

Being generous with our time seems like just one more thing to add to our busy schedules. The idea of adding a time intensive chore can make us feel overwhelmed and lead us to procrastinate or just write the whole idea off. The problem is we often have the wrong view of what being generous with our time truly means. It is not about looking for good works to do or chores to take on, but about choosing to spend our time walking with God.

Day 1

Choose

In Joshua 24:14-18 the Israelites are in the midst of a covenant renewal after a campaign to take over the promised land. Israel had to wait 40 years in the desert because they did not have faith in God and a whole generation passed away. After a new generation was raised up, Israel took most of the promised land and now needs to decide how they will live in the promised land. The question is, will they walk with God? Or will they walk in the idolatry of the nation of Egypt or the idolatry of the Canaanites? This need to choose seems obvious but Joshua knows the human heart better than most of us. We all tend to follow the path of least resistance and slouch our way into the lives we end up living. We do much of what we do without consciously choosing it. Rather than being a product of our careful consideration we live lives that come from the tendencies of our desires and inclinations. So, the question before us is simple. How will we use our time that has been allotted to us in the lives we have been given? Will we walk with God or with some other value system or with our whims of the moment? Some questions to consider when making this choice: What will the outcome of my choice be and where will my life end up? Is choosing to walk with God harder in the short term or long term than my other choices? What kind of difficulties are ahead of me? What are the rewards of each choice? How long will those rewards last? What is involved in living each choice day to day? Do I have the courage to live out my choice?

Day 2

Surrounded

Now that we have made our choice, we must live it out which is easier said than done. The easiest choice in the short term is to do whatever we feel like doing in the moment, but it is the hardest choice in the long term as our lives are chaotic and our time is wasted. Assuming we have made the choice to walk with God and use the time that God has given us to pursue a relationship with him, how should we proceed? Most of the time when faced with a question like this we will begin to “try harder” to follow God which will quickly be followed by resuming our normal lives. If we really want to pursue change, we must live wisely and understand how change occurs. Both the Bible and modern behavioral research have many areas of agreement on how a person can change, and the first step is to look at the environment that surrounds us. Proverbs 13:20 encourages us to look at who we spend time with because making changes that go against the grain of our environment takes a tremendous amount of willpower and we will sooner or later run out. Who you choose to surround yourself with will largely determine your future. In addition, the things that surround you will have a great impact on how you spend your time. If you want to start a new behavior or end an old one, make sure it is “in your face” all the time. Want to start exercising? Put the equipment you need in your living room until you make a habit of using it. Want to read your bible more? Put it in an area where you will see it repeatedly. Put bible verses throughout your house where you will see them throughout the day. Want to eat differently? Get all the old food you don’t want to eat out of your house and put the new healthy food on the counter. We must arrange our environment to make it conducive to walking with God. In the garden one of Adam’s main tasks was to guard the garden and keep the serpent out. When he failed,

the serpent entered and sin and distance from God were the result. So, how can you start to arrange your environment to better walk with God?

Day 3

Beauty

Throughout the book of Proverbs, a contest unfolds. This contest is between the personification of wisdom and folly and who will entice a young king to follow. Proverbs 1:20-33 is the call of Lady Wisdom, and Proverbs 4 speaks of the results of following her. Proverbs 7 contains an extended description of the adulteress who is also folly that is continued in Proverbs 9:13-18. Throughout the book of Proverbs, the battle between wisdom and folly for the hearts of people rages. What is the weapon that each wields? Beauty. In the ancient world there were three transcendentals: Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. Truth was what exists, goodness was the quality of that which exists, and beauty was the attractiveness of the truly good. Beauty was seen as the force that drew us to unite ourselves to an idea, and action, or a decision. The perspective of the writer of proverbs is that Wisdom's beauty is based on an offer of true goodness. If you follow wisdom, even though sometimes difficult, you will find your reward is true goodness. Wisdom's beauty or attractiveness rings true. Folly, on the other hand, has a beauty or attractiveness that is false. Folly looks good because it promises ease, comfort, and something for nothing. Folly lies. If we want to walk with God, we must come to see his beauty. In Psalm 27:4-5 the Psalmist is convinced of the beauty of God and desires to get as close to it as he can and stay as long as possible. When we are tempted to spend our lives walking with something other than God we are being deceived by a false beauty. The key then to walking with God is to behold his beauty. In what ways are you being deceived by false beauty? In what ways are you missing the beauty of God in your behaviors and habits? When you are tempted to sin, what mistake in beauty are you making? In an area where God's command is clear but you struggle to obey, what assumptions are you making that deny the beauty of God in that command? How can you think about it differently? In what ways can you use the beauty of God to reinforce good habits?

Day 4

Overwhelmed

Choosing to spend our time walking with God can seem overwhelming as can any major change in our lives. Whether it's losing weight, saving money, or going back to school, major life changes can be daunting in their size and scope. Both behavior research and the bible recognize the power of accumulated small changes over time and the development of good habits. The British were completely dominant in bicycle road racing from 2007 to 2017 because they hired a man to head the program that believed that accumulated small changes could bring huge rewards. He examined the entire program looking for all the areas he could make a 1% improvement. From the clothing the racers wore to the tires of their bikes to their pillows, he tried to make a small improvement. These incremental improvements turned the team from one of the worst in the world to the best in a matter of a few years. What's the point? Jesus said in Matthew 11:25-30 that his yoke was easy and his burden light. We often think about how walking with God means some great burden like going to Zimbabwe as a missionary or changing our country. Mother Teresa said we can do no great things, only small things with great love. What are some small things you can change in your life to spend your time walking with God? Instead of trying to find the biggest thing, try finding the smallest. Can you make a habit of it? Throughout the bible, from the 5 loaves and 2 fish to the widow's mite, God can do extraordinary things with something small given to Him. Make a list of the smallest things you can do to walk with God. Get started on the one that seems most enjoyable to you today.

Day 5

Celebrate

We have the privilege of walking with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This should be a joy and not a chore. Here are some things to think about as we close out the week: Start making changes to how you spend your time in the way that seems most enjoyable to you. Success begets success so start off on the right foot by doing the thing that will bring you the greatest reward in joy. After you get momentum, you can try some things that seem more challenging. Meditate on the goodness of the changes you are trying to make in your life. We often sabotage ourselves by thinking of the enjoyable aspects of the things we are giving up rather than on the enjoyable aspects of the habits we are building. Meditate on the harvest that you will receive from the habits that you are planting. Many times, when we choose to walk with someone other than God, we are thinking of the short term over the long term. The problem is the future will be here before we know it. God made the world so that the planting of one seed could bring a harvest of 100-fold. What a glorious God to make such a small sacrifice so potent in our blessing. Jerry Seinfeld is often considered one of the most prolific comedians of the modern era. His secret is very simple: 1 joke a day. Instead of trying to write a whole routine at a time, he simply wrote one joke every single day. He would mark his calendar with a big red x every day he wrote a joke, and then after a while he just wanted to make sure he didn't break the chain. The bible says we should not become weary in doing good (Galatians 6:1-10). It is easy to see why when God made such a wonderful world where such small things could yield such big blessings.