

# Time Management: Handle with Prayer

By Emily Akin

*"Do NOT BE ANXIOUS about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).*

"I don't have time!" We hear that often today. I never seem to have enough time to accomplish everything I want to do. I use my daily planner to prioritize and schedule everything from getting a haircut to Bible study. It bothers me when I don't get everything done as planned. As I read Paul's teaching in Philippians 4:6, 7, I realize I need to consult God in deciding how to use my time. Only then can I be at peace with the outcome.

## Basic Time Management

Time management is big business. Several popular brands of time management equipment, including planner books and computer software, are available to the busy consumer. These tools are designed to help us be more productive and to get more done in less time. After all, time is money. We can't afford to waste it.

Most time management methods involve some variation on three basic steps: planning, performing, and evaluating.

**Planning.** First, we decide what to do and when to do it. We establish goals and devise strategies to achieve those goals. We assess how much time will be required for each activity. We are besieged with requests for our time at work, at home, at church, and in the community. We want to do our part, but how do we decide what to do and what to leave out? While we're making our lists and setting our priorities, we need to ask God to help us make those decisions.

Organizing resources is an essential part of the planning process. When resources are plentiful, we must be careful not to waste what we have. Sometimes it seems we don't have what we need to accomplish a task. Paul said we must present our requests to God. If we have a need, God can show us how to fill it.

**Performing.** Carrying out the plans we have made is a challenge, especially if we have overscheduled. It's frustrating to get to the end of the day and realize your to-do list is unfinished. In the performance stage, plans must sometimes

be changed. Take it to God in prayer. In the rush and stress of daily life, a prayer break will make the work progress more smoothly.

Remember to praise God when things go well. It's only human to want to take credit for our successes. Paul said we must present our requests to God with thanksgiving. We can take credit for our work, but we need to give God the glory.

## Time is a gift from God.

**Evaluating.** The final step in the time management process involves analyzing results. What worked? What went wrong? Why? We can ask God to show us what might have worked better. Again, we give thanks for God's guidance and for the plans that succeeded. Because time management is a never-ending process, the evaluation stage leads directly to planning for the next period.



## Seeking God's Guidance

Time is a gift from God. It is a resource given equally to everyone. Each of us has 24 hours a day, seven days a week. God gives us enough time to accomplish his purpose for us. It's up to us to discover that purpose.

God allows us to decide how to live our lives, but he expects us to be good stewards of our resources, including time. We can choose to spend our time in useful activities, or we can choose to waste it. Some of us get carried away, trying to do too much. We let multiple priorities cloud our judgment and we end up overburdened. I often read Ecclesiastes 3:1-12, which begins, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." This familiar passage reminds us there is indeed a time for everything, and we can't do everything at once.

## Jesus lived his entire life according to God's plan.

The Bible contains many stories about people who consulted God in their planning. Discussing whether they should join forces to go to war against a common enemy, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, admonished the king of Israel, "First seek the counsel of the LORD" (1 Kings 22:5).

As he gave the plans for the construction of the temple to his son Solomon, David said, "All this . . . I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan" (1 Chronicles 28:19). David knew the importance of following God's plan.

Paul's journeys required planning, but he always sought God's direction in determining where he should go. His words to the elders of the church at Ephesus illustrate his approach to planning his travels. "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:22-24).

Jesus lived his entire life according to God's plan. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed that God would spare him from the suffering that was to come; yet, Jesus knew God's plan must prevail. In the end he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

## Praying through the Process

Let's follow the lead of our faith heroes. Begin by recognizing that all our resources come from God, and then organize them accordingly. Seek God's wisdom in the use of those resources. Pray at the beginning of your planning process.

A writer friend explained that she carefully outlines each article she writes. She prays for guidance as she develops her subject. Once she has her outline, she feels she knows how God wants her to present her subject.

Sometimes our plans work well. When that happens, remember to thank God for your successes. Sometimes things go wrong. God is still there. Pray for guidance even in the turmoil of plans gone awry.

A local judge told me he takes time to pray over his court docket before beginning each court session. But one morning he was so busy he failed to pray before going to court. The first couple of cases were difficult, and things were getting out of control. He remembered he had not prayed, so he called a recess. After he retired to his chambers to pray, he returned to court and things went smoothly the rest of the day.

When you arrive at the evaluation stage, you can again thank God for the successes and for the lessons learned from the failures. Since time management is a circular process, your prayer for guidance in analyzing your results from one project can lead into praying for God's help in planning the next.

My writer friend develops her outlines with prayer, but sometimes has difficulty following her outline. When this happens, she feels God is guiding her to take a different direction than she planned. She has discovered that following God's lead always results in a better article.

## Trusting in the Outcome

Consider Proverbs 19:21: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." As we manage the time God has given us, we must remember God has a purpose for each of us. We won't always understand. We just have to trust God.

In Philippians 4:6, 7, Paul tells us to take everything to God in prayer so we can have peace. Even in our busy 21<sup>st</sup> century lives, we can have the peace that passes understanding—if we give our plans over to God. We have enough time to do what God wants us to do. We simply have to ask God to show us the right path, every step of the way. ■

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