

LESSON 6

Making the Most of Your Time

Wouldn't it be nice if we had 36 hours in a day? Would 12 hours more a day be enough? I suppose we would never have enough hours in a day, no matter how many we had. We would surely just fill up the extra hours with things that would cause us to still come up short. People are constantly tired. Where does this apparent universal fatigue come from? It seems to come from the compulsive drive of modern life.

Furthermore, we live in the age of immediacy. Everything is designed to help fill our need for instant gratification. Sadly, much of what we spend our time doing will not really matter when we get to heaven. So we should assess what is important in light of eternity.

Time is a primary resource that cannot be recouped if wasted. Ecclesiastes 8:6 says, "There is a proper time and procedure for every matter." The problem is not enough time but how we use that time. According to Paul good time management is a mark of wisdom (Ephesians 5:15–16) and an act of good stewardship (2 Corinthians 4:2). Moses, also, teaches us in Psalm 90:12 that better management of time can be learned.

I believe that prayer is the most important time management tool we have at our disposal. Beginning each day with prayer can help us to use our time wisely. We simply need to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide us through our day. In addition, skills and habits can be developed that will make us better stewards of time. So let us journey together in this chapter and make some changes in our lives regarding the precious commodity of time.

LESSON OUTLINE

The Value of Time
Time Management
Understanding Time
Regaining Lost Time?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1: *Discuss the brevity and value of time.*
- 2: *Discuss ways to manage time better.*
- 3: *Identify three principles that influence our understanding of time.*
- 4: *Show ways to catch up on lost time.*

The Value of Time

Objective 1:

Discuss the brevity and value of time.

God expects us to be good stewards of time. While some people have mistakenly interpreted this to mean that God demands perpetual busyness, God encourages us to be wise in our use of time. Colossians 4:5 tells us to redeem our time from unprofitable activities. In Ephesians 5:15, Paul advises us to look carefully at how we walk and to make the most of our time.

The apostle Paul sometimes followed a routine, such as visiting the synagogue on the first day of each week (Acts 17:2). At other times he was flexible. For instance, in Paul's traveling times we see sudden changes in plans depending on external conditions, personal anxiety, reception to his ministry, and even God's direction. Paul chose not to do certain things if he recognized that he did not have the emotional energy to cope with the

challenge (2 Corinthians 2:12–13). Thus, at times, he bypassed fields of ministry (Acts 16:6–9).

This does not mean that Paul was lazy and did not work hard for the Kingdom (Acts 20:31; 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). Do not read into these passages that Paul is telling us to fill our lives with busyness. Remember that in such passages, Paul is counterbalancing those who are doing too little for God.

In his later years, Moses wrote that the years of a person's life pass quickly (Psalm 90:10). For forty years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness with no specific destination in sight. Many of us experience the same time dilemma, wandering in our routines and overbooked schedules. But life on this planet is shorter than we think. Therefore, Moses urges us to number our days so that we may gain wisdom (Psalm 90:12). Understanding the brevity of life here on earth compels us to place value on the limited time we do have. God wants to teach us how to be prudent about our use of time.

Everything that means anything has its correct season and timing (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8). We simply cannot do all that we desire to do. We must choose. We must make the most of our short time here on earth. Time here on earth is given to us to prepare for eternity. This life and this earth can never satisfy our deepest longings, because God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We are conditioned to long for more than this world has to offer.

Paul encourages us to live worthy of the calling we have received and to be imitators of God (Ephesians 4–5). Each day is a microcosm of our life, and there are things that happen beyond our control. How will we respond to the unexpected, the urgent? Time is priceless. You cannot get it back once it is used.

King David accomplished a lot in his lifetime. His secret is revealed in Psalm 39:4–5: “Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. . . . the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.” David understood the brevity of life and the importance of the use of time.

God moves with purpose in directing humanity toward His ultimate will. He expects His followers to live with the same intentionality, properly managing the time given to us. We cannot be content to simply survive when there are so many important opportunities to serve God's purposes.

Time Management

Objective 2:

Discuss ways to manage time better.

Much of life consists of routines and values. Routines provide order and consistency. Our routines are often in alignment with our values and priorities. Routines should work to help us meet our goals. And to meet goals we need a timeline.

Time management problems occur when our routines do not match our values. The friction begins as we add to our lives things that God does not want us to be doing. Hebrews 12:1 teaches us to throw off everything that hinders or entangles us in the race God has marked out for us. Therefore, do not be afraid to cut less important things from your life. Start with the goal and outline the steps needed to accomplish that goal. Use a checklist. Break your timeline down into the individual actions needed. And schedule your day so that you have the allotted time needed for each specific project.

Managing time is like managing money. You have to keep track of time, budget time, and invest time so that it brings a return. Time can be spent, saved, invested, or wasted. You would be wise to identify areas where you are wasting it (examples: too much time watching television, too many hours on the internet, sleeping when you should be active, too much time chatting on the phone, etc.) Then reinvest your time in areas of greater priority. Remember, lost time can never be recuperated.

Finding More Time

Here are three easy steps to finding more disposable time:

Take Inventory

The apostle Paul advises the church in Ephesus to pay close attention to how they live (Ephesians 5:15). We all have 168 hours in our week. How are you spending your time? What are the time robbers in your life? Be aware that although many things we do are not necessarily wrong, they also may not be constructive. We must eliminate those time wasters.

Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." One way to add time to your life is get up 30 minutes earlier or stay up 30 minutes later than usual. That will add 7.5 days to your year!

Live in the Present

Make the most of every opportunity. Take advantage of today, for tomorrow is not promised to anyone. Be alert to the daily possibilities. Use your prime time to do your priority items with no interruptions. Use your medium effective time to multi-task with lower priority things. Use your lower effective times to unwind, rest, and get away. Try to unclutter your life. Physical clutter occupies your vision in a negative way. Mental clutter distracts your mind. Emotional clutter drains your spirit. Make each day count for eternity, and live each day to the full.

Prioritize

Find out what God's will is and then do it. Priorities help us in achieving our number one goal: pleasing God. We always have enough time to do God's will. It is when we get overextended in other things that we feel the time squeeze. So, what are your primary priorities? Ask yourself, "What would happen if this were not done at all? Which of my activities could be done by someone else? What seems to be a waste of my time?" The conclusions to these questions may mean stopping some activities or delegating activities to others. Cut back the unproductive demands on your time and move that newly found discretionary time in alignment with God's greater priorities for your life.

This does not mean every waking moment needs to be filled with intensive activity. We need time to rest, relax, and play. The pressures of this world clamor for our attention and starve our souls, and we lose sight of the things that matter most. Our focus shifts to those things that pass away, and our value system becomes compromised. What matters is not how long we live but how we live.

What order of things do you use to prioritize your activities? Here is a priority list I recommend: 1) your ongoing relationship with God and your spiritual growth; 2) your relationship with spouse and family; 3) personal ministry; 4) vocation/work; 5) health/fitness/recreation; 6) friendships. God does not want us to be governed by external pressures. He wants us to align with His priorities. Life makes sense when we streamline and order ourselves around God's priorities for our personal lives. Perhaps you sense the need to re-order your priorities.

If you do not seem to have enough time to get everything done, it means one of the following: 1) You are doing something God never intended, 2) You are not doing what God intended, or 3) You are doing the right thing but in the wrong way. The fact is that you do have enough time to do God's will for your life. After all, God would not have a will for your life and then not give you the time to get it done. If Satan can trick us into making bad use of our time, he will minimize our effectiveness for God.

Once you have determined your priorities, you can develop a master weekly schedule based on those priorities. Then all new activities can be analyzed against that master calendar. God's priorities result in daily patterns.

Understanding Time

Objective 3:

Identify three principles that influence our understanding of time.

Even committed followers of Christ can feel overwhelmed and overextended. The root cause of our

being overextended is either flight from others, God, or ourselves, or our trying to impress God or others. Our busyness is either idolatrous self-absorption or an exercise in self-justification. We are trying to prove our existence is justified. But if we depend on our work to give us self-worth, what happens when we lose our job? Time management cannot save us from the tyranny of time. Consider the following basic principles about time.

The Importance of Becoming

As Christians, the most important thing is not about doing or even being but about becoming who God wants us to become. Our difficulties will not be dissolved simply by adding one set of actions in place of another. In becoming, we develop the gifts and character qualities that best fit us for God's purposes. This transformation process calls for commitment to live a less hurried and more purpose-driven life.

The Need for Clarity

Many of our time problems are due to a lack of clarity about our roles. We must become crystal clear about the path that God has mapped out for us. One of our greatest problems is in misunderstanding what God's will is for us. In so doing we add extra responsibilities to our time. We must learn to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you" (Matthew 6:33). God will grant us the clarity we need to accomplish His will.

Internal Rhythm

We each have natural internal rhythm. Some of us are morning people, some are evening people, and others work best in smaller time segments. We should evaluate ourselves to see what our individual rhythm is and adjust our expectations of what we can achieve during particular times of the day. No matter our rhythm, however, we all need to balance between having personal quiet time and strenuous people time. Like Jesus, we must retreat privately sometimes.

Regaining Lost Time?

Objective 4:

Show ways to catch up on lost time.

All of us discipline ourselves to do what we have to do or what we value most. We are probably better at time management than we give ourselves credit for. So how can we make our best even better? Time management is each individual's personal responsibility. Time is life, a gift from God and a gift to God. We cannot put time aside and use it later. But we can save time in order to gain the best use of time.

Set Priorities

Identify where and how you are losing or wasting time. What are you doing or not doing that keeps you from being most productive? Common time thieves include lack of planning, over commitment, paper shuffling, indecision, and hyper-independence. These usually occur in combination with one another. So start your adjustments. Plan first. Your objectives should help you reach your goals and priorities. Do not let the urgent overrule the most important.

Also, use the wastebasket. Act on the paper, file the paper, or throw away the paper. Organize your work area. Stack for function and file for retrieval. Do not procrastinate. In so doing, you can eliminate your time wasters.

Activate Your Priorities

Many people live by the Christopher Columbus system. When he left home, he did not know where he was going. When he got there, he did not know where he was. And when he returned home, he did not know where he had been. Use your priorities to chart your course. God will never be first in your life until He is first in your day. Plan, organize, and prioritize for each day. Use a daily "to-do-list." Planning your day will multiply your results. At the end of your day, update your plan for the next day. Move uncompleted tasks to the next

day, and list according to importance. Use a “this week” plan in which you list projects to be completed. Keep a calendar for the month and year. Plan out in detail each task you intend to accomplish that day. Focus on purposeful, fruitful living.

Value Your Uniqueness

As much as you can, make your schedule fit your unique personal strengths. Do the difficult and demanding task first, or when you are at your prime time. Focus on the essentials; reduce redundancies, eliminate unnecessary activities, and avoid demands that stretch you thin. Learn how to say no kindly.

If you are unable to master a major conflict in your life, leave it and move on. You are not superhuman. You cannot master everything. Even Jesus was hindered in what He could do and had to move on at times (see Matthew 13:58). Surely, you are not greater than Jesus! So move on without taking on feelings of guilt or failure. Be more flexible; flexibility reduces the likelihood of frustration.

Execute your game plan. Being effective means doing the right things and doing things right. Time management principles must still be applied in the context of our unique qualities, background, personality, and schedule. Make the decision where and how you need to improve. Slow down if necessary. Hurriedness is a human characteristic caused by inadequate planning and poor time management. Hurrying only increases the wear and tear on us. Develop a plan through prayer, and fine tune your plan along the way. Learn from your successes and failures. Even though you may have fallen behind, you can still catch up.

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- According to this lesson, the most important time management tool is*
 - the calendar.*
 - prayer.*
 - the clock.*
- We are given time here on earth to*
 - live fully and carelessly.*
 - prepare for eternity.*
 - condemn ourselves to more sin.*
- Which is a true statement about time?*
 - Time cannot be retrieved once it is used.*
 - Time has no value.*
 - It is impossible to manage our time.*
- Priorities help us to achieve our primary goal, which is to*
 - satisfy ourselves only.*
 - please God.*
 - please other people and ignore our own needs.*
- Our routines need to be in alignment with our values and*
 - priorities.*
 - people skills.*
 - purses.*
- Time can be spent, saved, invested, or*
 - heightened.*
 - enjoyed.*
 - wasted.*
- To say that each of us has an internal rhythm suggests*
 - we all like the same type of music.*
 - we are all morning people.*
 - each of us functions best at a particular time and in a particular way.*

8. *Who is responsible for managing our time?*
 - a) *It is God's job to manage our time because He made us.*
 - b) *Our family is responsible for our time management.*
 - c) *We are responsible for our management of time.*
9. *Which of the following is not a common thief of time?*
 - a) *Planned moments devoted to prayer*
 - b) *Lack of planning*
 - c) *Indecision*
10. *Hurriedness is caused by*
 - a) *adequate planning.*
 - b) *poor time management.*
 - c) *new technology.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *b* (6.1)
2. *b* (6.1)
3. *a* (6.1)
4. *b* (6.2)
5. *a* (6.2)
6. *c* (6.2)
7. *c* (6.3)
8. *c* (6.4)
9. *a* (6.4)
10. *b* (6.4)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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