

Women's Bible Study

LEADER



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WELS Women's Ministry
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LEADER Women's Bible Study

LESSON ONE | Time: It's a Gift!

LESSON 1 | A Look at Time

Preparation

Pray. Read through the lesson with special attention to the Scripture. Work through the exercises to better direct others. Plan opening and closing prayers—ask others to pray as they feel comfortable. Supplies needed: A couple extra Participant copies. Blank paper (letter size) and pencil for each participant. Hard surface to write on. Paper pad for prayer requests. Hand this out as people arrive.

Opening prayer and Introductions - provide a gracious welcome; be sensitive to all attendees.

Getting into our study

Time is a precious gift from a gracious God. How we make use of the gift is our topic for these four weeks of Bible study. The goal is to equip us in the midst of a “no limits” society to make wise decisions in scheduling each day; to live biblically in all the seasons of our lives. God speaks clearly saying “live in peace and be content.” We say, “How is that possible?” We'll look at those possibilities. We also note that nowhere does God say, “Now here's a great way to live a harried life!”

The concept of time has eluded the best of minds from every generation. Scripture lays the foundation of our study with some basics in Lesson 1—the creation and purpose of time. Throughout the study we keep in mind the words from the psalmist, our theme verse: “My times are in your hands.” (Psalm 31:15) Lesson 2 goes deeper into God's Word to increase our understanding of four concepts of time: time of grace, times of refreshment, opportune time (vs. chronological time) and the fullness of time. Like a child spending precious time with her wise father, the time we spend with our just and loving Father gives the direction and confidence we need for Lessons 3 & 4 where we get practical, analyzing our current season and schedule, setting priorities, and looking at solutions. The final lesson refines our decision-making so that we respond to daily choices in how we use our time with a “joyful yes” or a “graceful no.” The foundation of all our study is that we live in God's grace. Our plans and decisions are imperfect, but with the forgiveness we receive through Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death we are renewed to live again.

- 1. Take time to think about time! Select thoughts that have run through your mind lately. Share with the group how time impacts your life, for better or for worse.**

- “I don't have enough time!”
- “I think that's the perfect time.”
- “I wish this (class/school year/test) would be over soon.”
- “My nights are rough. Will I ever be able to get a good night's sleep again?”
- “My priorities seem to be in pretty good order at this point in my life.”
- “Now that I'm (retired/laid off/not working), I don't know what to do with my time.”
- “My parents are really aging – I want to spend more time with them.”

- "I'm not at all sure what the future holds."
- "That was time so well spent."
- "Thank you so much for taking the time to be with me."
- "Dear God, how do you want me to live out these last few (days/months/years) of my life?"
- "Hurry up! We're late!"
- "My children are growing up too fast."
- "I feel like I'm just wasting my time doing this."
- "Tomorrow's a new day—can't wait!"
- Other? _____

2. Why is thinking about time helpful and necessary, but when can it become unprofitable?

Thinking about time is essential to planning, organizing, scheduling ourselves to make the most of the gifts God has given us. It helps us to prioritize our lives, setting aside time for worship and spiritual growth, caring for our family and others both physically and spiritually.

Thoughts about time are harmful when we think we don't ever have enough time. No matter what we're doing we're often anxious to get to the next thing. This may lead to:

- Missing the chance to treasure the moment, ponder what the Lord has planned for us in that moment, savor relationships, gain wisdom
- A mind filled with *my own* thoughts and the desire to focus on what *I've* accomplished in that day; no capacity for interest or compassion for another person's story
- Feeling helpless and stuck

3. How would you define time? Consider the dictionary definitions of time. Do they help us with the practical use of our time?

Wikipedia: Time is the indefinite continued progress of existence and events that occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future.

Webster's: Time is the measured or measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists or continues (there are 13 options in the definition of time; some are: duration, occasion, age, present conditions, season, repeated actions, person's experience...)

Volumes are written in attempts to define time. It really isn't possible.

4. The inspired writers of Scripture write about time. Look up and tell about what we learn from the creation of time in Genesis 1:1-5, 14 and 2:2-3?

Genesis 1:1-5 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Genesis 1:14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times [ESV: seasons], and days and years...

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

Time is part of God’s divine creation. Our human attempts to define it fall short, but we still receive it as the gift God intends it to be for us. It’s woven into every aspect of our lives and the life of everything around us! We see in Genesis 1:14 that time is divided. This is God’s way of establishing order in his creation and provides us early on with a model for managing our time.

Discuss what God is marking with this early division of time. (Sacred times, days, years.) Note especially how serious he is about REST and honoring REST. As time permits, dig deeper into understanding the “promise of entering [God’s] rest” in Hebrews 4:1-11. We look forward to the temporary rest God desires for us each day. Even more important is the eternal rest provided for those who believe the promise.

We’ll look at practical ways of ordering our time as well as the seasons of our lives in the next lessons.

5. What else do we learn about time from the psalmist in Psalm 31:14-15?

Psalm 31:14-15 ¹⁴But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God.” ¹⁵ My times are in your hands...

Refer to the cover for this study. This is the Scripture included in the logo.

We learn that God didn’t create time and leave it to run on its own. God carries every single one of our seconds in his hands! With the psalmist we can also trust that not one of our seconds is unimportant, unnoticed, or wasted. And the psalmist was David who was in despair, experiencing anguish of soul, in the midst of terror on all sides, aware of his enemies’ intent on ending his life, feeling like “broken pottery (see vs. 12).”

6. God reveals to us the purpose of time in many places. Scan the following passages below. Tell about some of the purposes God has for us with the time he gives.

Genesis 1:26, 28

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image...” ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Psalm 50:23 ²³Those who sacrifice thank offerings honor me, and to the blameless^[a] I will show my salvation.”

Matthew 5:16 ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

John 15:8 ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Philippians 1:9-11 ⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

2 Corinthians 5:15, 20 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again...And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors,

1 Peter 2:9 ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Ask participants to scan and then share what each verse says about how God designed our days to be used: that we be fruitful (bear children), rule over creation; we bring offerings, do good deeds, gain depth of insight; we live for others, speak the message to others and declare praises/worship.

Bring out the idea that being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26 – God’s original intent) gives amazing significance to who we are (emphasize our identity in Christ) and then what we do. Even though now after the Fall we’re created in Adam’s image (Gen 3; 1 Co 15:42...49), God is at work in believers to restore his image (presented as holy, Col. 1:22; renewed in image of Creator, Col 3:10; having a "likeness in Christ" image, 2 Co 3:18). (See also general reference in Gen 9:6 "for in the image of God has God made man" in the context of honoring the creation).

It’s not really about us being such great doers. It’s all about God forgiving, calling and equipping us to do his will. Jesus frees us from the burden of guilt and the law which says only “do better, work harder.” The gospel works in us to bear fruit. Jesus has pronounced us chosen, royal, holy—we have the tremendous privilege of living it!

Keep in mind throughout this study that we don’t limit God’s will for the use of our time to only that which we do in church. God’s callings include being a faithful student, wife, mother, co-worker, community servant. Whatever we do, we do it all to the glory of God in response to the gospel—forgiven and set free to serve God and our neighbor.

- 7. Take one of the statements you selected from the opening exercise and picture it being carried in Jesus’ hands. Talk about how that makes a difference. Now draw a picture of two open hands on your paper, filling the page. Inside the hands, jot down a few things you have to do tomorrow. How does this picture change the way you look at your list?**

MORE TIME (As time allows, choose any of the following for further study and discussion)

- 8. Compare the directive in Romans 13:11 (understand the time) and the assessment of Acts 1:7 (not for you to know the times). How do these relate to each other? To your life of managing time?**

In Romans, we’re encouraged to know that the time of Jesus’ return is near! Wake up and put aside careless living. In Acts, the point is that we don’t need to know the exact time, but to know how to make the most of that time by receiving the Holy Spirit and being God’s witnesses.

- 9. Think about how people spent their time in days past. Was time ordered for them better than for us today? Who put the order in place? What would you change (if you could) in the way time is ordered today? In what ways does God’s purpose for the use of time change from generation to generation? In what ways does it remain the same?**

Share memories of your grandparents’ use of their time.

(Be sensitive to those who didn’t have a chance to know their grandparents and feel that void.)

Ask attendees: What did you do with your grandparents? Have you read diaries or letters? What can you tell about their priorities? How did they spend time with each other? How were relationships built? What have you learned from how they used time that has helped you in your life?

10. Consider life in biblical times. What do Genesis 8:22 and Exodus 20:8-10a tell us about the ordering of time in a simpler agricultural society?

Genesis 8:22 ²²“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

Exodus 20:8-10a ⁸Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God.

Life was dominated by planting, growing and harvest. At Sinai God confirmed the Sabbath for worship as a regular, ordered part of their lives.

11. How did Jesus spend his time? Review some of the following passages and jot down specifics:

Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 42; Luke 5:13, 6:10, 19, 9:6, 9:11 _____

Luke 4:15, 5:17 _____

Luke 4:18-19, 43-44; 5:20 _____

Luke 5:16; 11:1 _____

Luke 5:23 _____

Luke 10:21 _____

12. Our culture seems to give greater honor to the one with a fully booked schedule rather than the one with extra time to pray, study, be available. What would it take to reverse that aspect of our culture? What might we share with our children to prepare them for a balanced lifestyle?

Answers will vary. Keep this in mind for Lesson 3 when we plot priorities.

13. What might we learn from other cultures where honor is given to time spent in spiritual growth, relationship building and study?

Talk about how a better sense of time following God’s plan might reduce the many ills of our society related to mental illness, depression and substance abuse. When we don’t have time for God’s Word or the community and support of his people, we’re a sure target for the devil!

Closing prayer (Include prayer requests)

Closing song

Christian Worship Supplement #764, st. 4 “There Is a Time for Everything” (*License needed*)

Alternate Closing song – Christian Worship #469 “Take My Life and Let It Be” (*Public domain*)

LEADER Women's Bible Study

LESSON TWO | Time: It's a Gift!

Preparation

Pray. Read through the lesson with special attention to the Scripture. Work through the questions to better direct others. Be honest—we all have struggles with living lives to please God. As a leader, you're not expected to have all the answers. Direct participants to search out and take hold of God's Word as you work out answers together. Plan opening and closing prayers—ask others to pray as they feel comfortable.

Supplies needed: Extra Participant copies. Paper pad for prayer requests. Hand this out as people arrive. Provide a gracious welcome; be sensitive to all attendees, especially new ones.

Opening prayer

Review

Review Lesson 1: God created time; we acknowledge that it is a gift to us. In God's Word he reveals his purpose for how we should use this gift (#5. ...that we be fruitful (bear children), rule over creation; we bring offerings, do good deeds, gain depth of insight; we live for others, speak the message to others and declare praises/worship). The exercise of jotting down our daily schedule right on the image of God's open hands was given as a useful visual tool. Further discussion (if time allowed) considered the use of time in other generations and cultures.

Getting into our study

In Lesson 2 we'll explore four special biblical concepts of time that can enhance our understanding and appreciation of God's gift of time. Each of these presents a unique way of looking at time that can help us navigate the varied circumstances that life throws at us and make the most of the time God gives us to live our lives for him. Take the time to dwell on and savor these wonderful truths in a relaxed and unhurried way. This lesson may take longer than an hour; excuse those who need to leave early—continue as time allows for the rest of you.

LESSON 2 | God's Time

Time of grace.

1. **Share a time when you've been relieved to know you have a grace period. It may have been as a student when you were granted an extension on a paper that was overdue. Or it may have had to do with the repayment of a debt. Have you experienced grace in a similar way?**
2. **The biblical definition of grace is _____.**

The common definition of biblical grace is getting what we don't deserve (God's love and forgiveness). Free and unmerited favor of God. Mercy, on the other hand, is not getting what we do deserve (God's wrath and punishment).

- 3. The Apostle Paul gives us some great insights into the meaning of grace in a letter to the young pastor Timothy (2 Timothy 1:8-10). Look up and read the passage together. How does Paul see grace working in his life?**

2 Timothy 1:8-10 ⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

God's grace worked new life in Paul calling him to a life of holiness and ultimately to an eternal life with Jesus. This new life didn't come about by any works that Paul did. It was a free gift of God's grace.

- 4. Apply this now to the common expression "time of grace." How would you define our time of grace? What would it have meant to Paul in prison in the passage above that his imprisonment too was a part of his time of grace?**

Sometimes we speak of our "time of grace" as the whole of our life, from birth to death. But in a special sense it is the time we spend as baptized, redeemed children of God under his grace.

Paul sees his time of grace as living under God's blessing no matter what the circumstances are. God's grace doesn't change—it was given before the beginning of time and extends to eternity. Now it's revealed through Jesus. Nothing on earth can alter the power of God. This is a tremendous source of strength and comfort for Paul in the midst of his suffering. We're engaged in life at the moment, but the Spirit at work in us gives us faith to see the richer and broader view of eternity.

- 5. How does it help you to cope with whatever you may be dealing with at the present time to know with certainty that the whole of a believer's life is lived out as a time of grace?**

The same is true for us! The promise of God's grace included in this example of Paul, even as he is in prison, redirects our thoughts and renews our soul.

God gives us **unique means** for showering us with this grace—his Word, his washing through baptism, and feeding us with his holy meal! Emphasize that this grace is sufficient (Colossians 2:9-10). We have all we need to live in this world.

6. **In what sense is it true also for the unbeliever that his or her life is a “time of grace?” What is the purpose for which God gives unbelievers their time of grace? (See 2 Peter 3:9)**

God is graciously extending the time for unbelievers to hear and believe.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The purpose is that God wants all to be with him for eternity. The awareness of God’s will that all should be saved also brings urgency and meaning to how we view our life as believers, and how we set priorities that include reaching the lost. Setting priorities is our topic for next week.

Times of refreshment.

7. **Aaaahh....to be refreshed! What comes to mind for you?**

It might be having turned in all your assignments and now on spring break; or an hour just to yourself. Going on a trip. For a mother with young children, engaging in meaningful adult conversation.

8. **Explain: It’s possible for us to look for refreshment in life in ways that don’t really refresh, and may even do us harm.**

In the big picture, if we limit refreshment to temporary fixes we’ll be left with a thirst that can’t be quenched. It’s fun to go on a shopping spree, get a makeover, book a getaway. There’s nothing wrong with that unless we think that’s all there is and we only fill our schedules and credit cards with short term solutions. See next question...Only Scripture can provide real and lasting refreshment.

9. **Look up the following verses: Acts 3:19 and Romans 12:2. What is the path God provides for times of true refreshing and renewal in our lives?**

Acts 3:19 ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...

Romans 12:2 ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The path is that we acknowledge our sins and turn to God in repentance. Renewal in our minds takes place every time we remember our baptism – the drowning of our sinful nature through Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection. See Romans 7:22-25. We desire God’s holy will but our sinful self gets in the way. Thanks be to God through Jesus! Spending time in God’s Word is a continual feast of refreshment in the abundance of God’s grace. We need this refreshment often!

- 10. The Apostle John, in his gospel, uses a picture from nature to further reveal the idea of refreshment. Read John 15:1-8 taking turns with each verse. Read slowly and note the repetition.**

John 15:1-8 ¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

- 11. How does the vine refresh its branches? What is the positive outcome when the connection between vine and branch is firm and works as it should? What happens if the branch is cut off from the vine?**

Jesus is the vine. His Word is what pumps refreshment through the branches...you and me. Just like in a healthy tree that bears an abundant crop of fruit, so the positive outcome for us is that we bear fruit (lives of faith and service). Part of the outcome is that our requests will be in line with God's will. Helping toward that positive outcome is God's pruning which of course is painful but comes with the assurance that it is still for the purpose of making us fruitful, all of which gives glory to God. (Refer back to this with close tie-in to closing song).

God is serious about what happens when we are lured away from him. We are cut off! It happens when our schedules don't include time for staying connected!

- 12. Complete the following: God's purpose in giving me times of refreshment in my life is _____**

Opportune Time.

- 13. There are two words for time in the New Testament: one is chronological or sequential time (Greek: chronos), which is the normal use of time. The other is a special word for time: opportune time (kairos). How is this distinction still useful for us today in our understanding of time?**

It's useful to know that our life is not only about a chronological series of events. But we need to keep our eyes open to the special moments of opportunity God gives us to serve him. These are unique occasions that we may not have included in our daily journal.

- 14. God gives opportune time in ways that may be unnoticed. Talk about these examples:**

Our children are little for only a short time. How will we make the most of that time? Do we even view it as an opportune time that God is giving us, or do we miss it because of busyness or preoccupation with other things that seem more important?

You're on an errand and run into someone who's been on your heart and in your prayers for some time. Your time is really short. So which gives way? Your chronological timetable or the opportune time God is placing in your path?

Discuss other scenarios where it's important to be tuned in to the opportune time rather than only our scheduled hourly time.

- 15. Do you take time in your prayer life to thank God for the opportune times in your life or do you see them sometimes as a nuisance? Pray that God would open our eyes to better seize these unexpected moments to show his love in the world. Record opportune time experiences you have and share in the next lesson.**

Fullness of Time

- 16. Read Galatians 4:4. How do you understand the expression "fullness of time" (original Greek translation) or "when the time had fully come?" (NIV paraphrase).**

Galatians 4:4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law...

These are events that come together in the culmination of God's perfect time and will.

- 17. What specific events do the following passages reveal about God's perfect timing? Take turns looking up the following accounts:**

Esther 4:12-14 ¹²When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Luke 2:1-3, 6 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to their own town to register... While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born...

John 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Romans 5: 6 & 8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- 18. Share a time when you were in awe at how some events/thoughts/plans came together perfectly. Explain how you could see God's hand and timing at work.**

As believers, when scheduling our days, it's assuring to know that plans we put into God's hands are entered into his perfect calendar for the universe! It might be as simple as crossing paths with someone unexpectedly or something major like the purchase of a home, a long-awaited trip or the birth of a child.

MORE TIME (As time allows)

19. What is meant by the familiar section of Ecclesiastes 3:1? “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

You may want to gain further insight from the following section of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) essay: The Eternal God Is Our Refuge: A Brief Commentary on Ecclesiastes by G. Wolff

God, the Creator of the universe, envelops in his almighty power all human life and with it all its activities and all earthly happenings. **“In him we live, move and have our being” (Ac 17:28). “For from him and through him and to him are all things” (Ro 11:36).** He has also established time, though he himself is not subject to it, existing, as he does, in eternity. Thus he has fixed a time for the beginning, the duration and the end of every event and of every human activity. It is not chance, nor the will of man, but the will of God which governs all things. This almighty will of God is at work in all men, in the good and in the evil. However, man is at a loss to comprehend how God’s will squares with human responsibility. The wicked, too, accomplish God’s will unwittingly and involuntarily. The most striking example of this is the death of Jesus Christ. Consider the prayer of the Christian congregation in Jerusalem: “Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you appointed” (Ac 4:27). And Peter in his sermon to the people of Israel said: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (Ac 2:23). Yet the Jews bear the full responsibility for their crime. They were cut to the heart, and upon asking Peter and the other apostles what they should do under the circumstances, they were told: “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven” (Ac 2:37, 38). **Having, first of all, affirmed the general truth that there is a time for everything (stating, in effect, that everything happens with the foreknowledge of God and according to his fixed plan, in other words, according to divine providence),** Solomon goes into detail and enumerates fourteen pairs of events or acts involving man. Each pair is a contrast between a destructive or negative act along with a corresponding positive or constructive one. **Solomon thus demonstrates that human life is not a confused mixture of things, good and bad, due to chance and occurring higgledy-piggledy in utter confusion, but rather that everything happens at a time fixed by God and serves in effecting his plan, which is hidden from us, but concerning which the Bible assures us that it promotes his glory and our happiness.**

Look also at the Concordia Study Bible note on Ecclesiastes 1:2, p.994: “The basic thrust of Ecclesiastes is that all of life is meaningless, useless, hollow, futile and vain if it is not rightly related to God. Only when life is based on God and his word is life worthwhile.”

Note: A “time for everything” doesn’t mean we’re here to cram everything possible into our daily planner. It means, as stated in the essay, that “everything happens with the foreknowledge of God and according to his fixed plan.”

Closing prayer (include prayer requests)

Closing song – Christian Worship Supplement #761 Christ Is With Me (*License needed*)

Alternate Closing song – Christian Worship #584 O Blessed Holy Trinity (*Public domain*)

LEADER Women's Bible Study

LESSON THREE | Time: It's a Gift!

Preparation

Pray. Read through the lesson with special attention to the Scripture. Plan opening and closing prayers—ask others to pray as they feel comfortable.

This lesson encourages participants to use a Time Budget Worksheet to work through at home. There are 3 versions according to possible seasons of life. It would be great for leaders to work through a worksheet of their own to understand the process and to give meaningful encouragement. Provide print or electronic copies of the worksheet according to the needs of your group. Consider watching and sharing this 2+ minute video clip...search for: "Time of Grace: God Knows Your Name." Also bring: Extra Participant copies. Paper pad for prayer requests. Hand this out as people arrive. Provide a gracious welcome; be sensitive to all attendees, especially new ones.

Opening prayer

LESSON 3 | Our Time

Getting into our study

Our study of managing time began with a look at time itself. It's a gift, created by God for a purpose. In lesson 2 our study focused on the richness of time as we have received it from our Father's hand. Our life is a time of grace, fully lived out in his grace. As we make our passage through the seasons of life, he provides us with needed times of refreshment and renewal through his Word and sacrament. He gives us special moments of opportunity to serve him with our lives. Ask if anyone has noted an opportune time (kairos) to share with the group (see lesson 2 #8). We are confident that God is guiding all things according to his plan and perfect timing. In lesson 3 we'll talk about identifying and assessing our current season of life, noting that choices are involved and priorities may need to be adjusted. We'll look at the importance of depending on God's wisdom as a guide rather than on what the world has to offer. Practical exercises to develop a mission statement and time budget are introduced at the end of this lesson with encouragement to work through them at home.

My season of life

We saw in Lesson 1 how times and seasons are part of the very fabric of God's creation.

Genesis 1:14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years..."

Seasons: Genesis 8:22 ²² "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

- 1. Explore with your neighbor how the seasons of a person's life correspond in some respects to the seasons of the year.**

The very idea of a season means that something is changing. Change is involved in both types of seasons. Some seasons of the year and our seasons of life may be more fruitful than others; some may be less or even be barren. Each has joy and challenges to be embraced.

2. The idea of going from one season to the next involves change. Why is it important to anticipate these changes?

When we look ahead in anticipation, we can think through what changes we might be facing. We need to be prepared to let go of some activities to make sure we embrace the new season with a measured approach. We burden ourselves thinking we should be busy doing the same things this season as last. We don't decorate our homes for all seasons all the time. It may mean giving up time with close friends in order to focus on family. It may mean giving up career for being present in raising godly children. In retirement it's important to anticipate and seek out ways of serving that weren't possible with a full working schedule. Jesus promises to equip us for these new seasons!

3. Identify your current season of life (student, single mom, working with family, retired...). What fills your schedule? Use the chart below to check the items that are on your agenda right now. Add others that are not listed.

SEASONS OF LIFE - Categories of Activity		My Season of Life:	
Check categories that apply to your season of life; add daily (D), weekly (W), monthly (M), annual (A), occasional (O)			
✓	D, W, M, A, O	✓	D, W, M, A, O
Spiritual Growth -personal		Projects (personal/for others	
Family devotion/worship		Play with children	
Exercise		Sports with children	
Meals / Eating/Clean up		Homework with children	
Personal Care		Bedtime with children	
Sleep		Financial planning	
Commute		Home maintenance/care	
Groc/errands		Yard care	
Work		Professional development	
Work prep		Family	
Professional development		Friends	
Time with spouse		Recreation/concerts	
Care for parents/others		Travel	
Volunteer service - scheduled		Internet / Social Media	
Volunteer service - flexible		Free time	
Scheduled classes/lessons		Opportune time	
Study/practice			

Choices, wisdom and solutions.

4. This now gives us a general picture of what we do—what we fit into the planning of the 24 hours we're given each day. The next step is to clarify what is important. Is our schedule balanced? Does it fit God's agenda for us? This is called setting priorities and it involves

making choices. We'll look closely at the process of how to best make those choices. As we've learned, it is God himself who directs us to make wise decisions. Read and comment on the following verses for further insight into godly decision making.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. To him belongs eternal praise.

1 Corinthians 2:4-6 ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. ⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

(James): We all have an amazing resource and promise when seeking wisdom. We go to God in prayer. Note how generous it is! And it is given without first pointing out fault! (Proverbs): "The fear of the Lord" appears to be lacking in today's society but look how important it is when seeking wisdom. (Corinthians): In all our decision making, we have tremendous assurance that it is God's Holy Spirit that provides the power. When we are discouraged with and deceived by the wisdom of this age, this passage points us back to the real wisdom God intends for his world.

5. Why might we be tempted to skip taking the time to search out God's wisdom as a first step in planning our life?

Encourage discussion. Here are some to include: We already know about God. We're too impatient! We forget. We just want to get to the "real" stuff that pertains to me and my agenda. It's too general and I want specific "this is right, that is wrong." We're burdened with guilt and afraid to face what we know we "should" be doing. The world is more appealing with quick fixes.

6. It's important to recognize there is a "wisdom of this world" (2 Corinthians 2:4-6). When making decisions about what we do, what thoughts might develop from a worldly perspective instead of God's perspective?

The trap of comparing with others is huge! The world comes at us with media slogans—you deserve this or that. Marketing is so appealing, but really deceptive so you think you are making wise decisions. All of life these days is without boundaries and portrayed as if that's a good thing...for example, career and sports. We're tricked into thinking new gadgets (which cost money) will save us time. The idea of being busy all the time has become a status symbol. Very little in our current society builds character or self-discipline or accountability or patience.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself

See "Additional Exercises" at the end of this lesson

7. **When a worldly perspective overrides our better sense in the use of our time, what responses might godly wisdom make to the attitudes expressed below?**

- When over worked we still might say...“No one else can get the job done—or done right.” “I’ll lose my job if I don’t perform to the max.” “It will get better next month.” “We really need this overtime pay.”
- As a retired/unemployed person...“I don’t know what to do with my time since what I’ve done all my life doesn’t matter anymore.” “I don’t think I can learn anything new at this point.” “It would take way too much time to do ‘that.’” “This world is just falling apart and I don’t want to be a part of it anymore.”

If Finances are Driving Your Agenda

See “Additional Exercises” at the end of this lesson

Answers will vary. These situations are not easy and bring great stress to families and individuals. We pray for God to lead us in making godly decisions. It will mean giving up something but with careful examination by those involved God promises to show us the way. Look back at Scripture we’ve used in this study.

Point out especially, that It’s not wrong to apply ourselves fully to our work, but when our desire to work is all-consuming with no consideration for our family and other responsibilities, then we need the correction of God’s Word. Let the participants wrestle with this. It’s also very important to acknowledge that each person’s circumstances are unique.

Reflect: Our lives are not perfect and God knows that. We can either try to ignore the bad choices we make in the use of our time, live in guilt and do nothing to correct it; or we can acknowledge how we’ve failed to live according to God’s will, repent and believe in God’s washing of forgiveness and his promise to restore and equip us to make wise decisions going forward.

This is absolutely critical to get across in discussion. In the end, the fact that we are fully forgiven is what matters the most. We are clothed in God’s grace! The love of Christ truly does compel us! Use this time to remind participants to recall their baptism. Talk about how vital it is to be receiving Christ’s body and blood at the feast he so graciously invites us to attend. More than anything he wants to restore our relationship with him when it is broken.

Taking it home

Go through this section (#8 & #9) before ending the lesson. These are assignments for at home but it’s important to review and get the ideas started while still in a group. Emphasize that the time spent working through these details will make a real difference in applying what we’ve learned.

- 8. A great tool in the process of setting or adjusting priorities is a mission statement. Have you used one? If not, take some time this week to develop one. What is your personal or family mission in life? Look at the benefits and use these examples to guide you.**

A personal or family mission statement based on God's Word has godly benefits:

- Serves as a guide—all activity is weighed in light of the overall purpose
- Provides place for setting priorities
- Clarifies identity
- Gives place for each member to be involved and reinforces sense of belonging
- Increases effectiveness with everyone moving in the same direction with the same goal
- Reduces conflict. Consider including action, how action/activity will be carried out, and who will benefit.

Examples of mission statements for families (easily adjusted for personal use):

- “We exist to grow as a family by continually growing in our relationship with Jesus.”
Values: spiritual growth, honesty, achievement, accountability, family joy.”
- “To prepare faithful disciples to witness to the gospel in all of life.”
- “Christ's love compels us.” (Painted on a sign as a daily reminder). When children came added: “To raise independent servants of the Lord.” (“Sent them out every day as a child of God”)
- “Devotion to Christ crucified & to family”
We resolve to glorify God by serving others.
 1. We value grace and knowledge of Christ crucified.
 2. We make our home a place of scriptural study, health, and hospitality.
 3. We prioritize time with loved ones above other activity.
 4. We interact with each other in a spirit of humility.

For families: Here is a great place for men to exercise their leadership as God intended for them and their families. Gather as a family and explore this opportunity to grow together with each other and your Savior as you work through the process of setting a family mission statement. Note that it is a process. Start simple from the examples provided. Study Scripture together to make it your own. Pray about it together. Gather regularly to assess how it is working. Use real life situations to test your mission statement. Here's one scenario: You're faced with a promotion. It's going to mean more travel. Your children are 2, 4 & 6. This would mean your wife could quit her part-time job, but you'd be gone each week for several days. How would having a mission statement help in determining your decision?

- 9. Once you've identified your mission, it's easier to set priorities that fit that mission. Developing a weekly time budget is a useful tool that works for some people. There are many templates and formats out there. This study does not allow working through a personal planner, but if any of you are so inclined we are providing a time budget template with several versions according to your season of life. This is for you to work on at home. It is an Excel worksheet that is also available electronically with formulas to automatically calculate the**

weekly total of time you spend on each activity. The “Seasons of Life-Categories” checklist from #3 in this lesson will help you decide which version of the template to use.

Hand out paper copies to those who want a template. Take names of those who want the template electronically and email it to them.

If you aren’t interested in using a time budget template, use the checklist from #3 to get a general idea of how much time you spend on each item in your schedule.

Next week we’ll look at how to fine tune the choices we make. Whatever our season, God desires contentment as we live out our lives.

Closing Prayer (include prayer requests)

Closing Song – Christian Worship Supplement #757, st. 1 & 4 Where Your Treasure Is (*License needed*)

Alternate Closing Song – Christian Worship #580 Every Morning Mercies New (*Public domain*)

Lesson 3 ADDITIONAL EXERCISES (thought-starters for wise decisions in setting priorities)

Important Questions to Ask Yourself and Your Family

For families...

- How much time do you spend with each family member each day?
- Does work prevent quality and quantity time with your spouse and children?
- Are you involved in your child's daily school routine, expectations, accomplishments? Do you help them with homework?
- How much time do you spend talking about their spiritual life with set time for family devotions? Do you pray for and with your children regularly?
- Do your children observe and learn how you set priorities? Schedule time for personal devotion? Worship? How you turn to prayer and God's Word to determine your decisions?
- Do your sons have opportunity to learn from dads to be spiritual leaders in the home? From both parents, honor for God's plan of head and helper?
- Do you schedule fun times of fellowship with fellow-believers? Do you reach out to help others both physically and spiritually?

For students and others...

- Add up the amount of time you spend on social media.
- Does your non-school screen time take priority over studies/assignments?
- Are you spending most of your time with friends and very little with your family?
- Are you actively part of the body of Christ in your relationships? In being nurtured through Bible studies? In your service, outreach and witness to others? To an unbelieving world around you?

For all to ponder...

- Where do you place personal devotion, prayer, Bible study in your list of priorities?
- What most often gets in the way of this happening?

If Finances are Driving Your Agenda

- Set up a budget
- Cut back on expenses to cut back on hours at work (even if it means one parent staying home for the sake of family)
- Take a less expensive vacation
- Be content with last year's outfit
- Take lunches instead of buying them everyday
- Cut back on eating out as a family
- Encourage the whole family to take one hour on a Saturday to eliminate housekeeper expenses. It's important that children learn to pitch in to do their share!
- Plan meals and cook together from scratch—healthier...less expensive...time together

LEADER Women's Bible Study

LESSON FOUR | Time: It's a Gift!

Preparation

Pray. Read through the lesson carefully. Work through the questions to better direct others. Plan opening and closing prayers—ask others to pray as they feel comfortable.

Supplies needed: Extra Participant copies. Paper pad for prayer requests. Hand this out as people arrive. Provide a gracious welcome; be sensitive to all attendees, especially new ones.

Opening prayer

Review

Encourage participants to share their experience in developing a personal or family mission statement as was proposed last week. Ask if any were able to use the time budget templates. Discuss successes and challenges. If there seems to be a lot of discussion on this, suggest continuing at the end of this lesson. Make sure you allow time to end with the final note about being content – a godly, positive wrap up to this whole study.

LESSON 4 | Yes & No

Getting into our study

Our final lesson leads us to refine our decisions even more carefully. Managing our time in the season of life where we find our self comes down to saying “yes” or “no” to the many choices facing us each day. God keeps us connected to the life-giving vine through his gospel of love and forgiveness (Lesson 2, John 15:1-8). This same gospel enables us to give a “joyful yes” or a “graceful no”—without guilt and without pride. Let's enjoy this final lesson together, learning to be content in whatever season of life we're in.

Determining our “yes” and “no.”

- 1. Every day we make decisions that determine how we manage our time. Write down some “yes” responses you've given in the last few days or weeks—with a friend, fellow-student, teacher, your spouse, children, co-worker, congregation. Put a heart by the ones you've given joyfully.**
- 2. Some of our “yes” answers are made in the midst of struggle and uncertainty. Give examples.**

Allow time to talk about experiences. Sometimes God leads us to say “yes” that outwardly isn't so joyful. Discuss challenging “yes” situations you've been in. Some to consider: inviting extended family into our home for long-term care, when taking on a leadership position in an organization, when called on to care for aging parents, when providing shelter in times of natural disaster, or anytime we're asked to get out of our comfort zone. Sometimes we're simply moved to say “yes” to something that needs to be done—ministry often calls for “do what it takes.” We see the example of Jesus himself! Even when we're led to say “yes” hesitantly, we pray for God to grow us and help us have inner joy in doing his will. It's good to be aware and sensitive to how we might give support to our sisters in Christ in these “not so joyful”

situations. NOTE: This does not contradict the schedule overload we've been cautioning against throughout this study. It's to provide balance in using our time where God still calls us to grow and consider using our gifts "outside the box," trusting in his plans and purposes. These are times when our faith grows!

3. What about our "yes" answers to what is repetitive and mundane?

Depending on your group and if there's time, talk about the mundane...how saying a "joyful yes" to the "same ol'" routine can be a blessing. We may feel like every day is too much the same, but direct the conversation toward being thankful. We can also seek to be creative—oftentimes it's a matter of shifting thoughts from self to others.

4. What biblical insights might help us to a more consistently joyful response?

See 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and Romans 12:12.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Romans 12:12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

The Holy Spirit works inner joy in the midst of life that is messy here on earth! Joy is not the same as happy. Happy comes from "happenstance" and is tied to our circumstances (temporary).

5. Now talk about situations where you've said "no." Jot down one or two and indicate how you came to that decision.

Discuss as the group is willing. Examples may include: I knew I didn't have time; wasn't interested; didn't think I had the gifts.

6. Oftentimes we find it hard to say "no." Let's explore why that is.

Encourage discussion. Answers may include: we don't want to hurt others. We want to be known as one to always be counted on. We don't have our priorities thought out beforehand. We want to please everyone. We think we're the only one able to do it...right. The deadly compare and compete creeps in—we look at so and so and think we should be doing that too...and maybe even better! We're not content with what God has given us. Talk about the underlying circumstances.

7. How can we learn to offer a graceful "no?" Give examples of what this might look like.

God's Word settles us and gives us peace. We're able to answer with wisdom; we're aware of our priorities and we have a picture of what a balanced life looks like. Write down some

“graceful no” responses. Make sure to encourage ideas from your group. You may also offer these – given sincerely:

“No, but keep me in mind for next time.”
“No, I don’t think I’m the right person for this, but how can I best pray for this?”
“I’m not able to do that right now. Are there other options that I could consider that (I could do from home...takes less time...don’t involve working alone...that we could do as a family)?”
“I appreciate your thinking of me for this but after praying about it, I’m not able to accept.”

8. “Graceful no” avoids over-commitment and pride. Explain.

Sometimes saying no is so difficult we almost feel like it’s a victory to say it! It’s so important to be able to say “no” to over-commitment and to say it gracefully. The caution here is to not let pride accompany your response. What are some comments you hear? “Well, I just said “no” and I’m sure glad I did!” “I finally said “no” and it’s the best thing I’ve ever done!” An “I-showed-them” attitude is not what we want to develop!

9. Why is it important to take time before we say either yes or no?

A quick answer may be based on our current emotional state and doesn’t embrace the fullness of God’s promises to guide and bless. It’s important to seek God first! We often withhold our “yes” out of fear of the unknown, but when we pray first, we move ahead in trust. We may give a quick “no” out of frustration for the moment before even taking time to understand the request. **Consider some of the following responses. What others would you add?**

“I would like to pray on it/I would like to talk to _____ about it.”
“This sounds like a great opportunity. When do you need an answer?”
“Let me see how this fits in where God has placed me in this season of life.”
“Thanks for this invite. If I may ask, why did you think of me for this?”
“Please share specific expectations, goals and job description with me.”
“Can you tell me how much time is involved in this?”
“What type of training do you provide?”
“Please join me in praying about this.”

10. What role does guilt play in our decision-making?

Make clear...guilt DOES have a purpose! It’s God’s law at work. It’s that mirror that reflects back to us how we measure up to what God intends for us. We know we fail in many ways (**James 4:17, 1 Peter 1:15 & 16**). We use our time selfishly, we’re irritated that someone would ask us to do one more thing, we neglect others, we forget to trust in God’s promises, we especially neglect God and his Word! The law at work directs us to see the need for a Savior (**Romans 3:20**). We acknowledge our sin and ask for forgiveness. BUT GUILT IS NOT A PROPER MOTIVATOR; not for us and not for us to use on others to get them to do things. The wonderful

message of God's love and forgiveness is what motivates us to renewal in our sanctified living. Huge emphasis here is to make sure our lives are motivated by response to the gospel – not guilt! Then we look to God's Word as a guide (**2 Corinthians 5:15, Romans 12:1, Psalm 119:105**).

11. Does some of our frustration in the management of our time arise from spending too little time on our knees?

As we've noted in this whole study, we seek God's wisdom first of all. He's eager to receive our requests and promises to hear us (John 15:7, Romans 12:2). Suggest writing a prayer to be used at home or personally. Have members of your family write down decisions they're facing. Use Scripture to direct prayers and record answers as you move forward. Don't forget to offer prayers of thanks!

12. A note to congregational leaders. How can you be a positive instrument in helping members to a "joyful yes" and "graceful no" when asking them to serve?

As a leader, make sure you provide clear expectations, job descriptions, and training. Take time to understand the gifts and current life situation of the one you're approaching ("I'm not sure of your current situation, but here's what I have in mind..."). Sincerely join them to pray about the decision they're making. This is an art, with a bit of godly tension: we're here to draw people in to use their gifts but we're also here to help them come to godly decisions which may include a "graceful no." Offer alternatives. (Refer to suggestions above...thinking through "yes" and "no" responses.) Continue to grow in your own example of being in the Word and worship.

13. Some things God wants us to do don't even require that we fill another slot in our daily journal. Share ideas.

Example: God's plan is that we are his witnesses. It may not be our season to join the congregation's evangelism team but look around and see the many people he puts in your path from soccer moms to basketball team parents (think beyond simply being there to enjoy your child's sports activity) to college project partners to fellow-travelers on a family trip. Pray for eyes to be open to these opportune times and the confidence to share the gospel.

14. It's important to engage others in the process of finding solutions in planning our daily schedule. How have you benefited from the godly wisdom of others in the past? Are there decisions you are currently weighing where outside guidance would be of benefit?

Talk with your family. Talk to your pastor. Talk to your employer. Ask others to pray. Seek a mentor.

Content in our season

As we wrap up this study it's important to leave with the uplifting message that God desires contentment as an important aspect of our life. Assure participants of this truth even in the midst of life's challenges and uncertainty for the future. We have a Savior who loves us!

15. How are we to understand what the Scripture teaches about being content in all seasons? Look up and read the following?

Philippians 4:11-12 ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

1 Timothy 6:6-9 But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Scripture makes clear that contentment is not based on circumstances. In these passages, bring out the underlying truth of what produces contentment: the life of faith, depending on God's strength, living in godliness, knowing that God promises never to leave us. Also note one key source of our discontent: focus on material possessions, the love of money. We can be content in all seasons remembering the God of grace who created and sustains the universe!

Read together the theme verse:

Psalm 31:14-15 ¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵ My times are in your hands..."

Reflection. The contented life is the life that centers and builds on God's Word and sacrament. Regular worship, regular reception of the Lord's Supper, frequent remembering of my baptism and all that it means to me that God has made me his child are the foundation of an ordered life that enables me to fit everything else into its proper slot. We came from God, and ultimately return to him. "My times are in your hands..."

Closing Prayer (include prayer requests)

Closing Song – Christian Worship #467 "May the Mind of Christ My Savior" (*Public domain*)

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