe He will increase your resources in some other way, but don't forget to ask for help from the One who knows about all your needs, even before you remember to ask.

#### e. Check if you really want help!

I know that sounds rather odd. Let me explain... I sometimes find myself complaining to somebody about how ridiculously busy I have been over the last week, when I realise that I don't actually want to be less busy! In fact, I am not really even looking for sympathy. The painful truth is that I am really boasting about how many things I am doing. I smile at people who do this at work. Sometimes when colleagues start talking about their workload, it is like a reworking of the famous Monty Python 'Four Yorkshire Men' sketch, as each person tries to outdo the other with more and more outrageous accounts of how busy they are! What they are **really** doing is trying to impress people with how important they are to the organisation, and how hard they work.

It is easy to fall into this trap ourselves, complaining to all who will listen about just how overstretched we are, when, in truth, the last thing we want is for anybody to take any of those tasks away from us.

So before you next complain about how busy you are, check whether that busyness is really your own choice!

#### f. Budget time as carefully as you budget money

In the same way that we often get to the end of the week and wonder where all the money went, we can also get to the end of the day and wonder where all the time went! Even worse, we can look at our grown up children and wonder where their childhood went, and what happened to all our good intentions of spending time with them while we had the chance.

I'm not advocating scheduling every day as if it were a series of business meetings, but we need to know each day and each week what our top priorities are. For those of us in full time employment, the hours that we are free to schedule for ourselves are pretty limited, so it is even more important that we use them wisely. Paul talks, in Ephesians 5:16, about "*redeeming the time*". The expression seems to imply that, by default, time is likely to be used badly and that we need to be careful to use our time for good purposes.

Once again the Proverbs have some good practical advice about wasting time with idleness and putting things off:

- "*The lazy man says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets'*", Proverbs 22:13.
- "*The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth*", Proverbs 26:15.
- "*Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations*", Proverbs 27:23-24.
- "*I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction*", Proverbs 24:30-32.

I could go on quoting these Proverbs for some time, but you get the point!

Just as it is essential to periodically review what we are spending our money on, it is also necessary to regularly audit how we spend our time. It is very easy for those few minutes in front of the computer, tablet, games console or TV to grow into hours. For the more old fashioned among us, a book or a newspaper can just as easily steal away precious hours. Monitor how you spend your time, and then be prepared to make changes. If your audit shows you are spending less time on what are meant to be your priorities than you are on 'relaxation', then it is time to reschedule.

Those with children might also have to make sure that there is time set aside for husband and wife to be together alone. I ought to confess that I don't always manage this as well as I should, and my wife needs to prompt me regularly, which helps to illustrate the way that couples need to work **together** on these things. God was careful to give Adam a "*helper comparable to him*" (Genesis 2:18) and if He has given you a husband or wife, it is so that you can work **together** to use the resources that He has given you for the purposes He intends.

## Conclusion

In my sphere of work we have a scheme called CPD, or Continual Professional Development. It is meant to ensure that the training and skills of health service professionals are kept up to date, and that what is sometimes called 'Lifelong Learning' occurs. I think God has a similar scheme, we might call it CSD, or Continual Spiritual Development. As I said at the beginning, feeling stretched is a normal part of that development. At least, it is if we respond to it as the well planned design of a loving Heavenly Father, and allow it to increase our readiness to turn to Him for help.

*Our God and Father, thank You for providing for us both spiritually and materially. Thank You that You sometimes provide things in a way, and on a time scale, that teaches us to depend ultimately on You. We pray for those who are feeling particularly stretched today, that they might find help from You and that You will teach us all to follow the wise counsel in Your word on how to use the resources You have given us in ways that please You. Amen.*

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.