

“How to Find the Time”

Genesis 1:26-2:3

Series: BELIEVE Week 18: Offering My Time

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Mike decides to finally get serious about a morning prayer time with God. Setting his alarm for 5:30 a.m., he is determined to change his routine and start the day off on the right foot. When he finally awakes to his wife’s prodding at 6:58, he kicks himself for sleeping in again. Slurping down a cup of coffee, he kisses his wife and kids and rapidly merges out into the stop and go race of the freeway, trading insults and dirty looks with the other drivers. At work Mike is greeted by a mountain of papers, an inbox of emails and a phone full of voicemail. He swears an oath to get better organized in the future. Every attempt to dig into the pile, though, is halted by a phone call or a visit from a colleague. Some of these conversations are purposeful and others only want to shoot the breeze. Mike finds himself caught up in the latter all too often. In the middle of one such coffee klatch he discovers he has 10 minutes to be at a meeting. Rushing to the table, Mike explains sheepishly, and somewhat dishonestly, he is done with the assigned project but he still needs to put the finishing touches on it. Racing home an hour later than his expected time of arrival, Mike eats a cold dinner alone and plops down in front of the TV. At 11:30 p.m. he awakes to go up to bed and, of course, with all the best intentions in the world, sets his alarm to wake up at 5:30 a.m.

Ann feels good about her decision to return to her career after taking time off to be at home when her children were small. Yet sometimes she feels like a carnival juggler spinning a multitude of plates. She would like to be at more of Devon and Adam’s school or sports events. The bills, mail and papers keep growing in piles around her bed and desk. John, her husband, complains she is always tired. He suggests they try getting away together but their full schedules rarely allow them a moment alone. Ann also misses the friends she made in the weekday Bible study at church where she could express her feelings and receive support. Most of all, Ann feels lost underneath all the competing demands of her life. “Where is there time for me?” she wonders. There was really no option. You need two paychecks to get by today and she wanted to get back to her career. But it all makes her doubt her decision.

Jimmy feels like he is moving at hyperspeed. He worries about his finals and whether he has the grades and SAT scores to get into the schools on his list. He tries to keep up with his friends on Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat. He also loves coming to Senior High Youth Group on Thursday evenings. It’s the place where he feels most connected to God. As the only believer in his family and the only active Christian among friends, youth group is his life-line to God. It keeps him strong enough to resist the temptations that come with his friends. But spring means baseball is starting for two different teams. Games and practices are on Thursdays and Sundays. Jimmy won’t quit the team but he feels he’s losing his relationship with God. There’s just not the time for both. Jimmy wants to go on a summer mission trip but it will be tough to find the time.

Mike, Ann and Jimmy are nobody ... and yet everybody. They are composite drawings of situations I hear and see in this community. As with all of us, Jimmy, Ann and Mike are trying to “find time.” There are more stories – the single parent who plays the role of mother and father, the homemaker who is always playing catch up, the empty nesters who find that instead of having more time together their busy careers are creating an emptiness between them, the person who is looking for work before the severance runs out, the retired couple that finds they are busier now than when they were working.

Are you trying to find the time? I think God has a sense of humor. He put this topic of BELIEVE on the week when we lose an hour of sleep. Our theme is Offering My Time to God. The key idea is: “I offer my time to fulfill God’s purposes” and the key question is “How do I best use my time to serve God and others?” Often, when you ask someone how they are doing they don’t say “Good” or “Fine” they say, “Busy.” Everyone is busy. Some even brag about being busy as though it is a badge of honor or a status symbol. It’s actually more like an infectious disease. Are you too busy to listen to your spouse talk about his or her day? Too busy to play catch with the kids? Too busy to rest or read a book? Too busy to help a neighbor with a problem or listen to a friend’s pain? Too busy to read God’s Word or pray to your Heavenly Father? Are you caught in crisis mode? A person in crisis mode, according to author Doug Sherman, is someone

whose goal is simply to get past the crisis of the moment, who feels victimized by the tyranny of the urgent, who dashes from deadline to deadline, appointment to appointment, expectation to expectation and – often – apology to apology.”¹

Is there an exit ramp from crisis mode? We can’t “make the time.” We all have the same 24 hours a day. But we can “find the time.”

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks have written a simple yet insightful handbook, a weapon in the war against wasting time. Its title: How to Balance Competing Time Demands: Keeping the Five Most Important Areas of Your Life in Perspective. Some people say “Time is Money.” But I believe time is far more valuable than money. You can always make more money. But once you spend time, it’s gone. And that’s why spending time in a wise and godly way is essential if we want to be more like Jesus. Written from a Christ-centered perspective, this is not just about time management.

It’s about how to put your work in its proper perspective with the rest of your life. In fact it’s about how to honor Christ with your whole life, pursuing biblical balance in every area of your life.²

From their point of view, our lives are out of balance and too busy. First, we allow our careers to consume a large, disproportionate size of our limited time. Some of us may be obsessed with work. Perhaps we worship our work. Others may be bored by their job to the point of hating it. Or maybe you enjoy your career and find it satisfying. How you

¹ Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, How to Balance Competing Time Demands, (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1989) p. 13-14.

² Ibid, p. 14.

feel about work is not the problem. The trouble arises when you give your work the lion's share of your time and let the other areas of your life fight for the leftovers.

A fixation on career success, whether that success is measured in dollars, power, applause, fame, votes, whatever – is a sure way to get life out of balance. That's because God never intended life to be devoted primarily to work.³

In our culture, you are measured by what you do, what you make, what you own. By contrast, Biblical success means pleasing God with your whole life, including your work. You may think these authors are against work. Far from it. They know your work matters to God. Work is a gift from God. The primary purpose of work is not to please you but to please God. Not to serve yourself but to serve God and those around you. God wants you to bring your career back into balance with the other areas of your life.

“Okay,” someone might respond, “then I'm going to put God first, my family second, and my work third. If I can just maintain this hierarchy, everything will fall into place.” This sounds good. But such a hierarchy, according to Doug Sherman, is the other reason we fail to balance all our commitments. It sets up a conflict between family and career, between career and God, between God and family and so on. Life is rarely a choice between one and the other. Besides, Jesus does not want us to choose between God, family, work and the other areas. The Bible teaches us to serve God in our family, to serve God at work, to serve God in our personal life, to serve God in our community and to serve God in our church. Moses in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New say the greatest commandment is to

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22: 34-40).

God is not simply the top on a list of priorities. He is the Lord of all areas of life.

Instead of the God, family, work hierarchy, Sherman and Hendricks propose another solution. From a survey of Scripture, they identify five areas that are **equally** important to God: Personal Life, Family, Work, Church and Community. In the first chapter of the Bible, God issues instructions for these five dimensions of life.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28)

After creating man and woman in His image, He blesses them and commands them 1) to be fruitful – start families, 2) increase in number and fill the earth – create communities, 3) tend and rule the earth – go to work. When creation is finished it says,

³ Ibid. p. 41.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2-3)

In these verses God establishes the Sabbath for 4) worship and for 5) personal rest and refreshment. From the dawn of creation, God intends these five areas of life to exist in balance. No one takes priority over the others, all are under the Lordship of Christ, each is a way to serve and honor Christ.

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks call these five areas “The Pentathlon.” The Pentathlon was the culmination of the ancient Greek Olympics. It consisted of running, jumping, spear-throwing, discus and wrestling. The modern pentathlon comprises fencing, swimming, horse riding, running and pistol shooting – all in one day. In order to win, a Pentathlete must do well in all five sports. You cannot practice one or two and ignore the others or you will be disqualified. There must be training for each of the competitions. A Pentathlete is required to develop different skills. And though no athlete is ever perfect in all events, he or she continually works at improving all five.

In the same way, a Christian must spend time on all five areas. You can’t major in one or two and neglect the others. Each area takes practice and effort. Being a parent requires different skills than those called for in the workforce or at church or in local community organizations. And while no one ever reaches perfection, the goal is steady improvement and growth in all five. Is it difficult? Only if you expect to win a gold medal on your first try. But little steps of growth in each area eventually pay off. Paul accepted the challenge. In I Corinthians 9 he describes his efforts to become all things to all people. He works hard to meet the needs of the different groups to whom he preaches the Gospel: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free people.

Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (I Corinthians 9:24-25).

Don’t run wildly, Paul advises. Train hard and you will receive the prize of a balanced, Christ-centered life.

The chart in your bulletin lists the five areas down the left side and the seven days of the week along the top. Take some time this week and evaluate yourself. Where did you invest your time? What received the lion’s share? What was ignored? What changes can you make to bring more balance to your life? Obviously, no single plan is right for everyone just as no single training schedule fits every athlete. But as you put it down on paper and look at your week, you’ll discover how to love God with all your time, all the time. Don’t waste time, it may cost you.

Doug Sherman shared this story of a man involved in one of his seminars who let his work eat up more and more of his life. He started staying at work later and later, neglecting his wife and children. He told them it was just a temporary thing – just six or

eight months. After all, his business was booming and he wanted to ride the rocket all the way to the moon. In fact, he told them it was for *their* benefit. After he made a killing, he explained, he would be able to cut back and give them the attention they deserved. Soon it became weekends at work too. In fact, this man's entire life boiled down to his job and a Sunday school class he taught. For months this dragged on as his industry broke all-time records.

One Friday night his wife nagged him into taking a break and going out to dinner with another couple. Reluctantly, he went, and they had a great evening. In fact, as he and his wife retired for the night, he thought about how his life couldn't be better.

At 7 a.m. the next morning, this man awoke to find movers in his bedroom. Uniformed guys were packing up boxes, hauling furniture, and rolling up carpets. In fact, they asked him to get out of bed so they could dismantle it. Startled, he scrambled out of bed and staggered down the hall where his wife was directing traffic. He demanded to know what was going on, at which point she handed him a sheaf of divorce papers. She was leaving him, taking the children and the furniture. He could have the house.

Start spending time wisely now, before it's too late.