

Time- How do we Find It?

We all have limited time and generally fill it up. Most of us don't have extra time. So here's the big question.

How in the world do we find the time to be a disciple?

There- we've asked it! It's the eventual question on everyone's mind. We're to reflect the mind, character and priorities of Jesus. We're to spend time drawing close to God. We're to be in a healthy and close community with believers, which usually points to church, ministry and a small group. We're to have a healthy marriage and a close, loving family. We're to work hard and be productive at our career. We are called to fish intentionally and to also make disciples of others intentionally. How in the world is all of that possible? And where in the world do we find the extra time? These are relevant questions that need to be asked.

Let's begin by looking at our excuses. We are all busy. And we often don't have extra time. So we don't have time for fishing or discipling right now. We have our own families to think about and to influence. We're working hard at our careers. We're already busy with our church. We can even get overwhelmed with all the things that we have to do in life. We have almost no time left. And if there is time left, we're tired! When do we get to turn off our brains and just rest? A lot of us struggle to even find quality time with God. How can we find it for new areas of ministry?

So many of us use at least one of these excuses to justify our exemption from fishing or discipling. Here's the problem. We will always find new "legitimate" excuses for every season of our lives. Our circumstances keep changing, but our schedule will stay full. That's why people of every age and circumstance never get around to fishing and making disciples. And that's why you and I will never join this great missional adventure God has called us into to reach and then disciple others until we stop making excuses and obey! That can happen today.

This example represents everything we need to change in order to live out Christ living in us. How do we quit pornography, jealousy, smoking, impatience, over-drinking, pride, gossip, anger or any other sin issue in our lives? We repent, ask God for His power, freedom and discipline, and we then work on our issues until we change. How do we begin tithing or developing a lifestyle of generosity with money and everything else? Many of us as believers have had terrible habits in our track record in areas like giving. For example, we never feel like we have enough money to give generously to God. And when we get more money, we spend it on our growing needs and desires. God is often ignored and we give a token instead of a tithe or even more! We always justify it in our own minds, until the day we decide to obey. Our circumstances usually haven't changed, but our heart has. Something changes inside us and we begin to get generous. We know it's right! That's when we are suddenly forced to readjust our spending and perhaps even our lifestyles. But we know it's the right thing to do, and God has matured us and changed us in the process. That's exactly the same principle of deciding to obey in our time management when we choose to add fishing and discipling to our lifestyles.

Now, our ability to manage our priorities and time is so important. We will either plan and schedule our life and time or it will just happen. If we're not careful, we'll waste countless hours of our lives away. If we want to exercise, we'd better plan for it or it probably won't happen. Our priorities will decide if it's important and our management will make it happen, or not. So we look at our weekly schedule and decide when to exercise. If there is not time, something has to go. We can't do everything. That's when we relay on our priorities. Is it a priority to exercise a certain amount of time each week? If it is, we adjust around our other plans and make necessary changes.

We usually end up doing what they think is most important. By the way, all of us are doing things that aren't important. We're all out of balance to varying degrees in our life management. We may work too much, relax too much, watch or listen or play too much. We may church or family too much. God can help you see how to better balance your life if you ask Him for help. But it will always take effort. It won't just happen. Some things will have to go in order for you to add things that need to stay. It's like eating. If we want to be healthy, we just should not eat some foods. And we need to be careful with other foods. It's a fact of life. To get in shape, we need some discipline and planning. Many of those healthy choices will become second nature to us as time goes by. But we'll always have to remember our priorities.

It's the same with the spiritual disciplines of life. It takes real effort to bring appropriate change to our lives. We are actually changing the way we do life. But once those changes become more and more who we are, they will feel very natural to us. By the way, our Father will give us the desire, wisdom, strength and intentionality to do all of this. This IS His will! But He won't answer this as a prayer to a distant God. Drawing close to Him changes us and empowers us to do His will. As we get close to Him, we become more and more like Him and we naturally change. Here's the bad news. There are no quick fixes. You won't see a lifestyle change or a healthy balance in your time management without His help. And that Spirit-filled life only develops as we spend time and grow closer and closer to God.

The thought of doing all of the things that God calls us to do in the Christian life can look daunting and impossible. Fortunately, God's plan is meant to bring us joy and purpose and not guilt and exhaustion. All of our plans need to be woven into a healthy rhythm. So how do we do that?

We move things around. We start with easy steps. And we don't try to do everything at the same time. We have to eat, so we plan lunches and dinners around our goals. We have to drive, so we use our time more wisely, in thoughtfulness or in conversations or in worship. We decide what we don't need to do or do as much. We do some things every day, some things once a week and some things once a month. We learn to not do less important things, at least as often. And we learn to say no to things that aren't in our God-inspired priorities. We can't do everything. But we can do everything God want us to do.

Let's look at spiritual fishing. Fishing starts with prayer and that can fit in to the rest of our prayer plan. Taking time with lost people takes intentionality. But it can be scheduled the normal flow of our lives. We have to eat. Why don't we eat with those neighbors or friends or go do something together? It doesn't have to happen every week. But it does

have to be planned. Planning to talk to a neighbor to grow a friendship doesn't take a lot of time. We just have to set it as a priority and then do it!

What about discipleship? It takes time to be discipled and to disciple someone. It has to be planned. When do we do it? Let's look for those easy answers. Can we eat together? Can we use another meeting and meet at the same time. Are their times when our family members are busy and we can use that moment for discipleship? Can we get up early and meet before the family wakes? Is there a morning or evening or lunch hour when it works best? Here is the fact. Disciplemaking isn't convenient. It takes time to build strong relationships that will end up building authentic disciples. Real discipleship involves people spending lots of time together. It won't always fit in easy corners of our lives. Friends and families hang out, play and pray together. We text and call each other throughout month. Deep friendships develop. But it doesn't all have to happen all the time. Each of us will develop a unique pattern in our lives that will bless us and will please our Father. That's what we want. He's commanded us to go and make disciples. We want to run hard at all of the components of being an authentic disciple and we want to enjoy it as we go. So we have to plan for change. We have to intelligently reorder our time until we feel like we are finding a healthy rhythm in our lives.

Take some time to look at these issues as they apply to your own life. Write down your answers to these important questions:

1) How much time do I need with God and His Word each day in order to draw close and stay to Him? When can I best do that personally?

2) What do I need to do to grow strong and stay strong in the Lord? Is it personal study, classes, church services or a home, fellowship, discipleship or support group? Answer the question and shape your calendar.

3) Am I spending the right amount of time to maintain a healthy, dynamic relationship with my spouse and/or family? Work on God's answer to that question and live out the plan.

4) How does God want me to best serve Him in my life? This could have daily, weekly, monthly and even annual implications. Again, pray and think about God's plan for your life and your service to Him. Try to distinguish the difference between what you like or want to do and what God actually wants you to do.

5) How often does God want me to be intentionally fishing for lost people? How much time do I personally need to take hanging out with people like that?

6) How much time do I give and should I give to discipling others? How many people can and should I disciple?