

The 24-Inch Gauge

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WB Thomas L. Nitschke II

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Brethren, I come to you tonight as a Fellowcraft, and a struggling Entered Apprentice Mason. You may ask, “But aren’t you a Master Mason?” That may be true as to my title, yet it may not be truth with respect to the mastery of myself and the light that I seek. You see, we all want to believe that we have reached great heights with the benefit of that all has been revealed to us; and that we have some sort of understanding of the world around us, as well as what lies deep within us. This is something of a misguided presumption, and this fraudulent belief could be no further from the truth.

As we progress through our own personal journeys, we live, learn, fail, and achieve in hopes of gaining the ultimate prize of wisdom, and to know our God. Frankly, pretending to act as a Master is much akin to a teenager learning to how to drive. You have the ability to drive the vehicle, but lack the experience and knowledge of all that comes with it. This is why I consider myself a Fellowcraft, and sometimes an Entered Apprentice, I am still learning what it means to be a Master of myself, and, to some extent, learning just the basics.

Upon being brought from darkness to light for the first time as an Entered Apprentice, we are later exposed to one of the most valuable tools of that Degree, the 24-inch gauge. This symbolic tool is used to assist us in dividing our time, with eight hours for service to God and a distressed worthy Brother, eight hours for our usual vocation, and eight hours for refreshment and sleep. I can’t help but remember the first time I heard those words. Yet, the thought of how a person could easily divide their day into three separate eight-hour segments seemed almost impossible and even more impractical.

Like Plato’s man in the cave, I was only seeing the shadows and not the light. My shadows were how I perceived my life, and how I lived it with respect to the time allotted. During the middle of my professional career, I can remember working a 10-hour day on second shift and getting home around one o’clock in the morning. Not being able to sleep upon getting home, I would stay up for an extra hour before going to bed, just to get back up before six o’clock in the morning in order to get my son up for school.

Most days, this was my only opportunity to spend time with my son. After he got on the school bus, I laid back down for an extra couple of hours of rest before heading to the gym. Afterwards, I had a couple of hours for lunch and a shower before heading back to work. What I did not realize, at the time, was that the 24-inch gauge was to be used as a guide instead of a strict measure of time.

Each segment had a purpose, and realizing the use of it was more important than the amount of time spent in any one area. This can be more uniquely described through a passage from the Bible, in the third Chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It is one of the most well-known Chapters and describes a multitude of activities from birth to death, to tear down and build, and so many other integral parts contained in life. It does not talk about time, however, but rather, purpose. Looking back now, I understand that I was doing more than just engaging in daily activities. I was providing purpose to my life. At work, I endeavored to make sure the citizens I served were protected and the victims of crime had a voice. My time with my son, although limited, was spent nurturing and bonding with him. While going to the gym, I worked on my physical self, and nourished my inner spirit, as this was my time to also spend with my God through thought and prayer. My time may have not been evenly distributed, but my devotion to what I did had meaning and purpose. Brethren, the true light is purpose.

Current society moves at such a fast pace, and all the while we are bombarded with quick information and instant gratification. Thomas Jackson, the author of *North American Freemasonry: Idealism and Realism*, states, “And yet, with modern labor-saving devices, reduced required working hours, and increased speed of transportation, modern man has more free time than did any other of our Brothers of the past.”

To prove this point even further, a quick Google search reveals that the average person spends two hours and 24 minutes each day on social media sites. Additionally, the same Google search reports that adults spend four hours each day watching television, with an added three hours and 45 minutes interacting with their smart phones. The question then has to be asked, what are we really doing with our time?

Since we have already made the argument that we have a lot of time on our hands, and we spend it on activities that provide little substance, how are we to find any true meaning and purpose from those same activities? The easy and quick answer is, we don't. I would be a hypocrite if I said I didn't watch some of my favorite TV shows, or check Facebook to see what is happening with my friends or organizations that I follow. I believe these are healthy activities if they are done in moderation. But, with all our extra time, what should we be doing? It is not an easy answer to describe, as each of us are looking for something different in our lives.

For me, I strive to focus on reading Masonic books that help me delve into my love of history and esoteric philosophies that provide enrichment for my inner self. I also read my particular volume of sacred law. It provides me my spiritual nourishment and directs me on a pathway to know my God. While at work, I strive to give all my attention to my duties, as best I can, in order to provide the best service to the public and the officers I serve. I also maintain contact with my Brothers to share in their experiences and provide wise counsel when needed. In regard to my family, I give whatever time I can to make sure they are loved and cared for. In the end, I

strive to maintain a purpose with everything I do so that I smooth my rough ashlar with the hope of being a true Master Mason someday.

Recently, I read somewhere about whether it was better to have a full cup or not. The purpose of the question happened to be more about a willingness to accept new ideas. If your cup is full of hardened views, how will you ever be able to allow any new or challenging views in. Yet, I believe the concept mentioned can be applied to our current discussion. How often do we keep ourselves so busy in the Craft that we are unable to add anything more to our “cup?” Most who know me, know that I keep a very busy schedule. Unfortunately, I am not the only one who does this, and it is quite the norm for many within our Craft. It begs the question, is this an unnecessary use of or time, and could our time be better spent honing our skills in a few areas rather than spreading ourselves so thinly? I have concluded, even in my case, that addition by subtraction may be the best course of action. John W. Bizzack, author of *Island Freemasonry*, states “When the length of our cable tows are constantly short, what realistic expectation can a man (or his lodge) have for advancement or enlightenment when he does not pursue those things for which he voluntarily knocked on the West Gate and asked to receive?”

One has to ask; can a Brother truly be effective in other parts of the Craft when he lacks the fundamentals and time to devote to his current development? The honest answer is no. You have to make a choice as to where your efforts are best applied, and know that the rest of your activities will be merely support until you are ready for additional commitments and development. If there is an unwillingness to do this, then your “cup” will surely be full, and the possibility to have additional quality experiences may just pass you by. For myself, I am beginning to make these tough decisions, and I hope, for the sake of the Craft, others begin to do so as well.

So, I have to ask you tonight, how are you using your 24-inch gauge and are you giving time purpose?