



P.O. Box 66540

Albuquerque, NM 87193

505.890.6806

E-mail: irm@liferesource.org

Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript

Time Management for Christians – Why Time Management Is Important for Christians

By Bill Jacobs

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This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries. Good day to you.

We're starting a new series today, the title of which is *Time Management for Christians*. The title of this first installment is *Why Time Management Is Important for Christians*.

Have you ever noticed that when you hear a song played, you can almost always tell, within ten years or so, of when that song came out? Songs from the various decades have a similar quality about them. It's like there was an enormous group-think going on among the song writers of each decade that caused them to create the same kind of music – either that, or there was a lot of copycatting going on. Right? I mean, think about disco music, for example. Everybody knows that was big in the late seventies and early eighties – or there about. In the same way, I have noticed, in years past, a propensity for the same kind of sermons – or at least, sermon topics – in the Churches of God. Also, various topics were covered over and over, while others were not covered at all. It's like in my field, where there are fad diagnoses all the time – like, when I first started, it was bipolar disorder. Now, it's PTSD. So people listen to each other and they develop similar ways of thinking about things. Besides topics, maybe teaching about some biblical truth or social issue, and then never connecting it to what it means to the people listening. It was good enough just to talk about the topic without any connection. So that became a style or format.

Besides the group thing that I just mentioned, I've noticed that it's a lot easier to give a general type of sermon, where the speaker points out a problem and strongly exhorts everybody to overcome it, but omitting one element – a very important and difficult element – namely *how* to overcome it. When confronted with this type of sermon, there really is only one reason to listen to it – or to them, over time – and that is *duty*. Once we've come to church, and we've sat and listened to the sermon, we've done our duty. There's no obligation to go any further or do anything as a result of what we've heard – because we did our duty by just showing up. Home free. And of course, since it makes us feel good to come to church, when the minister gives an

exhortive type of sermon, we reinforce it by complimenting him on it, and that makes him think that the kind of sermon he gave was a good sermon. “That was a mighty fine sermon today, pastor. It reminded me of a lot people I know.”

Now some are thinking that I’m being negative about the effectiveness of sermons. So let me tell you about an experience I had a few years ago. Elaine and I held a Feast at Park City, Utah. And I think it was the first day, I passed out a survey of the one hundred-plus people who came. And I asked if they could point to one change they had made as a result of any sermon they’d heard at any Feast in the last five years. One teen, out of those hundred-plus people, responded positively to that question, and explained what it was, in detailed terms, what she was doing differently. I might note, too, that none of the ministers present, or any of the adults, could say the same. With a little more probing in my survey, I learned that ninety-five percent of the people there not only didn’t make any changes, but they didn’t even remember any of the sermons they had heard in the last five years.

So that’s why I’m saying these negative things about sermons. And part of that is because I want to talk about a subject today that is not part of the usual exhortational milieu, but one that points toward changes in everyday life to make a person a better servant of God. So, I dare you to learn *one* thing you can do differently from this sermon and remember to do it for the rest of your life. Just listening to it is *not* going to be helpful to you.

So, I’ve already told you the topic – *Time Management for Christians*. Now think about this. Have you ever heard a minister give a sermon – let alone a series of sermons – on how to manage your time, or even explain the necessity of it for Christians? Usually we find stuff like that in business books or self-help books, right? And yet, how we use our time is a core, but little discussed, element of Christianity. So this is my effort to “go where no man has gone before.” And since it’s about time, I can also – like Buzz Lightyear – say, “To infinity and beyond.” In fact, let’s start there – with infinity.

Why do you think God made us mortal? I mean, if we’re to learn to be like God, then shouldn’t we be learning to deal with never-ending life, instead of just a limited mortal kind of life? Well, some might think that if we had all the time in the world, we wouldn’t need to manage our time at all. We could live in the perpetual state of *mañana*. That’s what we call it in New Mexico, you know. And yet, as we see, God, who isn’t bound by time at all, has a plan, and He says He’s working hard on it to accomplish it. So He’s a doer. He’s an accomplisher. He doesn’t wait until tomorrow. Of course, there *isn’t* a tomorrow for God. It’s all right now. Right? With God, He has all the time He needs to do everything He’s doing. And yet, He still works hard. Some of us do what we do because we don’t want to be late. God doesn’t have to worry about late. But He still works hard. And we can look at the creation and realize that He’s an organized God who pays attention to and manages details.

Look with me at something that Jesus said in Matthew 24:36:

Matthew 24:36 – *But concerning that day and hour, no one knows – not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son – but the Father only.* What was He talking about? Well, He was talking about the day and the hour Jesus is going to return to this earth. And He said He didn't even know when that was – only God the Father.

So, even though God is outside of time, when it comes to His plan for us – beings who are stuck in time – He has a plan that has at least one phase of it that is set for a specific day and an hour. So He's gone inside of time to set that. So, some people have accused God of being slow on the draw, and others, quick on the trigger. But no, He's working extremely complicated plans, so that when it's time, everything will be ready. Of course, I'm talking in human terms there, right? We can't really understand how God works. But my point here is, that even though God has all the time in the world, He still works hard, and He's working out a plan, and He's stepped into time and made specific deadlines for it. So just thinking that, if we had all the time in the world, that's going to solve our problem, that's not really how God thinks about it at all.

We can see that Jesus, when He was here, did not have a reputation for being late, but always seemed to be where He should have been when He should have been there – and at the same time, never seemed to be rushed or pressured about any event in His life, except, perhaps, the very last one. And He always seems to have accomplished everything He set out to do. So, it's just taken as a natural part of God's way – in and out of the world – in and out of the universe.

Notice a statement Jesus made about the nature of God – John 5:17:

John 5:17 – *But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now and I am working.”* So they're a couple of workers. They have plans. They have goals. They're busy doing stuff. They have objectives. They have projects that they want to accomplish on the way to their end goal. They manage others in their plan. There is an innumerable multitude of angels, we're told. So God is a manager of other people and He sends them on missions – stepping into time in the universe to make sure these things happen according to His plan. And they make things happen in an orderly fashion.

Let's go to a famous scripture in 2 Peter 3:9 – Peter says:

2 Peter 3:9 – *The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness.* “When is He ever going to come back? It's just taking forever! You know, we just want Him to come back and end all the misery and all the problems.” *The Lord is not slow concerning His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* So, if it's taking a long time for Him to come, it's not because of Him. It's because of us. We're the ones that are slow. He doesn't want to leave anybody behind. So He has to make sure everybody is ready.

So God's not late. He's not slow. He's not lazy. He's right on time. And it's a good thing for us that He is, because it's taking so long for us to do what we're told, that we need time to get ready. If anybody's late, *we* are.

Okay, before we move on, let me make the main points that I hope you would take from what I've said so far. God has all the time in the world – outside of the universe. Still, He's always on time and He's never late. He works hard – not because He might get in trouble or look bad for showing up late, or because He might get behind, but because He has things He wants to accomplish – namely, to help us all into His family. So I'm talking about how God is, because we're supposed to be learning to be like Him. Right? And that would include how we use time.

Let's look at some roadblocks to using time like God does. I have a man coming to my counseling practice – or came to it some time ago. He also worked a 40-hour a week job. At the same time, he was a fitness trainer – that was a second job that he had – and he was part-owner in a business that set up gyms and sold franchises around the country. So he would fly to different cities on different weeks to work on these projects while he was doing his 40-hour a week job. He had some time flexibility there. He could work on weekends when he needed to. But I noticed that he had a terrible time getting to his sessions on time. Now, what I've noticed with other people is, the people that are the most busy are the ones that show up on time, because they *have* to. If they want to get everything done, they have to do it in an orderly fashion. Sometimes he wouldn't show up for his sessions, and I would call him when he was late. I call everybody five minutes in, if they're not there. Like he'd have a session set for the middle of the day, and I would call him, and he would have been asleep. I would wake him up with the phone call. He referred some of his clients to me as we went along, and once they knew that he was here – not because I told them, but because he told them – they would complain about his constant lateness and disorganization, and how frustrating it was to them. So his life was really helter-skelter. And all that was driven by anxiety that he carried around with him. And, in turn, the chaos that he was creating for himself was making him more anxious. It was a cycle. His anxiety wouldn't allow him to focus and get organized. And the chaos that created made him more anxious. So it was a terrible, vicious, exhausting cycle. It made him ineffective in his work, in his relationships, and even in his therapy.

I have known many people in the church, who've been trapped in that same cycle. They might be anxious by nature, or anxious because of stuff that happened to them in their past – like this man – and that anxiety hinders their ability to focus and plan their work. So that's the perfect picture of what was going on with this man. Can anybody relate to that?

Now some people do anxiety in a different way than he did. They're never late, because their anxiety won't allow them to. So they make too many lists, and they spend too much time organizing, and somehow they never get around to doing anything. I had a friend once who had always been a terrible procrastinator. He decided to buy a window cleaning business – or start one – I can't remember which – and he bought some equipment from another window cleaner

that was going out of business, I think. His wife came to talk to me about her frustrations with him. I said, "I understood that your husband bought equipment. What's he doing now?" And she said, "He's painting the ladders." You know, busy work – just doing something, because he didn't know how to go out and actually start doing it. So he was doing anxious busy work, instead of being productive.

So anxiety is something that causes people to misuse time – to be chaotic sometimes. We don't see that mentioned too much in time management books, but this is something that I've observed, watching people come into my office. You get a sense of how their dealing with their time and their anxiety and all that.

Now here's another one. I had another man who told me that five years earlier he was working on his taxes on TurboTax, and he ran into a problem – a wall. Now, you know, what that usually means – when you're doing TurboTax – you haven't found all the information you need to enter into the program, because it's going to figure it for you. Right? So he just didn't have enough information pulled out of his filing system or whatever. He told me that he ran into that problem, put it down, and never came back to it. And he was telling me this *five years* after that happened. So I also learned that, during a couple of those years, he'd made in excess of \$200,000. So he was say, way behind...I think when it all shook out, it was \$115,000 that he was behind on in his taxes. And I asked him why he never came back to it, and he said, "You know that saying, 'What was I thinking?'" And I told him, "I hear, and think, and say that quite a bit, actually." And he said, "Well, I was thinking it was all too hard." He said, "It seems like I never grew up. I've had a hard time doing things that are hard for me all my life. I've never managed my budget. I procrastinate. Keeping my home up – you know, mowing the lawn and doing the yard. I'm late paying my bills."

There's one other thing you should know about this man. He came because he was depressed. And when we're depressed, everything is harder. I'm not too depressed of a person most of the time, but I remember one winter I had what I think was seasonal affective disorder. That's where you get depressed because you're not getting enough sunlight. I don't know why I had that – only one winter here in Albuquerque, because the sun shines most of the time – even in the winter. But I think, as soon as spring came and I started getting outside more, it just went away. I didn't have anything to be depressed about, so that's the only think I can pinpoint it to. But I remember what that felt like. It was like I could hardly get out of my own way. Everything was harder, Depression for most people comes from not dealing with the emotional aspect of the losses that they have experienced. And this many had had terrible childhood. He told me that when he was seven, he overheard part of a conversation between his mother and his stepfather. He heard his stepfather say to his mother, "If you don't want him, you could get \$40,000 for him." Can you imagine that?

Once this man stopped being depressed, he started doing things, because they were easier for him. He was beating himself up over not doing all these things when it was a mood disorder. And

that was caused because he stuffed all of those problems he had, and all the terrible things that were done to him and said to him when he was a child.

Now, there's another reason I've noticed – so, anxiety and depression – there's another reason I've noticed that we have time management issues in today's world. This is a contemporary issue more than anything else. I call it overwhelm. (He was overwhelmed, because he was depressed.) I'm talking about being overwhelmed when you're *not* depressed and you're not anxious. There are just so many things to do, we don't know what to do with it all – email, texts, social media, rapid transportation. All of that speeds everything way up. If you think about biblical times, when someone went somewhere, it was not at 600 mph. It was at 4 mph on the back of a camel or a donkey. And you had lots of time to think about what you're were going to say before you got there, and a lot of time to think about what happened on the way back. There was time to heal up from the negatives. Most people today work way more hours than people have ever worked in the history of the world. The pace of life in Western culture is just over the top. That fellow I told about that worked 40 hours, and then ran physical training sessions, as well as traveling the country setting up gyms, he's an example. We're drawn to do more and more than ever before in human history, because we can. We have the tools to do that.

I was talking to a lady recently – very bright, very successful – came because of negatives in her childhood that she wanted to get past. And so, as we made a list of those things that she wanted to address, after she brought them up, in about half the cases, she would mention the issue and then say, “You know, my thinking has changed on that while I was in India. I don't think we need to work on that.” And finally, after hearing that about five or six times, I said, “Well, what happened in India?” And she said, “Oh, I went on a retreat there. I was in southern India. It was hot, but we all had rooms that were in shaded areas – you know, with big trees – and you could be cool. And we had classes and activities that we could attend. But we didn't *have* to do any of that. My room was cleaned by someone else. My food was prepared for me by someone else. So I could do as little or as much as I wanted.” And I said, “It sounds great. How long were you there?” And she said, “Forty days.” Forty days! And she said, “I think that helped my nerve endings heal from the fast pace of Western life. I don't think we're meant to go so fast,” she said. “And now I see that that time restored me and healed me of much of my past trauma. I didn't realize it until we started talking.”

So, in the West, most of us function on overload, and always have, and we don't even know that there's a more relaxed way to live. Do you know who else took forty days off to strengthen Himself spiritually? Jesus, right? We're told He fasted for forty days.

So there are three things – anxiety, depression and overwhelm. Here's the fourth one. The reason God works, even though He has all the time in the world, is because He has a burning desire to accomplish something. In other words, when you don't have any goals, it's really hard to manage them. So there are many people today, in our world, that don't have that. They just float. That's sort of the opposite problem most of us have. But there are a lot of those people that just float.

These folks are often late. They don't mind inconveniencing other people. They're sort of empty inside. This all comes from past issues as well. Most of the people I meet who live this way are also somewhat depressed, because they don't have any meaning in their lives – or much meaning.

The person who can't remember any sermon from the Feast last year... what's the problem there? Well, they come because they think they're supposed to and that's enough. They float in and they float out. Their mind floats while the sermon is going on. I can remember back to last year's Feast, to the three or four sermons that made an impact on me, so I know that there was good material put forth. You know, we could call the Feast a target-rich environment for those who want to go forward and grow and be more like Christ. But a lot of us don't do that. We just come, and we think that's good enough. I mean, if you were serious about accomplishing goals in your life, wouldn't you, at least, latch on to one or two things that would help you go forward? So, there it is, too. If you don't have any reason to learn anything, if you don't have any direction you're trying to go – you're just on free-float – you have a time management problem and don't realize it.

Okay, so far, in this sermon or presentation, I've been what I talked about at the first – the speaker who points up a problem and offers no solutions. Will I now show you step-by-step how to solve all these issues? Well, that's exactly what I intend to do. So, if you could identify with any of the reasons I gave for having time use issues, you can expect to hear some concrete practical tools, all aimed at helping you be a Christian who functions more like God – not just the time management part, but also the motivational and emotional parts as well – the part that goes along with having goals, and the part that has to do with depression and anxiety.

The question I have is: Can you override the experience of coming to church out of duty, and instead come to church to learn? Since we have a bit more time left, I'm going to, in advance, tell you about some of the resources we will be using. All of these tools have seriously impacted the way I live and work. So, this is going to turn into the story of somebody who is naturally a procrastinator, a chronic time waster, an anxious person, who can somehow run a counseling practice and a non-profit without much help from anyone, except for his very diligent wife. So, I think that I'm, in a way, an example of how these things can work for somebody that doesn't already have these tools.

First of all, I was in my car one day – I think it was 1987 or 88 – in standstill traffic on Highway 101, just north of San Jose, California. I was listening to talk radio – KGO. That radio station is important to me, because that's how I first learned about the Church of God. The guest on this talk show was a man named Stephen Covey, who had just written a book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*. And the talk show host – to open it up – said, “Why another self-help book?” And Covey explained that, before he wrote a word of his book, he did a research project on all the self-help books published in the United States from 1776 to the present day. And he said, “We discovered that somewhere in the 1920s and 30s, there was a profound change in the

content of these books. In the beginning self-help books were about loyalty, honesty, work ethic, etcetera. And when the change took place, they became about how to present yourself, how to manipulate people into doing what you wanted, etcetera. They changed from character to presentation, from substance to form. It was all about how look good, instead of how to be a standup person.” He said, “We’re going back.” He wrote this book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. I didn’t learn till years later that he wrote it right out of the Bible. He picked the seven habits that are in the Bible of highly effective people – never quoted a scripture. And I heard him say that he wanted to teach people biblical principles of living a good life to non-believers. Google says that all his books combined sold 20 million copies. So he was *very* successful at what he did.

Here’s what he said in a nutshell: Organize your life based on the roles that you play. What roles do you play in your life? Then prioritize the use of your time for each role based on the importance of that role to you. Right there – if we do this, we will start spending our time on all the things in our lives – including the fun things – but we will put the most important things first. And that will cause us to accomplish more in the area of importance. And that will make us feel less anxious and less depressed and more fulfilled. We still get to play golf, or watch TV, or go to the movies, or go out to eat, but we will be able to do those things, knowing that we put first things first in our lives.

So that book changed the way I organized my life. And amazingly, it made me aware that I was able to decide to play roles and how to learn and do them. So we’re going to draw on these principles heavily as we go along. It’s not my goal to today to explain how to do that. I’m just telling you what’s coming down the road so you can start thinking with me about these things.

The second one happened thirty years later. I was watching YouTube and I saw a man named David Allen, who had just written a book called *Getting Things Done*. And *his* point was, that everyone today – thirty years after 1987, when we now have all this social media and stuff.... You know, in 1987, when I moved to San Jose, I was just starting to learn about email and the Internet. So a lot of things have happened since then. And this man, David Allen, was observing what had happened to people because of social media and the Internet and all of these things. His point was that everybody is now in a state of overwhelm – way too much stuff coming at us. We have email. We have computers. We have laptop computers. We have phones that have more power than the computer I had in 1987. We have social media Websites, email, texts. We always got our phone with us, so we can be called. We have instantaneous connection all over the world. We can buy stuff and read stuff from everywhere. So we’re all in a state of overwhelm because of all of this. He created, in this book, a flow chart that is a work of genius. If you’re to use this, you’ll never again have to wonder what to do about the mountain of stuff that overwhelms you every day. I’m going to show you...I think I may either have to find a link to it in one of his books, that you can look at on Amazon or maybe Google, or maybe just put my version of that up on the Website, so you can download it as you listen to this. But we’ll figure that out as we

go. But I'm going to show you that chart. That chart changed my life. And it helps me get past overwhelm every day. I can just feel myself relaxing just thinking about it.

Now, one of the things that I learned from David Allen – besides the flow chart – was, I was listening to a presentation he gave in Silicone Valley on YouTube, and the first thing he did – once he got going – was ask a question. He said, “How many people here need to be doing something else right now?” And everybody's hand went up. And then he said, “The anxiety about not forgetting to do something else, or be somewhere else, is robbing you of the ability to focus on what you're doing right now.” He said, “That doesn't just apply here listening to my presentation. It applies to when you're talking on the telephone to somebody, or writing a paper, or doing something else, because you're in a state of overwhelm.” We all are. “So the anxiety of not forgetting to do something else, or to be somewhere else is robbing you of the focus,” he said. “So how many of you are looking at your phone, at the texts, or emails, or thinking about what you need to do next?” And then he mentioned that the human mind can only retain three to five things before it starts to drop stuff. And if the thing that you drop is paying your income taxes on April 15th, for example, that can be a problem. So the thought of forgetting something creates anxiety, which impairs our ability to remember. So it makes it *more* likely that we'll forget stuff. “A simple solution to all this,” he said, “is to simply write it down.” And we're going to talk about the easiest way to keep track of a thousand things, using his method as we go.

You see, I told you that I was going to talk about specific things. Right? So we're going to talk about that. I know some few people actually have system they use that doesn't break down and they stay with it and all that, but most of us don't. Most of us live in overwhelm, because of what's going on around us. So we're going to talk about the easiest way to keep track of those things. And we're going to talk about one other thing that will make a huge difference in your ability to be a successful Christian. It's just one simple idea. And I'm going to save that for later.

So, as we go along through these concepts and tools, I'm going to show you how you can get past not having any goals, or not setting any goals, or setting goals too low, or how to get past free-float. A lot of people are in free-float and have no idea where they're going, because they're so busy doing things that are irrelevant to the whole purpose of their lives. That's one of the reasons we create a lot of our own free-float and a lot of our own overwhelm – because we spend our time painting ladders, instead of doing what gets us forward. And that includes many people who are Christians. We really aren't any different, when it comes to this issue, than anybody else in the world. We all suffer from it.

So, there are positive effective ways around the obstacles that I've mentioned today, including anxiety and depression. So the next time, I'm going to begin showing you what has worked for me.

Now, in preparation for our next installment of this series, here is something that you've probably never heard in a sermon before – homework. I'm going to ask you to *do* something!

That will help you connect to what you just listened to, if you do it, and it will get you ready so that you will be able to pay more attention to what's coming after. So what I want you to do is make a list of the various major roles that you play in your life. Are you a parent? Are you a mate? Are you an employee? Are you...what are you? You have a gift that you use, and do you play a role in that gift? What do you do? Are you a Christian? Think about the major roles that you play in your life. And then, after you've got your list of primary roles, I want you to list *one* goal that you're working on toward each one of those roles right now. Okay, so you're a father. So what's your goal? What's your end goal? What are you trying to accomplish long range? Or, maybe, you can even come up with a short range goal, whatever – something to make it tangible – real – for you. Okay?

All right. That's all for today. Since this is the first of a series, you should know that the rest of them – like this one – will be installed on our Website at liferesource.org, and eventually you can go there and search for “time management for Christians,” and you'll find all that we've completed on this series so far.

So, until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.