

## **The Inefficiency of God**

Steven J. Cole, 1987

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As I was speed-reading the latest book on how to be a more efficient executive, I realized that God is terribly inefficient. I say it reverently, of course. But really, the Lord could have been much more efficient in the way He administered His eternal plan. I'm not sure the Lord would do well in modern America.

We live in a culture obsessed with efficiency. We have instant everything: instant photography, instant coffee, instant copy machines, and instant information available on almost any conceivable subject. Computers can do in seconds what took a whole office full of people weeks to do a few years ago. We have the one-minute manager, one-minute Christian executive, and even the one-minute Christian father! If something is more efficient, we want it.

Take child development. We push our kids toward achievement. To stimulate creativity we are told to play recordings of great music to them while they're still in the womb. One Christian leader says we ought to read the Bible to them during that time as well, to get a jump on spiritual development. We decorate the nursery for maximum intellectual and sensory development. We waste no time in signing up the little ones for classes to nurture their latent talents in music and sports.

We buy them educational toys and games, enroll them in progressive nursery schools, and get them a personal computer so they won't be at a disadvantage later in life. Our goal seems to be to make childhood as efficient as possible.

Why did God design the maturing process to take so long, anyway? Most animals mature and reproduce before human beings are out of kindergarten. It seems to me that God could get a lot more use out of people if He had made them that way.

As I think over my own life, I can hardly remember anything from the first ten years. From the next ten years, I can remember a lot of things I'd rather forget. From the third ten there are a lot of things that I thought I knew that the last ten have proven wrong. What a waste! At least thirty years just to get me to a place where I could function not too poorly in serving the Lord. At 40 I feel like I'm just beginning to get up to speed.

When I think of the only perfect Man who has ever lived, I marvel at the inefficiency of God. If I had been His parent, I'd have had the boy out preaching before His tenth birthday. Certainly by the time He was 20 He could have launched His international TV ministry! Why waste 30 years in obscure Nazareth and then give Him only three years to work before His death? Obviously, God must not have read any books on developing a child's full potential!

Or take sleep and rest. I feel like I could go full bore, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and still not accomplish all that needs to get done. Life is short enough as it is. But then my body requires almost one-third of my life just for sleep.

I've tried to get by on less sleep. I've even prayed about it. With less sleep I could pray more, read the Bible more, write more, read more books, and do all sorts of other productive things. But my body won't cooperate. If I don't sleep at least seven hours a night, I can't function. What a waste!

Then there's that weekly day of rest, which the Lord ordained and our modern evangelical world ignores. With church morning and evening and with all my projects, I'm too busy to rest on the Lord's Day. The Lord must not have known about lawns and dirty cars when He ordained a weekly day of rest.

And consider people. God is so inefficient in the way He molds and uses them. Noah was 500 years old before God told him to build the ark. He was 600 when the flood came. He lived 350 years after the flood. What couldn't I accomplish if I had 950 years! And yet all poor Noah is noted for is building an ark and planting a vineyard. Not much to show for all that time!

Abraham was 75 when he left Haran at the Lord's command. That's a lot better than 500, but still not too efficient. The Lord promised Abraham a son when he was 75, but he was 100 before the promise was a reality. That's 25 years--a quarter of a century. People were growing old and dying. Wars were being fought. The world needed to hear about God's promise to Abraham.

What did Abraham achieve in that span of time? Do you suppose he had well-defined goals? After all, becoming the father of a great nation is no small undertaking. It must have required careful planning. Did he keep his calendar full of key appointments to help move him toward the mark?

Maybe Joseph is our kind of man. He must have been an efficiency expert to administrate the famine relief program for Pharaoh. God must not have wasted any time with him. Sharp, honest, trustworthy, high moral standards--this young man had what it takes for leadership! After a brief apprenticeship with Potiphar, Joseph would be ready for a top management position in some ministry organization.

But God put this choice young man in an Egyptian prison for the better part of his twenties. At one point he had a good chance to get out. He interpreted the cupbearer's dream. The cupbearer was reinstated. Joseph's parting words before the man left the dungeon to resume his duties at Pharaoh's palace were, "Remember me." But the cupbearer forgot. Couldn't the Lord remind him?

In Genesis 41, we read of Pharaoh's dream, which led to Joseph's release from prison and rise to power. Don't miss those words in verse one which are so easy to skim over: "Now it happened at the end of two full years ..." It was two full years from the time the cupbearer was released until Pharaoh had his dream. You can read that phrase in a fraction of a second, but it was two choice years of Joseph's life. Two years in a stinking foreign prison! Two years of wondering if there was a God in heaven listening to his prayers! Why couldn't God have given Pharaoh his dream two years sooner? Maybe God would be interested in a seminar on time management?

It's not hard to multiply example after example. Moses, the great leader, blew it at 40 (why didn't the Lord call him at 25 or 30?), then had 40 more years tending sheep in the desert before he led Israel out of Egypt. Wouldn't three or four years of seminary have been adequate?

David, the young man after God's own heart, was anointed king as a teenager, but then spent his prime twenties fleeing from cave to cave to escape the mad king Saul. The nation had to wait for the glories of David's reign.

The apostle Paul spent several years in Arabia, then more in Tarsus before his ministry took off. If there was ever a key man in the history of the church, it was Paul. He

launched the whole thing in the Gentile world. Surely his few short years of ministry had to have been packed full. His appointment book must not have had a slack hour.

Yet as Paul dreamed of going to Rome, Spain, and points beyond, God saw fit to put him in custody in Caesarea. Sure, it was ultimately God's way of getting Paul to Rome, all expenses paid. But in Acts 24:27 we read some words which shouldn't surprise us by now: "But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

Two inefficient years sitting in Caesarea! Wasn't the church praying for his release? Here was God's greatest apostle sitting around, day in and day out, for two full years while the world was going without the gospel! Two wasted years when he could have been out preaching, planting churches, evangelizing Spain! The Lord sure could have used a course in efficient employee management!

Could God possibly be running His kingdom program differently than I'm running my hectic schedule? Could He be developing His children from a different perspective than I'm training mine? Could God be less concerned than I am about squeezing every spare minute of every day for all its worth?

Could there be any significance that His Word often refers to the Christian experience as a walk, seldom as a run, and never as a mad dash? Could God be less concerned about the efficiency of minutes and more concerned about the efficiency of eternity?

You'll have to think about these things, if you have time. I've gotta run--I'm late for my next appointment.