

TIME MARGIN



RECALL

Discuss Your Experience:

From Sunday's message we learned that time is a valuable resource and the way we spend our time reveals our priorities. What time management issue brings the most tension into your life?

Icebreaker:

On one piece of paper have someone list their top three priorities 1. 2. 3. The Next person will use the same priority list but will reorder it to reflect their priorities 1. 2. 3. Then the 2nd person will write a new list for the next person to put in order.

Example:

John's List

1. Food 2. Movies 3. Job →

Mary's List

1. Husband 2. House 3. Cat →

Mary Reprioritizes John's List

1. Job 2. Food 3. Movies

Sue Reprioritizes Mary's List

1. Cat 2. House 3. Husband

Introduction:

We live in the age of instant gratification. We have instant coffee, instant replay, instant polls and instant messaging. There are countless products designed to speed us up and help us save precious time. The question is what are we doing with the additional time that technology has provided? The truth is that the average work week is now 47 hours – up from 43 hours two decades ago and a recent Gallup Poll found that 44% of Americans consider themselves workaholics.

Work is good; work is important, but many of us have chosen work, making money and the pleasures that money can offer as our first priority. We may not admit that this is true, but our calendars prove otherwise. God has given us healthy guidelines and examples in His word to help us develop a balanced, productive lifestyle.

REVEAL

Pray For Guidance:

Now take a few moments and ask God to help you understand, grasp and apply the spiritual truths of this week's selected Bible passage.

Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 (HCSB) – The Emptiness of Pleasure

⁴ I increased my achievements. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself and planted every kind of fruit tree in them. ⁶ I constructed reservoirs of water for myself from which to irrigate a grove of flourishing trees. ⁷ I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. ⁸ I also amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I gathered male and female singers for myself, and many concubines, the delights of men. ⁹ So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. ¹⁰ All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure, for I took pleasure in all my struggles. This was my reward for all my struggles. ¹¹ When I

considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.

REFLECT

Understand the Context:

As a group, utilize your study bibles or on-line resources to help you answer as many of the following questions about the selected passage as you can. Keep in mind, these questions are intended to be a guide and you may not be able to find all of the answers or have time to address each one in the group.

- 1) Who? Who is the author? Who was the intended audience?
- 2) What? What other books in the Old Testament are considered to have been written by the same author?
- 3) When? When was it written?
- 4) Where? In what geographic location did the story take place?
- 5) Why? Why was this book written? What were the main purposes or goals of the text?

RECOGNIZE

Know the Truth(s):

Keeping in mind the context of the selected passage (see Reflect), read the Scripture as a group and carefully take note of the truth(s) and/or promises God provides. Look for God's promises, plans, provisions, & purposes. What did it mean? What does it mean? What meaning is unclear?

- 1) When reading Ecclesiastes 2 we identify that the writer is living out the philosophy of hedonism. According to Webster's dictionary the definition of hedonism is "the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life". Put another way, it is a total obsession of working toward and investing time in the pursuit of one's pleasure. Discuss and list the author's achievements. Notice how many times the author refers to himself. What do these two characteristics reveal about the author's time management priorities?
- 2) The Ecclesiastes 2 passage suggests that the author's time was spent pursuing amusement, projects, possessions, collections, entertainment and fame. Is there anything wrong with any of these individual pursuits? 2 Timothy 3 says "in the last days distressing times will come. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God". The author admits in verse 10 of Ecclesiastes 2 that he did not deny or refuse for himself any pleasure. What are the results of all his efforts and investment of time, according to verse 11? In what ways do your life and priorities resemble the author of Ecclesiastes?
- 3) The author of Ecclesiastes boasts that his greatness surpassed all who came before him. He spent all of his time working so that he could take pleasure in everything the world could offer. In Mark 8:34-38 Jesus says "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Discuss the sharp contrast between these two philosophies. How do these philosophies differ in the way time is prioritized? Which philosophy will you choose?

4) Verse 11 says “When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun.” The books of Matthew, Mark and Luke give an account of these words by Jesus. “For what does it benefit a man to gain the whole world yet lose his life?” When reading these scriptures it might cause us to think that using our time working hard and pursuing success is wrong. Is it wrong? If it isn’t wrong, what is a biblical way of using our time to achieve healthy goals? Give some examples of biblical characters that spent time working hard and prospered with God’s blessing. Read Colossians 3:22-25

RESPOND

Take Action:

You’ve now prayed asking God to Reveal Himself and help you understand the selected passage; you’ve Reflected on the context in which the passage was written; you’ve Recognized God’s timeless truths; and now you must Respond. To help determine your response, as a group, discuss the following questions:

1) Read Matthew 6:33. There is no doubt that the responsibilities and pressures of this world scream for our attention. The myriad of things pulling us in different directions make it all too easy for our time to get swallowed up in mundane, lesser matters. Those endeavors which have eternal value, then, often get relegated to the back burner. To avoid losing focus, we need to prioritize and set goals. What are some practical ways we can protect ourselves from giving into the pressures of our society? What is the promise Jesus gives in Matthew 6:33?

2) Read Ephesians 5:15-16. We all understand that time is valuable; even the lost world says “time is money”. God sees our time as a precious gift that He has given us to further His Kingdom. C.S. Lewis understood this: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.” In what ways can you adjust your time to reflect God’s priorities?

3) Read Proverbs 16:3. There are three laws attached to time that may useful for us to understand.

- Time cannot be stopped
- Time cannot be stored
- Time cannot be stretched

Since we live under the constraints that God has set in place, it is vital that we rely on Him to make the most of our time. James 1:5-7 says “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him.” What is the promise God reveals to us in Proverbs 16:3?

This Week:

Your assignment is to read Genesis 39:1-6, applying the five (5) spiritual learning steps (Recall, Reveal, Reflect, Recognize, & Respond).