

The Spiritual Disciplines: Stewardship/The Wise Use of Time

Time is one of the most valuable resources God has entrusted to our care; it can't be replaced, replenished, or relived. Each of us has a finite amount of time in our earthly life, and how much we will have to work with and when our life will come to an end is in God's hands. We are stewards of our time and should use it wisely, as we will be asked to give account of how we managed what was put into our care, including our time. As the apostle Paul wrote, *each of us will give an account of himself to God.*^[1]

Before going further, let me clarify that when I'm speaking of the proper use of time in the context of the Spiritual Discipline of stewardship, it should be understood as using it in alignment with God's nature and character and according to His will, for His glory. It's not limited to only doing things that are directly linked to your relationship with and service to the Lord, such as prayer, witnessing, etc. For example, we sometimes spend it on entertainment or relaxation.

Taking time to rest and relax is in alignment with God's will, as seen by His commanding a day of rest. Some may feel as if the time spent working at a job is wasted, when they would prefer to use that time in more visible service to God. But working to provide for yourself and your family is in alignment with God's nature and will, and when committed to God, is part of your service to God. While taking time to read God's Word and pray is important, so are the everyday necessities of life such as cooking, cleaning house, changing diapers, and caring for your family. Our lives call for a balanced use of time, and it's in that context that we are talking about the use of time as part of stewardship.

Perspective and Eternity

In every calendar year we live, we are graciously given 8,760 hours^[2] by our Creator. It is our responsibility to use them wisely and to make the most of them.^[3] Unfortunately, it's easy to waste time and fritter it away. Using it wisely requires discipline and sacrifice, as mountains of time management books have expressed over and over again. Decisions need to be made to forgo spending time on something we like doing and want to do, and instead using it for the purpose of improving in some area or working toward goals. Disciplined time management is needed in any area of life we hope to move forward in, including growing in godliness and becoming more like Jesus.

A key to understanding the importance of using our time for godly purposes is recognizing that this life is where we prepare for eternity. We know this holds true when it comes to salvation, as one's acceptance or rejection of Jesus affects one's eternity. In addition, how we live and what we do or don't do in this life plays a role in our eternity. It doesn't determine our salvation, but Scripture says that it does affect the rewards we will receive in the afterlife. Paul addressed this when he wrote about building our lives on Jesus as the foundation:

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.^[4]

It is worthwhile to invest in godly pursuits, in following God's will for us, in drawing closer to the Lord. Of course, these aren't the only things that it is important to devote time to, but they are things that can easily be overlooked within the busy lives we lead. Constantly putting off spending time in prayer, reading God's Word, and other activities which strengthen our faith and bring godliness into our lives can easily result in not doing them at all, because the time we thought we would have to do them later turns out to have been spent doing something else.

None of us know when our lives will be over. As James wrote:

You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.^[5]

Our times are in God's hands,^[6] and while it's wise to plan as if we are going to live a long life, it's also wise to use our time for the purpose of godliness as though it were uncertain that we will live tomorrow.^[7] Today is the day to do God's will, to make good decisions, to be generous, to share His love with another, to pray for someone, to help the poor, to visit the sick, to spend time in prayer and adoration, to be Jesus for someone.

Since what we do with our time matters both in this life and in the life to come, how we use each day counts. Properly managing the time we are given by God in a manner that helps us accomplish our goals, while allowing us to have a proper balance in our work, recreation, family life, and faith life, is an important part of our life on earth. The "right now" of every day is time that God has graciously given us, and we should value it deeply. When your time on earth is finished, will you be happy with how you used this precious gift God put into your hands, or will you have regrets?

Francis Chan uses a classic illustration about the time we have in our lives in relation to the eternity we have before us. He lays down a rope that looks about 30 feet (10 meters) long, and at one end three inches (8 centimeters) of it are painted red. He makes the point that so many of us are overly focused on the three red inches—our comfort, our status, the inch or so that is left of our life—yet we ignore the rest of the rope, which represents eternity.

Of course, the three inches which represent our lives on earth *are* important. God has given us life and time on this earth with the expectation that we will live it to the full and enjoy the life He has given us, in alignment with His nature and character, and that we will glorify Him in the lives we lead and leave the world a little better because of how we lived. However, those three inches don't represent our entire existence. There is more to life beyond that, and being mindful of that fact should cause us to consider how we invest our time and where we place our values. You can watch Chan's impressive illustration [here](#).

Values and Commitment

Wisely investing in the present as well as eternity means investing time in things that are important in this life and also have value in the next. That includes such things as taking care of your family, teaching your children to live in accordance with God's attributes, nurturing your relationship with your spouse, learning new things, cultivating friendships, caring for those in need, sharing God's love and salvation with others, being kind and generous, being mindful of the environment, and being a good influence in

your community. In short, investing your time wisely means living life in a manner that reflects God, that lets your light shine before others, that has a positive effect on those around you, and also lays up treasure in heaven.

Living a life that reflects the Lord would include keeping connected to the Lord through reading, studying, and applying God's Word; giving time to prayer, praise, and worship; sharing the message of salvation with others; managing our finances and possessions in a godly manner; giving to God and others; sharing what we have been entrusted with; serving God and others. Each of these activities requires a commitment of time, and in order to devote the necessary time, it's necessary to be disciplined in the use of it.

It takes work, discipline, and commitment to manage our time, as well as thought, reflection, planning, and sometimes coaching or help from another person if time management isn't one of our strong points. Making the effort can make our lives happier and more fulfilling. People who are disciplined and organized in how they use their time are more likely to achieve their goals, and are at the same time less stressed or flustered than those who don't do this. Wisely using our time plays a role in our effectiveness and happiness in this life, and according to Scripture has an effect on our life to come as well.

Time Management and Balance

If you are willing to work at using your time more efficiently, as well as cutting out time wasters, you will gain more time for the things that are valuable to you, such as being with your loved ones, learning things you're interested in, and working toward reaching your personal goals, whether practical or spiritual or both. Effective time management can also eliminate stress in your life.

There are plenty of books, websites, courses, and time management tips that you can avail yourself of to help you use your time wisely. I found it helpful to do an Internet search on "how to stop wasting time," which supplied numerous articles on ways to use my time more efficiently. You may want to do an audit of your time, and if so, a search for "time audit" will provide some ways to evaluate how you presently use your time.

We should watch out about wasting time on activities which either have little or no value, or which absorb an inordinate amount of time in relation to their value. Some things are fine in small doses, but can easily encroach on our time if we're not disciplined. For example, I really like to watch some TV series. While they serve as an avenue of relaxation for me, which is a benefit, I can also spend too much time watching them. Unless I discipline myself and set limits, I could end up spending many hours on something that has no eternal value—time which could be put to much better and more godly use. Relaxing and resting is important, but it's easy to cross the line from using some time for relaxation to wasting time on activities that steal hours away from the most useful and worthwhile endeavors, or even the things that are most personally fulfilling.

In relation to the use of time as a Spiritual Discipline, it helps to take to heart what the Bible teaches about the afterlife as a motivator to use the time we are given by God for godly purposes and to live in accordance with His Word and will. Being good stewards of the time we have, disciplining ourselves in the use of it, devoting time to developing and strengthening our spiritual lives and our connection with God, and avoiding wasting this precious gift, helps us to be productive in this life and *lay up treasures in*

heaven.^[8] By using your time for godliness, for helping others, for sharing the Gospel, you will *lay up treasure for yourself as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that you may take hold of the life that is truly life.*^[9]

Invest your time wisely.

^[1] Romans 14:12.

^[2] 8,784 hours in a leap year.

^[3] Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15–16 NAS).

^[4] 1 Corinthians 3:11–15.

^[5] James 4:14 NIV.

^[6] Psalm 31:15.

^[7] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1991), 135.

^[8] Matthew 6:20.

^[9] 1 Timothy 6:19, paraphrased.