

9 Ways to Make Time for God

If you were to ask women what their No. 1 health concern is, what would you expect them to say? Perhaps breast cancer, heart disease or maybe even excess weight come to mind. Yet in a study by the Women's Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, women said something completely different: We're all too tired.

Time has now surpassed money as our most precious commodity. A poll by the Independent Women's Forum found that 55 percent of women would accept a pay cut or lower seniority, if it were offered, if it also meant more time at home. Yet even those who don't have paid work still feel overwhelmed. Our to-do lists keep growing, and the time to spend on the relationships we value so much keeps shrinking.

However, if we aren't nurturing our relationships—with God, husbands, kids, other family members and friends—we're not going to feel peace. God made us for relationship; that's how we rejuvenate.

In today's fast-paced, technologically driven society, though, making time for people, let alone God, is difficult. Yet ultimately God will not ask us how many faxes we sent, how many floors we mopped or how many loads of laundry we did. He will ask whom we reached for Him. So let's look at how we can redeem our time to focus on Jesus' priorities.

Banish the Bad

When we're tired and run down and feeling out of whack, we often do the exact opposite of what will actually rejuvenate our souls. We turn to time-wasters.

For most Americans, the top time-waster is television. According to Nielsen Media Research, we watch, on average, 24 hours of television a week, which adds up to four days a month. Television not only robs us of time; it also is one of

the strongest indicators of obesity, with all the health problems that typically accompany this condition.

And that's not all we have to worry about. Watching television jeopardizes our emotional health, too. I clearly remember the Thursday night I decided to switch off the television for good. I was dragging myself to bed, depressed yet again, when I realized that this depression was a pattern—one that was directly traced to the human misery I watched weekly on the program ER. I tuned out, and my mood improved dramatically.

Television is not the only thing that can pollute our minds or steal our time. What about the other screen in your house? Stanford Professor Norman Nie, after conducting a widespread study of Internet usage, concluded that “the more hours people use the Internet, the less time they spend with real human beings.”

Maybe you have a different weakness, such as an obsession with the romance novels some women buy by the millions. If we're honest with ourselves, these things are usually just escapes. Because they insulate us from real relationships—our greatest need—they tend to make us feel worse. Reduce these time-wasters, and you'll suddenly find yourself with more hours in the day to rejuvenate your soul in a way that actually works!

Minimize the “Merely Good”

In Hebrews 12:1-3, we're told to treat our lives as if we're running a race, looking to Jesus at the finish line. In order to get to Him, we have to throw off two things: the weights and the sin that burden us.

Do you see the distinction? Many things that are holding us back from Jesus are not in and of themselves sin; they may not even be bad. To paraphrase Voltaire, “The enemy of the best is the good.”

By shifting our perspectives, we can find ways to redeem more time for spiritual growth. Here are a few suggestions:

Refocus everyday tasks. Sometimes we just need to ask, “Why do we do it?” For example, why do we clean? Ideally, it’s to create comfortable homes that can be places of ministry—homes where children can bring their friends, where neighbors can drop in, where we can foster that community so lacking in today’s society. For this, we don’t need perfection (a perfect house is intimidating, not comfortable); we just need a certain amount of order.

But we also need flexibility. In Luke 10:38-42, Mary has the flexibility to see when to leave her usual responsibilities to take advantage of a priceless opportunity to learn from Jesus. Similarly, we need to be able to give up cleaning for a time if God gives us something more important, even if it’s just listening to a friend who needs to talk.

Get organized. We can also make more time for these relationship-building opportunities by freeing up time we would otherwise spend on everyday tasks. Do housework and errands faster, and suddenly you have more hours in the day. There are lots of ways to get organized:

Declutter. The more stuff we have, the more we have to tidy and clean. Try tossing all those sixth-grade trophies, knickknacks you don’t like anyway, and the clothes that make you feel ugly. Now tidying’s easier, and your house doesn’t hold things that make you shudder.

Clean one room a day. Clean to a schedule, and you know everything will get cleaned in its time. Once you’ve done the cleaning for today, you don’t need to feel guilty for not doing more.

Plan your menu. Think of how you feel when it’s 5:30 and you’re not sure what you’re going to make for dinner. If you plan your meals for a week, you can go to the grocery store just once and save yourself stress.

Consolidate your errands. Do you need to take the car in for an oil change? How about making a doctor's appointment around the same time or planning on going to the bank then, too? Do errands all at once so you don't have to run around every day.

Set a timer. Bonnie Marshall, a family physician, found that she was often spending far too much time on everyday tasks. Now she carries a kitchen timer when she's working in her house. She sets it for 15 minutes and spends that much time cleaning, paying bills, organizing or doing whatever needs to be done. Having the timer helps her work faster and lets her tackle big tasks in small bursts.

Include others. Many of us make our kids clean up their toys, but if that's all they're doing, they're not really learning to care for others. So let's hand them a toilet brush!

Give kids age-appropriate chores such as cleaning a bathroom, dusting a coffee table or even making dinner. You can set the timer and turn cleaning into a race or make a game out of who can pick up the most things in five minutes. Then, when you're all finished, you can reward yourselves with some uninterrupted kid time.

MAXIMIZE THE BEST

We've looked at how we can take those good things that we know are not the best, refocus them and save time. For many things, though, the line between good and best is very blurry. So let's go back and clarify Jesus' priorities.

Simply put, Jesus loves people. He doesn't want any to perish (see 2 Pet. 3:9), and He does want everyone to be transformed into His likeness (see Rom. 8:29). In other words, we're to concentrate on encouraging ourselves and those around us to become more and more like Jesus.

So let's take these criteria and apply them to other things we do. Highest on many of our to-do lists is paid work, which takes more time than anything except sleep.

Is paid work God's best for you? For many it may be, as work gives us the chance to form friendships and shine Christ's light.

My husband, a pediatrician, finds ways to bless parents within his vocation. For others, though, God may have something different in mind.

Ask yourself if you need to work. Could you cut back on spending instead? The income many women earn is actually offset by the cost of working. Child care, a second car, work clothes, meals out and snacks can easily eat up most of it.

If work is necessary but you don't feel as if it's God's best, then ask Him how you can redeem it. Jill Smith, a hairdresser from Belleville, Ontario, used to joke that she wanted to quit and be a "kept woman," though her husband wouldn't agree. Now she's grateful for his reticence. God gave her a vision of how she could be used to bless her customers.

Though a relatively new Christian, Jill opened herself up to the opportunities God gave her, and she began to tell hurting women about Christ's love and to pray with women who were going through difficult times, even women who weren't themselves Christians. Her ho-hum job has now become a place of ministry, though she never would have dreamed it.

Another area we may need to evaluate is our actual "ministry." For years, my husband and I were very involved in the church, planning wonderful outreaches that few people attended. Because of all our meetings, we rarely had a night when our whole family was home.

We weren't able to invite friends over to dinner. We weren't able to start a neighborhood seeker Bible study. We were too busy with church work. We sat down and decided this was not God's best for us, and now we're spending more time being a conduit for those outside the church who need Jesus.

As we clear our schedules of the merely “good,” we can start to make time for the “best”—those relationships that God designed us to have. Sometimes this transition seems wrong because it’s easy to feel that if we’re not doing something, we’re wasting time.

However, that’s not how God sees it. We don’t need to be outrageously busy; we just need to devote our time to Him. Sometimes just being quiet before God, catching up with friends, snuggling with our spouse or pulling out that Monopoly board with our kids is the best way we can spend our time because we’re drawing closer to those we love.

Too often we feel as if we’re just spinning our wheels. But life does not have to be this way if we focus on God’s priorities.

Instead of making resolutions about how much more we’re going to get done, let’s focus on trimming the number of activities to focus on God’s best. Let’s get rid of time-wasters, minimize the “good” things we do, and dedicate our lives to the best, using every opportunity we have to build good relationships.

Time is fleeting, but it’s also a gift. Let’s redeem it as we focus our lives on Jesus.

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