

Equipping Pastors International

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Lesson #8

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DISCIPLESHIP
How Should I Use My Time?

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Christian has one life (perhaps 70 years) to give to God. How effective he is in God's service will be directly related to how he uses his time. Every Christian has been given 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. This time is not his own but belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, for each Christian has been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The Christian is called upon to be a good steward of time and to use it for God's glory.

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last."

B. Time is one of the most precious possessions a Christian has, and how he uses it will determine what he shall be. The pursuing of knowledge, the acquisition of money, the cultivation of friends, the enjoyment of pleasure and the gaining of experience are all related to how one uses his time. The difference between one man and another quite often depends upon the skill with which he uses his time.

C. As Christians living in twentieth century America, it is often much easier for us to give of our monies than to give of our time. In a technological society, a million and one things are making demands on our time. Good things as well as bad things, worthy projects as well as unworthy, useful activity as well as useless activity, are competing for our time, and Christians must learn to distinguish between that which is urgent, that which is important, and that which can be put off until tomorrow. We must get our priorities straight. NOTE: According to the Bible, there is a time for everything (Eccl. 3:1-8), but what time we do have we are to use for the glory of God.

II. BIBLICAL EXHORTATIONS ON THE USE OF TIME

A. The Christian Is to Redeem the Time. The Christian is to "**redeem (buy up) the time,**" by using his moments wisely and buying up every opportunity to serve the Lord. To use one's time wisely involves a disciplined life.

1. Eph. 5:15-20: This context is about the Christian walk. Much of our spare time is to be used to develop a healthy Christian life that will be honoring to God. Spare time should not be spent in frivolous living but in cultivating a deep devotional life.

2. Col. 4:4-6: Here the context seems to be that of evangelism.

Much of our spare time should be given over to witnessing to the lost and seeking to bring them, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Poor use of time invariably means poor evangelism.

- B. The Christian Is to Realize that His Time Is Short. (James 4:13-17): There is no real certainty to the length of any man's life, for it is but a vapor. Therefore, the Christian must work each day as if that were his last one. He should never put off until tomorrow the spiritual things he can do today, for to know what is right and not do it is sin.
- C. The Christian Is Not to Be Lazy or Slothful. The lazy man dislikes work and fails to plan ahead (Prov. 20:4); he has no motivation to work (Prov. 13:4); he gets engrossed in his own problems (Prov. 15:19); he is a hindrance to others (Prov. 18:9). Those who are lazy and slothful should consider the ways of the ant (Prov. 6:6). NOTE: Christians are to be motivated by a desire to please Christ. They should be industrious, setting goals and striving to meet those goals.

III. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE USE OF TIME

- A. Ritual or Spirituality? It is possible to fall into fundamental ritualism where time is spent in religious externals but very little time is spent in cultivating true holiness before God.
- B. Activity or Spirituality? Many Christians feel that the constant attending of church activities is the way to spirituality. Continual involvement in church activity may actually be an abuse of one's time rather than a proper use of it. Organization must never be substituted for true spirituality. We must ask ourselves, "Am I letting Christian activities replace Jesus Christ as the very center of my life?"
- C. Rigidity or Discipline? While a Christian is to use his time for God, this does not imply a rigid, inflexible daily pattern which cannot be broken. To make life very mechanical takes away the joy of the unexpected. Interruptions are often of God. There is some value in the more rigid approach, especially for those who are quite casual and need a disciplined life, but there are limits. Men are meant to live like men and not like robots. Discipline with flexibility is the ideal for a Christian.

IV. PRIORITIES IN THE USE OF TIME

- A. Introduction: Most Christians could be better organized than they are, and what they really need is a setting of priorities. A distinction must be made between the best and the good, the urgent and the important, that which is pressing and that which can be put off. NOTE: A failure to get priorities straight brings frustration into the Christian's life, and continued frustration brings guilt, and continued guilt brings mental illness. It is not God who loads us until we bend or crack with an ulcer, nervous breakdown, heart attack, or stroke. These come from our inner compulsions, coupled with the

pressure of circumstances. "The alternative to frustration is to be sure that we are doing what God wants."

- B. A Christian Must Find Time to Spend with His God. A believer must have time to cultivate a spiritual life and this can only come through personal Bible study and prayer (Matt. 22:37). A quiet time is so basic and so difficult to achieve, for it is usually the first thing to go if there is a busy day. No two Christians will approach the quiet time the exact same way or have it at the same time or for the same length of time. But time alone with God is essential and the devil will try to rob the Christian of this precious time. NOTE: The quiet time has no power, but there is power in the Word and the Holy Spirit with whom we communicate. A Christian is not more spiritual because of the time spent in a quiet time, but because of the things he learned from the Word. NOTE: The Christian's fellowship with Christ depends on his walk of faith with Christ, so if a person misses a day or two of quiet time, he should not feel that God is angry with him or operate under a guilt complex. However, the Christian should be concerned because time out of the Scriptures definitely affects the depth of his fellowship with Christ. NOTE: It takes time to cultivate a holy life and there are no shortcuts to sanctification.
- C. A Christian Must Find Time to Spend with His Family. For those Christians who are married, there must be time to cultivate a proper love life and mutual affection for one another. There must not only be time to talk but time to communicate in terms of real problems and longings of the heart. A proper home life and time spent with children is basic to a Christian home. NOTE: A husband who has a job that keeps him constantly away from his wife and family should ask himself if he has his priorities straight. If he is away from home a great deal, he should try to compensate for this when he is at home. A working mother often neglects her children. There are some things money cannot buy. Are material things more important than the spiritual, moral and psychological development of a child?
- D. A Christian Must Do His Secular Work. A Christian must work in order to live and support his family. This will take a good portion of any day. If employed, the Christian must give one hundred percent to his employer while on the job, and do it as unto the Lord. Our attention needs to be given fully to what we are doing if we are to give full value for our time. A Christian would not dream of stealing money from an employer, yet to give less than one hundred percent is a form of stealing. NOTE: If secular work takes precedence over religious duties, then serious consideration should be given to a cutting of hours or a job change.
- E. A Christian Must Serve His Lord. There must be time allotted to serve Jesus Christ. Each individual Christian is to serve his Lord in his own way. All Christians are to be personal witnesses for Christ, but some may be Bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, part-time secretaries, nursery workers, youth leaders, etc. NOTE: The Christian often fritters away hours reading irrelevant magazines and spends multiple hours before a

TV set. Someday each Christian will have to give an account to Christ as to what he actually did with his time. When a Christian is asked to do something for the Lord and replies, "I don't have time," does he really have his priorities straight?

- F. A Christian Must Have Social Contacts. The Christian is to make friends and have friends, both saved and unsaved. Some Christians need more social contact than others, but all need friends. Christians need no superficial friendships but real friendships based on trust and mutual understanding, and it takes time to develop these kinds of relationships.
- G. A Christian Must Have Recreational Time. The Christian needs time to "goof off" so as to take the edge off a highly disciplined life. Recreation in free time will vary with the individual -- golf, swimming, tennis, painting, walking, sleeping, sightseeing, listening to music, reading, going out to dinner, etc. Christians must learn to "come apart" before they come apart.
- H. A Christian Must Have Physical Exercise. The Bible says that physical exercise profits for a little (1 Tim. 4:8). Exercise keeps the body from getting fat and the mind from getting fatigued. It also prevents premature heart trouble.
- I. A Christian Must Use His Sunday for the Glory of God. It is important that the Christian set aside one day a week to remember the Lord Jesus, study the Word and fellowship with other Christians. While recognizing that every day is to be hallowed to the Lord, there is a place for making one day in particular a day for special service. God has given the Lord's Day for the believer's edification. NOTE: Christians must be careful not to let outings, camping trips, picnics, boating trips, etc., interfere with the real purpose of Sunday - corporate worship and rest. However, we need not be legalistic about Sunday, for there are times when it may be legitimate to miss the assembling on the Lord's Day for recreational purposes, but to make a habit of it is going against the revealed will of God (Heb. 10:25). NOTE: Having fulfilled his religious duties on Sunday, a Christian is free to do with the rest of the day as the Lord leads him.

V. EXAMPLES OF PERSONS WHO USED THEIR TIME WELL

- A. Apostle Paul: Paul worked part time as a tentmaker (Acts 20:34), studied the Word, did house to house witnessing (Acts 20:20) and gave lectures at the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).
- B. Richard Baxter: This great Puritan minister in England was very sickly, yet he carried on a house to house visitation program, wrote 180 books, and turned out over 35,000 printed pages on spiritual truth. He said, "I have these 40 years been sensible of the sin of losing time; I could not spare an hour."
- C. Charles Haddon Spurgeon: This man never went to seminary, but after his conversion he disciplined himself to study the Bible 14 hours a day so that he could faithfully minister to his flock.
- D. Martin Luther: This great saint of the Reformation read the Bible constantly, translated the Bible into German, wrote

voluminously against the Church of Rome, and he said, "If I fail to spend three hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get along without spending three hours daily in prayer."

- E. Conclusion: These were all exceptional Christian men. But were they busy because they were exceptional or were they exceptional because they were busy? Were they not busy because they were Christians and because there is much to be done for the glory of God?