

# Zebedee Commitment: A study for Personal Stewardship Growth

## Lesson Three: Stewardship of our Time

We celebrate the many gifts that God bestows upon us. One of these gifts is time, the hours of our day, as well as our weeks, months and years. John and James gave to the Lord their whole lives. That meant following Jesus, but it also meant spending time at caring for relationships, for one's human needs of sleep and hygiene and recreation. For these two, their work was in promoting God's agenda, first in being a disciple and later in building the church of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we think of our time as separated into spheres. We have personal time with family and home life, professional time at the work place and spiritual time in pursuing religious activities including church. Such would be a very foreign concept to first century people. They would see all of life as connected. This lesson will consider the ways in which we use our time. This includes time that we offer to God, as well as the way we schedule our lives to find health and wellness in all spheres. Since our jobs are a gift from God, even in this area God has something to say to us about the use of our time.

### Busy as a Way of Life

Our world expects much of us, and as a result, our weekly schedules reflect that activity. Most of us have daily planners that are jammed with work, family, and organizational commitments. A day to rest or play is often seen as a luxury that can only be indulged once all our work is accomplished. Since our work is seldom done, too often we don't get that time to rest and play. Wayne Muller has this to say about our hectic paced lives.

“ A ‘successful’ life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have, and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth, because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feed us, to taste its blessing and give thanks.” (1)

In addition, Muller points out that the Chinese word for “busy” is composed of 2 characters: *heart* and *killing*.(2) To be busy is to kill a part of our heart! (2)

How do you feel about Muller's assessment?

Some of the dangers of being so busy, Muller claims, is that we take everything for granted, “We consume things, people, and information. We do not have time to savor this life, nor to care deeply and gently for ourselves, our loved ones, or our world; rather with increasingly dizzying haste, we use them all up, and throw them away.”(3)

Do you agree with Muller’s evaluation of our push to busyness?

Think of a time when you had too much on your weekly planner. How did that week go? Did you find yourself feeling positive and energized or overwhelmed and overburdened?

People feel the effect of an overly busy schedule in many ways: physically, emotionally, and relationally. Some people lose the ability to fall asleep and walk through their days feeling exhausted. Some find that their immune system can no longer fight off infections as effectively, and it is only with illness that they allow themselves to finally rest. Others find themselves depressed and losing any sense of joy in our world. Still others forfeit the connection with loved ones and find themselves feeling lonely and disconnected.

How does the stress of too much to do affect you? Are you able to hear God’s call to you in the midst of the busyness?

The Prophet Elijah felt overwhelmed because of the wrath of Queen Jezebel. He ran away to the mountain of God. **Read 1 Kings 19: 8-13.** Elijah wraps his face in his mantle because it was the understanding of the day that any who see God would die. This is a sign that he has finally experienced God.

What does this story tell us about how God can be experienced in our world?

Does this story agree with your understanding of how God speaks us in the quiet? How does this story inform **Psalms 46:10** “*Be still and know that I am God!*” When are you able to be still and know the presence of God? What do you discover in that holy space?

## Church and Time

Church is also a part of our time-frenzied world. We expect God to be present to us in worship, yet sometimes we think that we have too much to do to be able to attend. Even for those who do attend regularly, “Church” is more than worship. There are committee responsibilities, teaching, fellowship events, and mission projects that call for people’s time. It often seems like we simply don’t have time for the church in our over-busy schedules. Those are the hours when we can do household chores or spend time with family. We see this same temptation offered to Jesus in the wilderness. **Read Matthew 4: 8-10.**

The devil asked Jesus to worship him and Satan promised him all the kingdoms of the world *and their splendor.* (emphasis added) How is our over-busyness an invitation to worship the values of our society instead of our one true God?

What are the splendors that our overly busy schedules seek? Does such a push to do it all work for us? How does it work against us?

So how does the example of James and John speak to this need to do it all? The disciples enjoyed the presence of Jesus who was a part of the daily lives. Jesus offered them, and us, an example to follow. We see Jesus in worship, (**Luke 4: 16-20**), but we also note that he knew how to move away from his work in order to rest—**Mark 6: 30-46**. Read these 2 passages.

Note that the Luke passage is often thought of as Jesus’ Mission Statement. This is what he understood his ministry to be. Yet even in the midst of that ministry he makes the effort to rest. While in the Mark story his time of refreshment is cut short by the crowds (whom he then cares for), very soon he does find opportunity to rest and pray.

What can we learn from these examples?

How do we understand our “mission” as followers of Jesus?

How might you find the balance to fulfill your obligations of work, family, personal time, rest and serving God through our participation with God through the ministry of our church?

## Church as Community

Our media likes to remember a simpler time when church and community was a more central part of people's lives. All people need a sense of belonging and connection to others. Today we often seek such belonging within the church. While church leaders always hope that community is a part of our congregational experience, community exists for the mission of God, which is the way we tell the story of God's love through our ministry.

***The church is not an institution of our own design, created to give US the warm, happy glow of God's love in our lives. The church is God's idea and is God's tool in our world.***

The above assertion means that church allows us to find a sense of belonging that grows from our involvement in God's mission. Being a part of a caring community helps us to walk through the difficult times of our lives, and our brothers and sisters keep us accountable to a faithful way of being in the world and serving Christ. As we share our commitment to Christ and doing HIS will in the world, we become a part of something larger than ourselves. We find ourselves connected to others and to God. We are better able to find the balance we need.

What is your reaction to this view of church in our lives?

Tell of a time when you felt a real sense of community and blessing through your work with others in the church for the purposes of our God?

How did the time that you devoted to the mission of Christ through the church offer you a sense of God's presence in your life?

How did that presence of God help you in other aspects of your life?

### **Read Romans 12:1-8**

What do verses 1-2 say to you about your involvement in Christ's mission?

Does the concept of being a "holy sacrifice" feel difficult or negative? What other word or phrase might we use today to convey the concept of giving ourselves to God? How about steward?

How does being a living sacrifice (or steward or the phrase you created) resonate with the concept of time management?

Many have considered congregational involvement to be a necessary but painful sacrifice. How does the last part of verse 2 (*...so you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect*) shed a different light on such thinking?

**Talk with a partner about your time.**

Do you think you have sufficient time to rest and play and enjoy the life God has given you?

What parts of your schedule could be adjusted to create more time to be still and know God's goodness?

Where in this congregation do you live Christ's mission of caring for our world?

How could the church invite others to participate more fully with Christ through worship and ministry?

**Pray:** Thank you Gracious God for the gift of time. We ask you, Lord, to bless our time, and help us to let go of things that do not feed our soul or serve you. Help us to know you through our participation with this congregation that we might be parts of your body, filled with opportunities for service and joy. Bless this congregation and help us grow as faithful stewards of all you have given us. Amen

**End Notes –Lesson Three: Stewardship of our Time**

1. Wayne Muller. Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest. (Bantam Books, New York, 1999), Page 2.
2. Ibid. Page 3.
3. Ibid. Page 4.
4. Stewardship Education: Congregational Ministries Division of the Presbyterian Church, USA. "Covenants of Stewardship," Session Three. Page 14.