BIBLE STUDY

The Time of Our Lives



RESONATE

The Time of Our Lives

Time to Work

The pressures of work can weigh on us but we know it is a necessary part of our schedules. The Word of God teaches us how to manage this area of life. This week we will learn about time management at our vocations.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:22

In one of my first jobs, I worked for a tyrant. This man would yell at us depending on his mood for the day. He would lie, deceive, and cheat others in order to push his agenda through. He scared me. Many times I left his presence in tears. I saw him break others down as well. It was horrible.

Some of you have a similar work environment. You may dread going to the office because of who is in charge or because of who sits in the cubicle next to you. I want you to know that I am sensitive to what you may be going through. The verse we will study today will not be an easy one to read but please bear with me as we explore its truths.

Colossians 3:22

Verse 22: I felt like a slave at my job but in reality I was free to leave. I could have quit at anytime and I am sure my tyrannical boss would have enjoyed my resignation. This verse, however, was written to true slaves, people who were living under the bondage of another human being. From history we know the brutality of slavery in our nation. Sadly, this cruel practice has been occurring throughout the world for thousands of years.

Picture a slave, someone forced into servitude to another. Imagine the atrocities this person may have experienced at the hands of someone else. Can you feel their shock as they read this verse? We get upset because our boss passed us over for a promotion. These people were being forced to live for and serve another yet the Lord tells them to "obey".

God does not agree with slavery. But since this culture allowed this evil practice, God was showing them a way to hold up Christ even in their unjust situations. If slaves were called to do this, how much more should we since we only work for or with someone instead of being enslaved to them.

When you are asked to do something by your boss, do it. Even if it may not seem the best course of action, do it. If you can voice your opinion, then share your thoughts but if it is not an open environment, then follow the course of action your employer has stated. You show reverence to the Lord by following through at work.

There was a secretary at my work who only would do what she wanted to do. If her employer gave her directions on something but she did not agree with it, she would flat out refuse to get it done. Sometimes the secretary would lie about attempting the project but later claim she was not able to complete it. Yet, she always wondered why she received low scores on

her evaluations. The secretary did not know that disobeying God's command of obeying her employers led to the problems at work.

When we choose to honor God by honoring our employer, we can alleviate some of the stress of our jobs. Instead of fighting to get our way, we can just allow our employer to have his. We know that he is ultimately responsible for his poor decisions. But, we are responsible for doing our best in whatever is asked of us. When we do our best, God is pleased no matter what the outcome may be.

Obeying in action only, though, is not enough. The attitude behind the action must also be pleasing to God. We can say "yes, I will do that" and still slam a door, gossip to other co-workers, or roll our eyes. The words do not match our attitude. God wants us to follow through not only in action but in attitude as well.

I struggled with this. When I worked for "my tyrant" I would often gossip about his abuse to others. It was wrong of me to do. I did not have a good attitude and usually when he walked into the room I would emotionally shut-down. Where laughter had been in my office only moments before, I would meet him with a forced greeting. My attitude did not match my obedience.

From my many mistakes I can honestly tell you that what I am writing today is not easy. But this does not get us off the hook. God calls us to obey those in authority over us. By obeying that earthly authority, we honor our Heavenly Authority. How much honor is God receiving by your attitude and your follow through at work?

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to honor Him at your work.

Do you have a difficult time following orders at work? If so, what do you think causes this?

How will you follow through on projects or tasks at work even if you do not agree with them?

In what ways have you showcased a poor attitude at work?

Do you need to apologize to anyone at your workplace?

How will you improve your attitude?

Side note: If your employer asks you to do something immoral or illegal then do not follow his directions. That would bring dishonor to the Lord and He is your main priority.

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:22

When I worked as a counselor on night shift, sometimes there was nothing to do. Our jobs were dependent upon the police calling us about runaways. No calls meant no work and there was little else to do in our one room office. My co-workers and I would sit around and talk after all of our paper work was caught up. One night around 8:30 p.m. we were discussing events of the day when suddenly we heard people walking up to our office. One of the counselors threw open our journal log pretending to write in it and grabbed the phone as if she was going to make a call. The people who ended up walking into the office were a quartet that the guy I was dating had hired to sing a song to me for Valentine's Day. As sweet as that was, nothing compared to watching that counselor's face turn bright red as she realized we had caught her being fake about her work because she thought the boss was dropping in. We laughed about that long after she left the job. It taught us all a lesson.

All of us from time to time put on a show about our work. Yet, this fakeness dishonors God. He wants us to do what is right whether the boss is walking in on us or not.

Colossians 3:22

Verse 22: We studied this same verse yesterday but today I want to narrow in on the phrase "not only when their eye is on you". We need to always give our best performance. To know how to do this, we need to forsake ways that are not "our best":

Playing video games on work time Shopping on-line Taking extra long breaks Prolonging lunch Exaggerating our work performance Taking credit for other's ideas Sitting around talking about nothing but changing it to a work conversation when the boss comes in Bringing office items home for our personal use Breaking policy rules about personal e-mails or phone calls Belittling the boss or gossiping about him when he is not around Sleeping on the job Running personal errands while out for a work errand Coming to work late Leaving work early

That is just a few examples. You may be able to think of more. These are ones that I've done or have worked with others who have done them. Sadly, all of these dishonor God. Ultimately, He is the "Boss" over all of us and His eye is always on us even though our earthly boss may walk out of the room.

Sometimes the pressures of work may build because we are wasting time avoiding work instead of finishing the tasks that need to be completed. Then we have more piled on the

next day because we did not complete our to-do list in a timely manner. This often leads to delays and excuses which could have been avoided if we had worked when we were supposed to work.

Not only is it not right to abuse work time, it is unfair to our family when we have to bring work home because we squandered the day. When you are with your family, you need to be present with them. When you are at work, do your work so you will not drain your precious family time.

Another abuse at work is not staying up to date. In most fields, you need to grow in the latest technology, research, tools, etc. It is only right for the people you are working with and the people you are working for that they should receive the best and that best may be something you need to educate yourself on.

I am about to tell you something frightening. My mom who worked in the medical field for over 35 years told me that some doctors do not stay up to date on the latest research and technology. They would treat patients with medicines that have since been replaced or did not know of new technology that could help people with certain ailments. That upset me. I may be treated by a lazy doctor who has not kept up with research to know the best ways to care for my medical needs.

Just as the people in the medical field must stay up to date, so should the rest of us. Every field provides opportunities to learn more and grow in our professional skills. This will help you to give your best at work.

To radically change our work habits requires intense effort on our part. Hopefully, you will be rewarded and “win the favor” of your employer. But this cannot be your main motivation. There will be times when you won’t get the raise, no one says “thank you”, the promotion will be given to someone less qualified, or the deal still does not go through. What do you do then? You will need to rest in the fact that you showed respect to God by doing your best at work. By not cutting corners, you can be confident instead of ashamed in your work. Then, even if your boss does suddenly walk in, you will have no need to fear (or grab a phone to pretend to make call.)

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Confess anything that you are doing that is not right at work.

What are you doing at work that needs to stop?

How do you need to improve your work performance?

What step will you take to get updated about research, technology, skills, machinery, etc. at your workplace?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:23-25

In college, we received our grades by mail. At the end of one semester I received an F in biology. I was shocked. I had carried an A in that class so how was it possible that my final grade was an F? After numerous phone calls, I finally reached the professor. She informed me that my final project had never been turned in. The final project had been a group collaboration. One of the group member's responsibilities was to type up the research the rest of us had done and to turn the report in. She failed to follow through on her task. Thankfully, the professor overturned my grade upon finding out the name of this girl: she was known by the professor as a poor student.

We have a reputation in our schools, in our homes, and in our workplaces. You know the people who work hard and those who do not. When a major project at work comes up, you know who you do not want on the team because they often do not follow through. You also know the person you desire to work with because they get the job done. As believers, we are called to always be the responsible workers.

Colossians 3:23

Verse 23: We are to work with all of our hearts. This is not a halfway effort. This is not about doing a mediocre job. This is tackling everything with gusto. You want your boss to be so impressed with you that he always wants to hire Christians because they are the best workers. Are you giving the Christian workforce a good or bad name?

Bob Coy is a famous preacher in Ft. Lauderdale. He shares openly about how after he became a Christian all he wanted to do was help out at the church. One of the ministers took him aside and confronted him about his neglect of his job in order to do "church work". He taught Bob that ministry is everywhere and that his poor example at work was hurting the name of Christ.

Our work habits are a witness to those around us. If you are failing on the job and causing others to have to pick up your slack, why would they want to hear about your relationship with Christ? If they are irritated with you, they do not care to know your God. But if you do a wonderful job, then others around you will be more willing to hear about your Lord and Savior. Your work is a witness. What are you telling the world?

Our motivation to work with all our heart is beyond winning those around us over. The main goal is to please our Lord.

Colossians 3:24

Verse 24: Did you know that you will be rewarded for the work you are doing? Most people only think ministers get rewarded by God for their work. This is not true. Every person is commended by God for the job they did in their workplace. Your work is holy unto God. You are not a businessman. You are a businessman working for the Lord and He will reward your work. The same goes for housewife, accountant, dentist, secretary, custodian, manager. All jobs are unto God and will be rewarded by God if you do your work in a way that serves Him. He gifted you to be doing your job so when you do your job well, He wants to reward you! Isn't that amazing?

While it is a wonderful truth that we will be rewarded in eternity, there is a flip side as well. If we are poor workers on earth, we will be penalized on earth.

Colossians 3:25

Verse 25: Just because we are believers, God is not going to promote us at work. In fact, if we are giving Him a bad name, He will make sure we know it. Sometimes people lament "Why didn't I get that promotion, God" yet everyone else at work knows the other person deserved it. Our prayer life does not give us the "inside edge" for a better job. Instead, our work habits are rewarded because we prove ourselves faithful then God opens the doors for us.

If you are having troubles at work, evaluate your work performance. Do not look at the other people on the job and compare yourselves to them. You need to evaluate yourself as an employee of the Lord. If you can honestly say that you are working with "all your heart" then ask God for his help with your work troubles. If you realize that you are not giving your all at your job, then improve your performance. This may be what will turn your work problems around.

You have a holy calling. Whatever your job may be, your workplace is holy ground, for it is unto the Lord. Treat it with the respect and wholeheartedness that it deserves.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Thank God that He is so gracious and wants to reward your faithful service at your job.

Are you working with “all your heart”? If not, how can you improve?

Does your work portray a good or bad witness? What may need to change?

How do you feel about the truth that you will be rewarded for your work?

What are your thoughts about God penalizing your poor work performance?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:1

I heard about a business splitting. One of the owners I knew was a Christian. The employee going with this Christian businessman said "I'll stick with him even though I have to keep after him. He wants a lot but he is cheap. But it does guarantee me jobs. Yet, I have to keep telling him, what you want and the price you are willing to pay, doesn't add up." He was asking for "Lexus" work while paying a "KIA" price. God rebukes this type of attitude.

Colossians 4:1

Verse 1: Every employer should give what is "right" and "fair" to their employees. No worker should feel as if they are being cheated, used, or overworked. The employer is to take care of his employees.

At one place I worked, I remember a secretary summing up the workplace. She said, "Every since they hired him to be in charge, more doors have been closed". It was a literal and metaphorical truth. Morale dropped and people kept their doors shut. They would rather be alone. How is the morale in your office? If it is low, and you are in charge, the blame is yours. It is time for you to evaluate if you are treating your workers "right" and "fair".

Employers will be judged upon how they treat their employees. God is over the workplace. He wants the employer to treat the employees as the Lord treats the employer. What are some of the ways God treats us: with respect, with grace, with mercy, with encouragement. He also expects us to grow and not be stagnant. He challenges us to be more and do more. When we do fail, God rebukes us but the rebuke is always saddled with love. As an employer do you show the traits of God to others?

In the book, The Christmas Carol, a stark contrast in shown between the main character, Ebenezer Scrooge, and his former employer, Fezziwig. Scrooge was cold and calloused except for his love for money. He would deprive his employee, Bob Cratchit, of coal for the fire to save money causing poor Cratchit to freeze. Morale was obviously low. Fezziwig, on the other hand, would throw elaborate Christmas parties for his employees, spending money on them. People enjoyed working for Fezziwig. No one wanted to be around Scrooge.

As a Christian employer, your first responsibility is not to make money but to honor God. If you are seeking yourself first in the business, you are sinning at your job. You are to place the Lord first in your business and care for those who He has brought to work under you. This does not mean that if there is a problem you do not have to make the decision to fire someone. There will be tough calls; I am not minimizing the responsibility. However, everything you do must honor God by being “right” and “fair” to those around you. Your Master is watching how you run the business.

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to treat others in a way that is “right” and “fair”. This is true for both employer but also the employee.

How is the morale in your office?

What can you do to improve morale?

Are you treating each employee in a way that is “right” and “fair”? If not, what changes will you make?

As an employee, how can you pray for your employer?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

In our culture we live for the weekends. We treat work as an evil necessity that gives us the money to do what we really want. Many people strive for quick fortunes in order that they may quit working altogether. For those of us who desire to just lounge around, the Word has a strong rebuke against us.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Verse 6-15: Idleness is sin that leads to more sin (busybody). Those who refused to turn from this sin received church action against them.

Do not be idle or lazy. Do not be a busybody or gossip. These characteristics are offensive to God. The Lord takes work seriously and so should we. We must rid ourselves of idleness and replace it with doing a good job. This will involve a change in our hearts, minds, and wills. But it must be done for it is too important to neglect.

If you are only living for the weekend, it is time to evaluate your attitude toward work. You were created to work. Even in the paradise of Eden, Adam and Eve took care of the garden. In heaven, we will not be loafing around on clouds. Instead, we will be released into the creative work of serving God. Work is not to be dreaded but embraced for it brings fulfillment to our intricate personalities, talents, passions, and gifts.

For those who do have a good work ethic, teach those around you how to work in a way that pleases God. Some people do not know that their workplace is holy ground. Show them how they can serve the Lord by being faithful laborers on the job. It may transform an idler to a passionate worker.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Confess any idleness in your life.

What are your thoughts about church action being taken against idlers and busybodies?

When are you idle?

How can idleness be replaced with work?

What will you do to prevent yourself from joining in with idlers or busybodies at work?

Who can you motivate toward working for God instead of idling?

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Time Out

What does your typical week look like? Are you exhausted by just thinking about your “to do” list? Right now I have 36 items on my list and I consider that an easy week! Over the next five days we will be evaluating our schedules for the purpose of saying “no” to some things in order to say “yes” to a better system of managing our time.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:1-2

I remember one day a third grader walked into the children's ministry area looking as if he were ill. I asked him if he was feeling alright. "I'm worn out. I had an all day soccer tournament yesterday plus I'm in baseball right now. And with school and all, I'm just tired." I would be, too. This poor eight year old was already heading towards burn-out. Our schedules and our families' schedules are overloaded yet we cannot seem to figure out why we are exhausted. We have too much going on in our lives.

How do we break free from all the activities around us? We need to change our minds.

Colossians 3:1-2

> 1Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Verse 1-2: It is time for us to get a new perspective on life. The world around us is slipping away and yet we are investing all of our time and energy in things that will not matter one year from now much less one thousand years from now. We need to reprioritize our schedules and begin to cut things out that are draining our energy and not adding to eternal productivity.

I am not suggesting that all we need to do is to stay on our knees all day for the purpose of prayer. This is not a practical solution. We need to eat, work, go to school, and take care of ourselves and our families. What I am suggesting is putting life in proper order. Think through all of your activities and put them in line with eternity. Our schedules are not filled with wrong stuff but they may be so filled they keep us from what is right and best.

I have a dear friend who desires to be leading others in worship. She is in the process of writing new songs for a C.D. Her struggle is to find the time to play her keyboard. She is married, works full time at an office over 30 minutes from her home, takes care of a house, plays in the worship band which involves being at the church three days a week, and takes care of two cats! She is struggling with knowing what God is calling her to do and finding the time to obey.

But obey she must or she will miss out on the purpose for her life. Obedience does not flow out of a sense of legalistic duty but from our mind, emotions, and will. Read the verses for today again.

Colossians 3:1-2

> 1Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Verse 1-2: Our hearts (emotions) must be set on the Resurrected Christ. Our minds are also to be set on heavenly things. We can set our emotions and minds on eternal matters only if we engage our will in the matter. We must choose to view our schedules, our time, and our activities through a heavenly lens.

To live for eternity, we must know our place in eternity. It is time to discover your purpose so that you can drop the time drainers in your life and fully pursue your reason for living.

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you understand His purpose for your life.

Write down the goals for your life for the next: 6 months:

1 year:

2 years:

3 years:

4 years:

5 years:

What steps do you need to take in order to achieve those goals?

What is prohibiting your growth towards these goals?

Who will you ask to hold you accountable in reaching your goals?

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:1-2

Yesterday, we looked at our long-term goals in life. But a long-term plan is achieved by day to day steps. Change happens in increments. Would you want someone to perform surgery on you who has only dreamed of being a doctor but never had been medically trained? A real doctor must endure years of scholastic training, internships, examinations, financial burdens and so much more to achieve his dreams.

The goals you want to achieve can only happen if you will honestly evaluate your schedule. Sometime this week, set aside at least an hour to go through your schedule. Look at everything you are doing. Put each minute of your day into one of three categories:

1. Priorities-these items must remain as a part of your schedule.

2. Pleasures-these activities are ones you want to keep in your schedule but they do not have to remain.

3. Pinchers-these are activities which are wasting your time. They need to be limited or eliminated from your schedule. Some of activities may be wrong. Others may not be wrong within themselves but they are pinching away pieces of your time.

Pinchers come in many different ways. (e.g. television, e-mail, surfing the net, sports, talking on the phone, shopping, sleeping, instant messaging, going out, fantasizing, driving children to multiple activities, partying, etc.) But these distractions take away from our lives' purposes. We will study tomorrow how to deal with these Pinchers. But for now identify the pinchers in your life and then rewrite your schedule without them.

After you have removed the pinchers, review your schedule with all the Pleasures you included. Are there items in the Pleasures category that can be cut at this point in time in order to make room for what is truly important?

Evaluate each Pleasure based upon Colossians 3:1-2.

Colossians 3:1-2

> 1Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to show us how to create a schedule that pleases Him.

After evaluating your schedule, write the answers here:

Priorities:

Pleasures:

Pinchers:

Are there any Pleasures that may need to be cut away from your schedule in order to better fulfill your goals in life? If so, write them here:

Now write your finalized schedule without Pinchers of time and after some of the Pleasures have been removed. The following gives you an example of how to organize it. But write it on a separate sheet for each day of the week.

Sunday 6 a.m. 3 p.m.



7 a.m. 4 p.m.

8 a.m. 5 p.m.

9 a.m. 6 p.m.

10 a.m. 7 p.m.

11 a.m. 8 p.m.

12 noon 9 p.m.

1 p.m. 10 p.m.

2 p.m. 11 p.m.

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:5-10; Hebrews 12:1

If you have followed through in writing your schedule, then you are on your way of learning to manage your time. A written schedule and a lived schedule are very different. Activities, people, deadlines, emergencies, crisis do not adhere to what we have written in our daily planner. While there are many events beyond our control, we can be responsible for our actions in life.

Colossians 3:5-10

> 5Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Verse 5-9: We need to get rid of the parts of our lives that do not reflect Christ. No more excuses, procrastination, or justification. If you have been saved by the acceptance of Christ's work on the cross, then you need to be transformed from your old self to your new self.

We discussed time pinchers earlier this week. These pinchers steal away from our time. Hopefully, you have identified the pinchers in your life. But we cannot just remove these time thieves; we must replace them with godly ways.

The list in Colossians gives us some of the time pinchers in life: sexual Immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, and lying. These sins keep us from the ways of God which in turn undermines our goals and purposes for a life of eternal impact. We must throw them off and any other sin so we may accomplish our dreams.

Hebrews 12:1

> 1Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Verse 1-3: It requires effort to radically change your life. These new habits and ways of living do not develop overnight. You must commit to running the marathon of life, not the 50 yard dash. But once you purpose to throw off the things that are dragging you down, you will run the race to win, not just hoping to finish.

Removal of sin and the replacement of godly virtues will not take place without awareness and action. We must be aware of what should be removed and we must take action to remove it. Then, we must be aware of how to replace what has been removed. For example, my mother is a chronic worrier. She wastes a lot of time focusing on the “what ifs” in life. In recent years, she has been working to replace the worrying with praising. Her mind is going to focus on something. She can waste time worrying or she can invest in the eternal things like praising God. She is aware of what needs to be removed and she developed a plan of what to replace worry with: praise. A plan of removal and replacement will help you implement new behaviors in life.

I will be asking you to make an honest assessment of your life. I hope you are ready to look at what needs to be removed from your life. If you cannot think of anything, please ask a trusted person to guide you in this process.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Confess your sins to the Lord.

What sins need to be removed from your life?

What godly virtues need to replace the sins that you will remove?

Who will you talk to about this decision for change in your life?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:10; Proverbs 2:1-11

Radically changing our time management is beyond saying "no" to time pinchers. We also need to say "yes" to the priorities in life. One of the priorities is putting on the new self.

Colossians 3:10

> 10and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Verse 10: The only one way to put on the new self is to grow in the knowledge of God. Knowledge is never "flung" upon us; instead it must to be pursued.

Proverbs 2:1-5

> 1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, 3 and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

Verse 1-5: Many people are stuck in the same bad habits. For years, they cannot get past their pain, their past, their addictions, or whatever else may hang them up. By the way, that past sentence relates to every one of us. All of us still have lingering effects from our sin nature as well as the effects from the sins of others. Those of you who think you have it all together, you are dealing with something worse: pride. Confess this sin and honestly evaluate yourself and let us all press forward in truth together. The truth is: we all need help, we all need growth, we all need more of Christ than what we have now. But we can only attain more life through knowledge.

Knowledge is the key to change. The more you know, the more you can make better choices in life. Many of our time problems stem from poor choices. But to go from poor choices to wise one, we must have knowledge of what would be better for our lives.

I hate to exercise yet I do it three times a week. Is it because I like to torture myself? Some days I feel like that is exactly what I am doing. But the real reason that I exercise stems from the knowledge I have about healthy living. This knowledge led me to change my sedentary lifestyle into a more active one.

If you know there are changes you need to make in life then gather knowledge on that subject. If your time is filled with work because everyone dumps on you since they know that you will never say “no”, then it is time to learn about boundaries. If you are struggling with an addiction, then get around people with more knowledge than you to help (e.g. counseling, treatment centers, AA, etc.). If overeating is your struggle, then it is time to discover what causes you to eat and how to create a plan of weight loss that works with your body type. There are diet experts who can help you do this. Stop being victimized by lack of knowledge. Pursue knowledge in your problem area through books, friends, professionals, videos, sermons, etc. This requires time and effort but the benefits are worth it!

Proverbs 2:6-11

> 6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, 8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. 9 Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. 10 For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. 11 Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Verse 7-11: These verses tell us the benefits of knowledge: victory, protection, understanding, good decisions, wise heart, knowledge, pleasant soul, discretion. Would you desire to be victorious in life? Do you want to be protected from bad decisions? Would you like to make decisions and know that they are good and wise? All of this can happen if we pursue knowledge. It is a choice. The benefits are worth the effort.

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Praise the Lord who is the source of wisdom and knowledge.

What parts of your life do you want to change?

What knowledge would be beneficial for you to change?

How will you pursue this knowledge?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:11, 1

I do not know what changes you desire to make in life. However, I hope that yesterday stirred your heart to realize the key to change is knowledge. While knowledge is the key, Christ is the power.

Colossians 3:11

> 11Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Verse 11: The Message paraphrase of the Bible puts the verse this way:

> Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ.

You are included in Christ. Your past no longer has to define you. All that matters is Christ. If you are a believer in Him, then He is your new definition in life. Before Him, you were a wretched sinner. Now the very Spirit of God lives in you. He is transforming you into the image of Christ.

Some of us are so stuck with the old labels that we cannot move forward in Christ. A label can be as small as "the one who is always late" to as harmful as "worthless". Jesus is saying, do not let the past labels define you, let Me define you.

I want to speak honestly to those of you who have tried to change your life before but have failed. You think you will never be victorious. Brother or sister, I have been there. I had labels on me that never seemed to peel off. But God was faithful even when I was faithless. He has given me a new name, a new label: Christ Jesus. I, in myself, am not worthy of such a noble label. But you see, it's not about me. Christ called me His own. It's not about you. He has placed His name upon you. Through Him, change is available.

Colossians 3:1

> 1Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Verse 1: We have come back to the beginning. The reasons to make changes in our lives are not so that we will be happy, healthy, and holy, though these are wonderful benefits. The

reason is that we have been raised with Christ. His death and resurrection has allowed us the opportunity to be transformed. It is out of our gratitude for what He did for us that we make efforts to pursue change in our lives.

In day 2, we discussed priorities in life. Christ is the ultimate priority. In response to who He is and what He has done for us, our lives cannot continue the way they have been. It is time for a change.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Praise Jesus for raising us from the spiritual dead.

What “labels” do you wear?

How do they prevent you from being transformed into the image of Christ?

How does the death and resurrection of Christ encourage change in your life?

BIBLE STUDY

The Time of Our Lives



RESONATE

The Time of Our Lives

Family Time

Each family offers a unique set of pressures. Managing families while keeping up with the demands of our schedules often requires more than what we have to give. This week we will discover balance in the midst of priorities.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today’s Scripture: Colossians 3:12-14

When I review my past, I can readily see that the people who have frustrated me the most have been my family. Not only that, they have received the backlash of my negative emotions over the years as well. You probably can relate. Families seem to bring out the worst in us, yet they are the ones we love the most. What needs to be our attitude towards our family?

Colossians 3:12-14

> 12Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Verse 12-14: There are seven virtues which need to be apparent in our relationships: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. Here is a definition for each:

Compassion: Mercy, the aspect of God’s love that causes Him to help the miserable…because God is merciful, He expects His children to be merciful.

Kindness: God’s loyal love and favor toward His people…God’s long-suffering love-His determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion…Because God has been gracious toward believers, they should treat all people with kindness

Humility: A freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God…Jesus is the supreme example of humility

Gentleness: Kindness, consideration, a spirit of fairness and compassion…Christians should have a spirit of gentleness toward all people

Forgiveness: The act of excusing or pardoning another in spite of his slights, shortcomings, and errors. As a theological term, forgiveness refers to God’s pardon of the sing of human beings…God’s forgiveness of us demands that we forgive others…

Love: A high esteem which God has for His human children and the high regard which they, in turn, should have for Him and other people.

(Taken from: Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

Did you notice how God has these qualities and showcases them towards us? He is asking us to treat others in the same way that He treats us. Because we have received: compassion kindness, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and love from Him; we need to pass it on.

This sounds so simple, “just pass it on”, but we know that it is the hardest thing to do. We give the advice so easily. A friend of mine is struggling at work. I told her that she needed to forgive the antagonist and act with kindness. Well, only a few days later, I was on the receiving end of a difficult situation. How did I respond? With irritated words, a bad attitude, and with much criticism. Advice was easy to give but not easy to live.

How do we live out this truth? It all comes down to focus. If we focus on God and what He has done for us and His feelings towards us, we can pass His ways on. If our focus is on the person who irritates us, drains us, or is just different from us; we will react from our ways (anger, avoidance, criticism, etc) instead of from the heart of the Lord.

Improving our family relationships begins with changing ourselves, not by attempting to change others. Only the One who is completely compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, and loving can change others and that is up to Him alone.

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to evaluate your interactions with your family.

What attitudes do you have towards your family instead of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love?

What godly virtues do you need to replace your bad attitudes with?

Who do you need to ask forgiveness from because of your previously wrong attitudes?

How will you nurture change in your life?

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:15

Rules govern every game. The rules keep playing fair. When rules are broken, the integrity of the person is ruined. For athletes, mistakes made can follow them throughout their career. Pete Rose is more famous for gambling than winning. Barry Bonds is on the news just as much for his supposed steroid use as his home runs. Broken rules leads to broken reputations.

There is a rule that governs relationships. This one rule protects our integrity more than anything else. The rule is peace. Without peace, we can do things, say things, and react in ways that can hurt our relationships and our reputations.

Colossians 3:15

> 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Verse 15: To understand peace is to understand it antonyms. The opposite of peace is fighting, arguing, and strife. These outward actions stem from inward attitudes or thoughts: my rights have been violated, that person was rude to me, I didn't get what I deserved, I want more out of life, etc. Countries have gone to war because they have refused to be governed by peace. True peace is not a signed treaty but an attitude of the heart.

We are unable to keep countries from fighting but we can control the "wars at home". To minimize arguing with others, we need to allow peace to reign over our lives.

I want to expel a false idea about peace. Many assume peace is avoiding confrontation or ignoring problems or even just keeping your thoughts and opinions to yourself. None of these are true. Peace is not hiding the truth but bridging to others in truth. For example, we sinned against God. When Adam and Eve ate that fruit, they declared war against God. Because of sin, we are eternally separated from the Lord. But He loved us so much that He sent His Son as a sacrifice. God wanted peace between us so He was willing to die so we may live. He did not lower the standards of truth, sin is still sin. However, He made a way for us to be in a relationship with Him. Peace cost Him everything; it was not the easy way out.

On a smaller scale, we are to be peacemakers. We are to sacrifice our "rights" for others. When I am offended, I do not force the person to "repay" me. I do not hold a grudge or demand retribution. Instead, I forgive the person so our relationship can be ruled by peace. I do not deny that the person has sinned against me yet I do not focus on the sin but instead

turn my focus on reconciliation.

Part of this focus on reconciliation may be confronting the person on his or her sin. This should only be done after prayer and with a heart of love. God is our example of this. He confronts us in our sin not because He gets pleasure in showing us our shortcomings but because he wants us to repent of our sin to have greater intimacy with Him. The purpose of confrontation is not “look what you did” but “look who you can become”. It wants to help people grow in Christ.

Sadly, this truth of confrontation has been lost in the church. I knew a man who was head of a committee on a church board. Many ministers came and went who complained, gossiped, and whined about this man and his sin of power and control. Yet no one spoke to him about it. I remember a “celebration” took place when this man was rotating off the committees. I said, “Should we not discuss with this man about his sin so he can grow in the Lord instead of manipulating behind the scenes for his removal? Isn’t our responsibility to help him? He may not even know he is doing anything wrong.” I was told that his no longer being on a committee was a “handling of the problem”.

True peacemakers loves others more than ourselves. If this church staff truly loved this man, they would have risked being uncomfortable and confronted him so that he could be at peace with God and with others. When we love ourselves over others, we will not risk our reputations, our comfort zones, our security, our need for approval or anything else to bring peace into our relationships. Seeking peace is always a risk. God chose to seek peace through His Son Jesus Christ even though He knew many would reject Him, yet He sent Jesus anyway.

Our families need to be ruled by peace. If you look at the verse again it states “since as members of one body you were called to peace”. Can you imagine if all the parts of your body decided to go in its own direction? You would be torn apart. But because the body is controlled by the head, your body works together and keeps you together. The same is true for a family. In order to keep from being torn apart, you need to allow peace to rule over you. Peace will guide everyone in a direction that is beneficial to all and will knit your hearts together.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Confess any relationships in your life where you have not allowed peace to reign.

Summarize your thoughts about peace.

What false notions did you have about peace? For example, did you think it meant avoiding others?

How can you allow peace to reign over your family and other relationships?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:15

Yesterday we learned about peace. I hoped you were as overwhelmed as I was about cultivating peace in all relationships. But the Word of God has never commanded anything that it was not willing to help us achieve. The Word has given us a way to nurture peace with others.

Colossians 3:15

> 15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Verse 15: More than any other discipline in life, thankfulness will help you live in peace. When you turn your attention on what to be thankful about instead of what irritates you, you can enjoy your relationships instead of dreading them.

Most homes are broken because the negatives have been magnified and the positives minimized. When all you look for is the bad, then all you will see is the bad. But if you will turn your attention on what is good then more good will be apparent. Instead of criticizing others, we need to look at reasons to be thankful. For example, my grandparents have an opinion on everything and if you disagree with them then they believe that something is wrong with you. I often get frustrated with their need to tell me how life should be. When I focus on their abrasive ways, I want to avoid them. But when I search for things in them to be thankful for (they love animals; they like to laugh; they give me magazines) then I can once again enjoy their presence without pent up irritation or anger.

I don't know who you may be struggling to live in peace with. Maybe your husband frustrates you because the projects around the house are left undone. Suppose you quit focusing on what he is not doing and begin thanking God and him for what he is doing: like working, or spending time with the children, or going to church, etc. Or maybe your child is going through the "my parents are stupid" stage. You can begin thanking the Lord for this transitional phase of your child learning to go from dependence to independence. Thank your child as well for anything positive you see in him. Cultivating thanksgiving will build peace in the home.

Now I want to make a disclaimer: you do not have to be thankful about every person. Some of you have experienced terrible things at the hands of another. Others have been wounded in deep ways. You do not have to be thankful for evil people or their evil intentions. However,

this does not excuse you from being thankful. Instead it just changes the focus. For example, Beth Moore, the famous author and speaker was abused as a child. She will never be thankful for the person who victimized her. Yet, she has expressed her thankfulness to God that He now allows her to minister to women all over the world who have suffered in similar circumstances. She is thankful how the Lord has healed her from her past and now she can teach others how to overcome their pain. By being thankful for what God has done, she can let go of the anger and live in peace within herself and teaching others the way to peace.

Every day we can choose strife or peace. The road of peace is paved with thanksgiving. Begin to pour it out today.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Thank the Lord for the people in your life.

What specific ways are you thankful for your family or other relationships in your life?

How can you focus on these positives instead of negatives?

When will you express your positive thoughts to them?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:16-17; Proverbs 22:6

How would you feel if a teacher in your child's school never was prepared to teach the children anything? Instead, she put on videos all day and just let them hang out and eat snacks. What if you confronted the principal about it and he said, "Well, she's doing the best she can." Would you remind the principal that a teacher is supposed to teach and not baby sit? Would you remove your child from the class?

If you are a parent, then you, too, are a teacher. How would you evaluate the lessons that you are teaching your children?

Colossians 3:16

> 16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Verse 16: To teach the ways of God, you must know the ways of God. We are commanded that the word should dwell in us "richly" or abundantly. I have heard people complain that they do not have the time or the ability to study God's Word. Yet, these same people can tell me all about the latest T.V. shows, sport statistics, movies, and so much more. The time and ability is there, however, it is channeled into everything else but the Word of God.

God wants us to know His Word so that we may teach and encourage one another with it: parents to children, children to parents, friends to friends, teachers to student, students to teachers, everyone knowing and sharing the Word with one another. At the end of our lives, that is all we will be held accountable for-knowing and living the ways of God.

So, teacher, how are you doing? Can your children say they are learning the ways of God from you? Not only are you to teach the ways of God, you are to sing it as well. Look back at the verse: "sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs". Is your music reflecting Christ? What about the music videos you watch?

Does this standard seem high? The next verse raises the bar higher.

Colossians 3:17

> 17And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Verse 17: In every thing we say and do we are to live for Christ. Let's get a little more personal: the way we talk to our children should reflect Christ. The T.V. shows we watch should be pleasing to Christ. The activities we are choosing to be a part of should honor Christ. The language we use should not embarrass the name of Christ. (By the way, the phrase "Oh my God" is taking the Lord's name in vain and is sin.) Are you overwhelmed? You should be. This is impossible on our own. But we need to make steps towards Christ-likeness. In order to do that, we need to be realistic about where we are and choose to take specific steps towards change. In order to do this, we must stop justifying (it's not that bad) or rationalizing (I'm the only one this effects). Instead, we must face the truth that God is calling us to Himself for transformation.

Your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, your great-great grandchildren are affected by you. People you will never meet are influenced by you because you are handing down lessons. Are the lessons you are teaching drawing others closer to or farther away from God? This is serious business.

Proverbs 22:6

> 6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

Verse 6: You have the responsibility to train your children. What are you training them to be? Godly parents will invest the ways of God into their children who will in turn grow up to be godly men and women. But to teach godliness, you yourselves must know the pathway of godliness. Children will learn more from your actions than your words.

Turn to God and ask for His help in this process for you cannot do this alone. He will help you and guide you. But you must be willing to invest time into this new way of life. You can't just act godly one day and speak the Word of God to your children for one day and expect them to totally change. You must commit for the long haul.

For those of you whose children are grown, you cannot change the past but you can determine to make a better future. Choose to change your ways and it may still influence your children. Not only that, there may be grandchildren you can encourage in the ways of God.

Some of you do not have children so you think you are off the hook. Reread verses 16- 17. This is a calling for all of us to know the ways of God and to teach and encourage one another in it. I just focused on families but it applies to you as well.

I hope all of us will be encouraged to take steps towards letting the word of Christ dwell richly, as compared to poorly, in us. How rich or how poor are you?

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Thank the Lord that His Word can transform our lives.

Are you rich or poor in the Word of God? How can you increase the “treasure”?

Who can you teach and encourage?

What needs to be cut away from your life so that you can make time for God?

When can you teach your children (or others) about the ways of God? How will you incorporate teaching your children (or others) on a daily basis?

There are many practical resources in helping to do this. On line you can go to Focus on the Family for practical tips, books, and so much more. In fact, they have a handy resource called “Plugged In On-line” which helps parents screen movies, T.V. shows, and music. This may help in discerning what is more appropriate for the family. If you know of any other resources, please share them with your group.

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 3:18-21

Vulnerability of the enemy shows the character of a man.

When I was in school, I was one of the few who enjoyed reading every book assigned in English class. Most of my friends would buy the cliff notes and considered that a hard enough read.

Today we are going to do the "cliff notes" of family relationships. We will look at the summary of the roles and responsibilities of the family. While this is not all encompassing, it gets us started in having quality family time.

Colossians 3:18-21

> 18Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Verse 18-21: If you want to evaluate whether or not you are doing your part for the family, reread those verses. Put it into question form:

If you are a wife: Did I submit to my husband today? If you are a husband: Did I show love and kindness to my wife today? If you are a child: Did I obey my parents today? If you are a father: Did I encourage my children today?

If you can answer "yes" then celebrate the Lord helping you to be like Him. If you answer "no" then confess your sin to God and make it right with the person you offended. Then ask the Lord to help you be more like Him tomorrow.

Harmony in family relationships will happen when you do your part. That is the only thing you can do because you can't force anyone else to change or to treat you in accordance with God's Word. But at the end of your life, you will be held accountable for what you did or did not do.

The pressure of family relationships can wear on us. Hopefully, our "cliff notes" will help us to focus our attention on improving the area we need to improve. Maybe this will improve the home atmosphere which may relieve some of the pressures. Begin today in being the family member God has called you to be.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Confess your family failures and ask the Lord to help you be the wife or husband or child or father that He wants you to be.

What changes are you feeling led to make?

BIBLE STUDY

The Time of Our Lives



RESONATE

The Time of Our Lives

Break Time

In the past few weeks we have evaluated our schedules in light of eternity. We have identified time pinchers in order to eliminate them and have also made our priorities more manageable. We have hinted at the priority of the spiritual aspect of life; this week we will delve further into making our “break time” a holy time.

DAY 1 / DAY 2 / DAY 3 / DAY 4 / DAY 5

DAY 1

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:2

It is easy to detect what people are devoted to. In my house, books are prevalent. I buy books even though I have not read all the ones on my shelves. I have a friend who is obsessed with sports. He is constantly watching ESPN. His devotion to sports is very evident. My grandparents are addicted to soap operas. There is one they have watched for over thirty years!

All of us are different so what one person may enjoy may not be liked by someone else. Our different personalities, backgrounds, and interests cause us to be devoted to a variety of things. But the Word of God calls all believers to have prayer included in the list of "Things I am devoted to".

Colossians 4:2

Verse 2: When I think of someone devoted to prayer, I imagine someone on their knee praying five hours straight. That is very discouraging to me. I have a hard time staying focused for five minutes. If you feel the same way, put your mind at ease. We are not going to be studying ways to get your knees in shape so you can pray on them five hours a day. We will look at how to spend time with God in a practical and meaningful way.

First of all, when you are devoted to something, you make time for it. I am devoted to reading, but I cannot sit around all day to read. But I do set aside every day for a time for my books. In order to be devoted to prayer, we need to set aside time each day for it. Schedule your time of prayer. Put it on your calendar and keep it like you would any other meeting.

Secondly, devotion requires focus. Remove any distractions that could interfere with your prayer time. The television needs to be off. Do not answer the phone or e-mail. This is your time alone with God. Get someplace by yourself and ask to not be interrupted.

The third part of devotion is perseverance. You are not going to become a prayer warrior overnight. But each day continue to make time for prayer and to stay focus when praying. You are developing a life-long habit. Just like any habit, it takes time to develop. Press on despite obstacles.

One of the greatest obstacles will be your emotions. Some days you will feel like praying and other days you will not. You need to persevere in prayer no matter how you may feel. Make it a priority just as you do other things in life. For example, we go to work whether we feel like it or not. We sit through a child's four hour dance recital whether we feel like it or not. You

just do what you have to do. The same applies to your times of prayer.

Devotion to prayer begins with the determination to pray. It will not just happen. You need to make a plan and then carry out the plan. But it is worth the effort. Prayer will join you with the Creator, Almighty God, King, and Lord of the universe. He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He can help you and sustain you. He will surprise you with love and answered prayers. He is absolutely amazing. He is the Answer to your every need. He is willing to talk to you. Be devoted to talking to Him.

DAY 1

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to learn to be devoted to Him.

Schedule your prayer time for every day this week. What time will it be?

Where will you have your prayer time?

How will you remove any distractions so you can remain focused?

Who will you ask to hold you accountable to keeping your prayer time?

DAY 2

The Word

Today's Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30; Psalm 23

Life can be overwhelming. There are many demands and pressures on us from many different angles. It can be hard to cope with it all. I have a friend who always answers my question of "How are you?" with "Crazy". She always feels stressed by the day to day tasks of life. In her attempt to keep up, she feels that she is falling more and more behind. I can relate to how she feels.

This "crazy" life is too much for me, it is too much for you. The stressors of life can only be carried with the help of One Person. But you have to accept His offer.

Matthew 11:28

Verse 28: Are you weary? Christ is telling you to come to Him. Are you burdened? The invitation is yours as well. Do you desire rest? Jesus is willing to give it to you. Everything you need is found in Him, but you must come. Yesterday, we learned about being devoted to prayer. Now we understand some of the reasons for prayer. The prayers are not for God. He does not need our prayers; He is sufficient within Himself. Prayer is for us. We need God. Only in Him are we complete.

Matthew 11:29-30

Verse 29-30: The phrase that sticks out to me is "rest for your souls". All over the world people are searching for this rest. Some spend thousands on vacations, only to return more tired than when they left. Others search for rest in the retirement, only to find life unfulfilling. There are some who read books or visit counselors to seek guidance to the place of rest but they are left with more questions than answers. Even religion is sought for rest but many feel only burdened by rules and regulations. Everyone wants rest for our souls but the promises allude us.

Jesus guarantees this rest. If we come to Him and learn from Him, the rest will discover us. Our souls will be awakened by the gentle and humble Teacher who will lead us into refreshment of our bodies, spirit, and emotions.

Psalm 23:1-4

Verse 1-4: Restoration of the soul is the answer to our every search. We pursue people, activities, beauty enhancers, sports, and so much more in order to find this rest. Some of them give us temporary pleasures but then leave us empty. So the search continues. But God is offering us a rest that will continue. One that will not fade away. Of course this rest is not based upon circumstances for we know the roller coaster of life offers no guarantee of permanent “good times”. So, what is this rest?

Rest is experiential knowledge of who God is and thus knowing our every need is met. It is beyond knowing about the Lord but having experienced the hand of Jesus in our lives. It is facing the struggles of life with Someone. It is seeing Him do a miracle on your behalf. It is being comforted by the Counselor of our souls. It is knowing a joy that surpasses the circumstances of life and propels us to the hope of heaven. It is knowing that He truly works everything out for good on our behalf. Not that every situation will work out the way I want it to, but the way heaven wants it to. I can rest that the One with all Knowledge has a plan, that the Almighty will defend me, that the Bridegroom loves me, that the Savior has helped me, that the Judge has pardoned me, that the Creator made me. That is rest.

What are you burdened with? What is overwhelming your thoughts and emotions? Does life feel “crazy”? Go to Christ. Spend time with Him. He is waiting for you. He is willing to lead you into a life of rest. It is possible for you, for it is based on Christ not on the battles raging in your life. You can have rest on the battlefield.

Psalm 23:5-6

Verse 5-6: Despite what you may be experiencing, heaven is before you. Hold onto the promise of your glorious future. But today, hold onto the Lord. Go to Him. Speak to Him. He will walk with you through your trials, through your joys. Learn from Him. His Word will carry you. And you will experience rest.

DAY 2

Up Close and Personal

Go to Christ in prayer. Allow Him to speak to you as well.

What burdens are you carrying?

How have you searched for rest apart from the Lord?

How do we bring our troubles to Christ?

DAY 3

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:3-4; Matthew 26:36-38; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26

I still remember the day she rebuked me. I had been working in the office for a few months. I had never had a secretary before so I did not know how to hand things over to anyone else. She finally told me, "I'm here to help you. Let me do things for you." Slowly but surely I learned how to give her tasks to do. My load was immediately cut in half as she took over all of the office duties that I had been laboring over myself. I felt so free at work. I realized the importance of utilizing the help available.

We cannot carry the demands of life alone. We need one another. Often we are so pressured with things around us because we refuse to allow others to help us, or share the load, or pray for us. We must be open about our shortcomings so others can help us carry the load.

Colossians 4:3-4

Verse 3-4: Paul, the greatest missionary who ever lived, asked for prayer. He wanted others to help him carry the burden of evangelizing the nations. Paul knew that he could not handle the pressures alone. What do you need help with? Have you asked anyone to help? Is there a person whom you have shared your situation with so they can pray for you?

I am always moved by the vulnerability of Jesus. The Lord of the universe made Himself transparent before His friends. He asked for help. Think on that: the Creator asks the creation for help.

Matthew 26:36-38

Verse 36-38: Jesus wanted others to carry some of His emotional pain. In the hours before His death, the Lord wanted His closest friends to be with Him, to pray with Him. How much more do we need one another! We are not meant to journey in life alone. The pressures in life can be lightened if we would allow others to intervene to help us. But they can only do that if we let them know we need the help.

I remember a friend upon moving lamenting how no one helped her though she had the difficulties of being a single mom. I felt so bad that I had never offered to watch her children or run errands for her or clean her house. But later I recognized the fact that I would have willingly helped in anyway if only I had known her need. We must share with one another.

God has given us one another. We need each other. No one is to go through life alone. The church is the body of Christ. All of us belong to one another.



1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26

Verse 12-13, 26: Doing life together. That is the church. It is walking side by side through good times and bad, experiencing the journey with one another. You do not have to bear the pressures of life alone. There are people with whom you are connected to in Christ who will come alongside you and ease the load. All you have to do is ask.

DAY 3

Up Close and Personal

Ask the Lord to help you to open up to others and ask for help.

What do you need help with today?

Who can you share your problems with? If there is no one at this time, ask the Lord to help you find another believer with whom you can share life's burdens with.

Is there anyone you know going through a difficult time?

How can you come alongside that person and help?

DAY 4

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:5-6; Ephesians 5:29

I was in a department store when I ran into someone I knew. I had not seen this gentleman in a long time so I asked him how things were going. He began to share his struggles about his job and trying to decide whether to move or not. He was debating how the move would affect his children and so on and so forth. A woman I had not seen in over two years came over to say "hello". I had heard she was recently diagnosed with a progressive form of cancer. From everything the doctors had said, the prognosis was not good. As I listened to this man continue to tell about the difficulties of considering the move, I became more and more conscience of how trivial his story seemed when standing next to a woman who was dying.

Problems range from minor to major. When we are in the midst of trials, often we forget that others are suffering as well. I think we can get so wrapped up in our own stories that we miss opportunities to minister to others. That lady listened patiently to the man's story. She showed such kindness. I would have said, "Hey, I'm dying. Your problems are not so bad." But she didn't do that. She was willing to minister to him in spite of her own personal pain.

Colossians 4:5

Verse 5: We are told to be wise in the way we act toward outsiders, namely those outside the body of Christ. Our interactions with others encourage people away or toward the Lord. When we are too focused on ourselves, we will miss valuable opportunities to reach others with the good news of Christ.

If our schedules are too busy, when will we be able to share about the Lord? We will be too busy about our next work project or community activity then the person who needs to hear the salvation message.

I still remember the young girl sitting on the plane. She was a few years older than me, dark hair and dark eyes. I was on college break. I had been on a terrible schedule for the past few weeks due to finals and spending time with friends. I had literally been up all not so I was looking forward to sleeping on the plane. She saw me carrying my Bible and asked, "Are you afraid to fly?"

"No," I smiled, "I just like to read it."

"Why," she asked.

“Because I want to learn more about Jesus.” The stewardess came around at this point for a final check before take-off. The girl looked up at the stewardess so I took the opportunity to lay my head against the wall. I fell asleep in less than a minute. I did not wake up until the end of the flight. As soon as I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was my Bible. I recalled my earlier conversation and looked at the girl beside me. I smiled but I realized the opportunity was gone. We taxied into the airport. I tried to make small talk in order to lead back into our previous discussion but it was too late.

As she walked off she turned to look at me and said with a smile, “Enjoy reading your Bible.” I was so ashamed. I was not wise in my opportunity. My busy schedule led me to desire sleep over being a witness. I will never forget that sinking feeling as I looked back down at my Bible.

Colossians 4:6

Verse 6: Our conversations need to reflect the Lord. In order for this to happen, we need to know the Lord. We learned earlier this week about prayer which is an important daily activity. In conjunction with prayer we need to add Bible study. It is from the Word of God that we grow wise.

The Word of God teaches us the ways of the Lord for it was written for us to learn about God. He wants us to know Him. Jesus wants to tell you about Himself. The way to come to know more about Him is to read the letter He wrote expressing Himself to you. The Letter is found in the 66 books of the Bible. What you learn from the Word, you can share with others.

In your time with the Lord, include reading the Bible. Each day expect to learn something else about the Author. Ask Him to reveal more of Himself to you. When opportunities come, share what you learn. Then your conversations will know how to answer everyone.

I want to get to the point in life where I say the right words in every situation. I have stuck my foot in my mouth on multiple occasions. But I keep learning so that I will be able to speak beneficial words to everyone.

Ephesians 5:29

Verse 11: I want to speak words in a way that is beneficial to others. By learning the Word of God, my conversational words are transformed. I speak with grace instead of anger, irritation, or criticism. My words are seasoned with “salt” so it is easily taken in by others. It leaves people wanting more of a conversation with me than wanting to avoid me next time I walk into the room. By knowing the Word, I can speak the Word to others thus making the most of every opportunity that comes my way.

DAY 4

Up Close and Personal

Confess any opportunities you missed to share Christ. Ask the Lord to be wise in future interactions with others.

How does your busy schedule sometimes prohibit your sharing the good news?

What changes do you feel that you need to make?

Earlier this week, we set aside a prayer time. If possible, schedule your Bible reading during this same time. Write down when this will be.

What book of the Bible will you begin to read? How many verses will you attempt to read each day?

DAY 5

The Word

Today's Scripture: Colossians 4:7-18

My great aunt died yesterday. I did not know her well, she lived far away and I had only seen her a few times in my life. I was her nephew's child. She did not have to keep in contact with me but she did. I received a card from her every birthday as well as every Christmas. She would write and tell me a little bit about life in Minnesota. I was amazed at her perseverance because I rarely wrote back. Yet, she continued. She even wrote to my niece, her great-great niece, for over fifteen years although she had never met her. My great aunt was an amazing communicator through her letters, an art form lost in this high-paced, high-tech age.

I sat and reflected yesterday about the gift this woman gave me. She taught me the power of keeping in touch. A woman that I had not seen in years, kept me close to her heart despite the distance. I want to learn how to do the same. Today, stopping to make a phone call does not seem like such an inconvenience. Making lunch plans for tomorrow outweighs the work that is pressing in on me. E-mails are more in depth and personal instead of just a sentence or two. My great aunt had a gift of keeping in contact. It is vital for life.

Colossians 4:7-18

Verse 7-18: Paul kept in touch with others. He knew the power of contact. He wanted others to be encouraged by him and he wanted to be encouraged by others. The priority of relationships in his life is evident by all the names listed above. These men were friends of Paul; he allowed his life to intermingle with theirs. He was on a world- wide mission to spread the gospel of Christ, but he knew that his mission was worthless without others.

I do not know what you may be living for, but I know that at my great aunt funerals they will not talk about her work or hobbies or anything else that we think is so important each day. Instead, they will share about her as a wife, as a mother, as a sister, as an aunt, as a great aunt, as a friend. In the end, relationships are all that matter. I have heard it said that at the end of your life you do not wish you had spent more time at the office; instead all you long for is more time with the people in your life.

Let us look at life from the end to now. If you were to die tomorrow, what would you do today? Who would you shower with love? Who would you apologize to? Who would you call? Our schedules, so crammed with meaningless things, needs to be freed up for the people that make life worth living. God created us for relationships. We cannot neglect them. We never know how long we will be on earth to enjoy them. Death shows up unannounced. But since we know that all of our lives on earth will one day end, we can live with the end in mind

and make the most of our relationships now.

I want to tell you about the greatest relationship of all: the one with Jesus Christ. He captured my heart over two decades ago. I have had my ups and downs in life. Yet, like my great-aunt, He continued to pursue me even when I did not have much contact with Him. His letters tell me about His love for me. He proved that love dramatically one time by dying on the cross for my sins. He took my place. Can you believe how much someone like me is loved? And to prove His power, He rose from the dead. He makes that resurrection power available to me, because He loves me. He wants to offer that same relationship to you. All you have to do is believe in what He did out of His love for you.

DAY 5

Up Close and Personal

Spend time alone with the Lover and Savior of your soul.

What relationships in your life need to be revived or renewed?

How do you need to improve these relationships?

When did your relationship with Jesus begin?

How do you invest in your relationship with your Lover and Savior?