

# No, You Are Not Running Late. You Are Rude and Inconsiderate!

By Tim Challies  
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*You are not "running late." You are rude. You are inconsiderate. You need to change.* Greg Savage's frustration with other people's tardiness boiled over into an amusing rant that he posted online, and that was subsequently read by hundreds of thousands.

10 people kept waiting in a meeting for 20 minutes, while some selfish pratt who idles his way via the coffee shop, is actually 20 minutes times 10, which is 200 minutes wasted – while you keep us waiting because you did not catch the earlier bus. That is over 3 hours wasted. By you! How much has that cost the business? Shall I send you an invoice?

And an arrangement to meet someone for a business meeting at a coffee shop at 3 pm, more often than not means at 3.10 you get a text saying 'I am five minutes away' which inevitably means 10 minutes, and so you wait for 15 or 20 minutes, kicking your heels in frustration.

Like most epic and enjoyable rants, we can all identify with the heart of the issue. Most of us feel some of his angst, because most of us have been kept waiting by someone who pulls in late too often and who apologizes too seldom. Somehow lateness has become culturally acceptable, excused away by busyness or traffic or the other trappings of our frantic lives. Savage says, "I consider serial lateness a character flaw which I take into account when working out who to promote, who to hire and who to count amongst my real friends." In his view it is that important.

In many ways I am inclined to agree with Savage. I can very easily see a link between promptness and character, where people of mature character tend to be the ones who show up on time, or even a few minutes early. Here in North America we could probably lobby to make it the missing fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, promptness, kindness, gentleness... But there is always one nagging little thought in the back of my mind: Jesus was late. Or was he just on time? He certainly looked late. In John 11 he is summoned to rush to the side of his friend Lazarus. But he dawdled and arrived not 20 minutes late, but 2 whole days late. By that time Lazarus was not only in the grave, but getting pretty ripe in there. His friends were disappointed in him, assuming that he didn't properly understand the situation, or that he didn't properly prioritize it. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

But Jesus had been waylaid for the best of reasons—he was deeply in touch with God's will and knew that God had something he meant to do and something he meant to prove in this situation. Where a human perspective made Jesus look like a failure, from a divine perspective he was the greatest success. We can see the same in the Psalms where David seems to assume that God is late or too busy with other things, too busy or too distracted to reply to David in his agony. We can see it in the cries of God's people under oppression, as God seems so slow to turn his face toward them. Sometimes even the Divine looks late when we look at Him from our so-human and so-limited perspective.

And this is just my fear when we demand promptness and assume that tardiness indicates a character flaw. There is so much we don't see. There are many people who love to do good to others, and they allow that doing good to others to take precedence over their schedules. My

temptation is just the opposite, to refuse to do good because I don't want to be late. In fact, just last night I dreamed about witnessing an accident but driving away so I wouldn't be late for an elders' meeting.

This issue has been an important one in my church. Toronto is the most culturally diverse city in the world, which makes the churches multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-everything else. I would say that nearly half of our church is from a West African or South American background, and both continents regard time differently from the way we do. I might be tempted to regard this *only* as weakness, but there are strengths as well. While I arrive on time but alone, my African friends might arrive thirty minutes late, but in a socially-engaged crowd. While I might be tempted to rush right back out of church to get home, to get lunch, to get a nap, to get geared up for the evening service, my African friends might dawdle at the church and socialize for hours until the next service begins. The issue that may frustrate us also masks genuine strengths. Will those strengths diminish as promptness increases? Is it worth the cost? Some of the most thoughtful people I know, are also the most consistently late people I know. They show their thoughtfulness in other ways—ways that sometimes make them late.

I do not mean to defend lateness. I still believe promptness is an application of Jesus' simple command that we are to let our yes be yes and our no be no. If you say you will arrive at 10, arrive at 10, not 11. Like Savage, I believe the deeper issue is with people who plan to be late, who think so highly of themselves that they don't even attempt to get there on time anymore, and who don't care a bit for how this inconveniences others.

So by all means, let's plan to be on time, and let's live orderly lives. But let's be slow to stand in judgment of those who show up at a time we deem inappropriate. If nothing else, let's know people for their many strengths and not only that one weakness that most frustrates us.

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