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Some Don't Realize What a Profound Gift of Time This Pandemic Is

By Peter Telep
UCF Forum columnist
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Our lives are fleeting, and the ultimate gift is giving our time to our loved ones to make memories.



On a bicycle outing in pre-pandemic times, columnist Peter Telep (in back) with wife, Nancy, and daughters, Lauren and Kendall.

Which would make you happier: more time or more money? Most people want both and say they'd be happier if they had both. However, most of us spend the majority of our time chasing money and sacrificing our experiences and relationships in the quest for financial security.

Our consumer-driven economy supports this notion that more money equals more happiness. Consequently, you need to work more overtime, make more money, and buy more stuff to be happy, right?

Suddenly, a pandemic strikes and many of us have all this time at home with our families. Ironically, we don't even realize what a profound gift this is. We say we're "stuck at home" and "quarantined" and "getting cabin fever." If I had little ones running around, I can imagine saying, "These kids are driving me nuts! I can't get anything done with them here!"

Just a few months ago, I was teaching four writing classes at UCF, teaching spin classes at my local gym four nights per week, and riding my bicycle on Saturdays for three or more hours. Other time I had was spent grading papers and working on various writing projects of my own. The only real family time I had was on Sundays. Admittedly, my daughters are older now (24 and 21) and they work, but at least we made an effort.

We were all doing our own thing and barely saw each other save for that Sunday afternoon dinner. My father would've called this living the "rat race," where you spend your whole life chasing a piece of cheese you'll never get.

Still, we were all doing our own thing and barely saw each other save for that Sunday afternoon dinner. My father would've called this living the "rat race," where you spend your whole life chasing a piece of cheese you'll never get.

Of course you need to earn a living, but how much is really enough? Perhaps you can justify wanting more money because you're saving up for that family vacation. Great—you work 51 weeks a year so you can spend one week with people you hardly know because you're busy making money—so you can spend time with them. That makes total sense.

There's a telling line of dialogue in the movie *Interstellar* written by Christopher and Jonathan Nolan. Matthew McConaughey's character shares some wisdom from his late wife: "We're just here to be memories for our kids." Steve Jobs, founder of Apple, underscores this sentiment in his final essay: "The wealth I have won in my life I cannot bring with me. What I can bring is only the memories precipitated by love."

In his article for *The New York Times*, "How Quarantine Has Brought My Family Closer Together," essayist Clint Edwards writes, "So in this moment of reflection, I'm taking an accounting of what our children really need to grow into well-rounded, responsible adults with active bodies and brains, and what we might have been missing as a family because of trying to do too much. Perhaps what we really needed all along was less on our plates and more time with one another."

Time, time, time, see what's become of us. I'm paraphrasing the song "Hazy Shade of Winter" by Simon & Garfunkel, but it's true: We've been spending so much time in our work routines that when given the gift of time with our families, many of us don't even recognize it or know what to do with it! That's insane. Stop reading or listening to this for an instant and smack your cheek!

Seriously, let's slow down and appreciate this time. I've been trying to deepen my bond with my daughters, watching TV shows and movies with them and just sitting and talking, asking more about their lives. I've been taking nightly walks with my wife. We discuss current events, drama at work, and whatever's going on with our girls.

It's amazing how much I've enjoyed these simple moments, and it's sad that it took a global pandemic for me to realize this. Our lives are fleeting, and the ultimate gift is giving our time to our loved ones to make memories. That is why we're here. This isn't a new concept, just one we keep forgetting as companies advertise the latest slice of cheese that's supposed to taste like happiness (I know, cheese does taste like happiness, but you get the point).

Let's make a promise that no matter what happens during these tough times, we'll reconsider our priorities and make decisions that will give us more time with those we love. "I sustain myself with the love of my family," wrote celebrated author Maya Angelou.

We Knights know how to prevail against great adversity, so let's cherish the moments. Let's allow them to give us strength and hope and, yes, sustain us through this crisis.

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