

PAUSE & BUILD MARGIN

Week Three | May 7, 2017 | Better Together: Pause

PREPARATION

MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through Psalm 39:4-6; Mark 6:30-32; Romans 14:12; Ephesians 5:15-16; & 1 Timothy 6:9-11. Pray the Holy Spirit would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study.

OPENING PRAYER

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The very center of the disciplined life is the wise, balanced use of our time, energy, and resources.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

As we take time to pause and build margin in our life, we will be able to give the right time and attention to the things that matter, wisely using everything the Lord has given us.

MEDITATE

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

How does our culture view personal rights, choices, and lifestyle?

In the mind of non-Christians, who do they believe is their ultimate source of accountability? How does this lead them to live differently than believers?

Have you ever met someone who constantly misused their time, money, energy, and relationships? That type of life is characterized by what emotions?

GETTING BACK IN BALANCE

A lot of times, we simply go about life day to day as if it will go on forever as it is right now. We assume we will always have more time to get certain things right. Maybe sometimes we are unwise with money or inconsiderate with people. Perhaps we devote the majority of our energy on things that won't really last. Maybe we spend way too much of our time on entertainment than on God and others. But again, we keep going, as if we will always have tomorrow to sort it out. We assume that we'll eventually get around to using our lives wisely. We think we have the time to procrastinate. In contrast to this common belief, the Bible tells us that the "tomorrow" we assume is a given is actually not, and that the time to live wisely is today (James 4:13-15). In order to do make good use of the things God has given us—things like our time, our relationships, our energy, and our resources—we must take the time to pause and create the margin necessary in our schedules to pursue the things that truly matter. Without doing this, we will be caught in the same cycle of procrastination, and worse, we will be considered unwise managers of our lives by the Lord himself.

How do you usually respond if you sense something in your life is severely out of balance?

God is the giver of all things. In what ways does our culture use those things out of proportion?

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

The biblical passages we study this week will help us explore why we should make margin in our lives and what key areas of life require good stewardship and balance: our time, energy, relationships, and resources. In order to pause and make margin for the right things in life, the passages of this week help us understand three main principles to frame our discussion:

1. THE SHORTNESS OF OUR LIFE
2. THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF OUR LIFE
3. THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR LIFE

GOING DEEPER

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

THE SHORTNESS OF OUR LIFE

■ ■ PSALM 39:4-6, 90:12; JOHN 9:4

What are the things Psalm 39:4-6 compares our lives to?

Why do you think the author chose these metaphors for our lives?

Explain why our lives are short from God's perspective.

As we walk through an average day, most of our thoughts are not focused on the shortness of life. While the rest of our culture would consider this a gloomy idea to be avoided, believers are instructed to meditate on it often as motivation to live life as obediently as possible. Since Christians will be with Jesus in eternity and therefore do not have to fear death, the shortness of life keeps its motivational power but loses its sting. When we build the marginal time we need to think on ideas like this and gain heaven's perspective, we realize that a human's lifespan is not invincible or long-lasting. Instead, it's a puff of breath on a cold winter's day: seen for a moment, and gone for the next. The Bible writers call it a mist, a shadow, or a withering plant. The point is clear: it's an experience so short that from God's eternal perspective, it's gone in the blink of an eye.

Why should we pause to notice the shortness of our life, according to Psalm 90:12?

What should we be doing with our time while we still have it? (John 9:4)

According to the Psalmist, we should ask God to help us see our lives in the most accurate light: frail and short. However, God's goal here is not to make us drown in uselessness, as if our lives have no purpose or value. On the contrary, God wants us to think of life as "here today, gone tomorrow" in order to gain wisdom and live wisely. In other words, we don't despair at a short life (for we know where we are going afterward!). We use our short life for all God has planned for it, not wasting a moment he has given us; for soon we won't have the opportunity to live out all the works he called us to in this lifetime!

What distracts you from the reality of how short life is? How does this impact your ability to make proper margin in your life?

Why is the culture around us fearful of the shortness of life?

THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF OUR LIFE

■ ■ MATTHEW 12:36, 16:27; ROMANS 14:12; & 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

Romans 14:12 tells us that we will give an account for whom?

According to Matthew 12:36, what's one of the things we will be specifically held accountable for?

Each person is repaid in what way, according to Matt. 16:27?

Like the idea of life being short, our culture does not enjoy the thought that life is accountable to someone, that someone being God. One of the major motivations the Christian has for making the most of the gifts they have been given is remembering exactly that: they were given. Our time, our energy, our resources, and our relationships were not created by us, and therefore do not belong to us; they were created by God, they belong to God, and he chose to give them to us to steward and manage. In short, our life and our gifts aren't really ours! And one day, after a lifetime of stewarding all God has given, the Lord will return to evaluate how we managed his gifts.

Who will have to appear before Christ's judgment seat? Believers, nonbelievers, or both? [2 Cor. 5:10]

Will we be held accountable for good deeds or bad deeds? [2 Cor. 5:10]

We are all juggling many different things God has given us—family, school, work, money, time, church, ministry, social commitments, parenting, friendships, and so on. Many times we forget that these things have a tendency to get disordered, one taking much more prominence than the other. Or sometimes we commit to too many things in one season; our schedules feeling overcrowded, leaving no room for the things that matter. In these seasons, we must step back and build margin in our life to reorder everything and restore it to a balanced state. Why? Because we know that we only have one shot at this life, and we all will answer for every part of it—God giving us our due for taking care of, abusing, or neglecting what he's given us. To pause and build life-margins like this takes discipline, but it's required in order to honor God with the gifts he gives us.

How do these verses change your outlook on your daily activities?

What encourages you about these passages? Challenges you?

THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR LIFE

■ ■ PSALM 127:2; PROVERBS 22:7; MATTHEW 6:19-21;
MARK 6:30-32; EPHESIANS 5:15-16; 1 TIMOTHY 6:9-11

In regards to our time, what does Ephesians 5:15-16 instruct us to do? Why?

When it comes to stewarding our energy and our relationships, what does Jesus show us in Mark 6:30-32 and Psalm 127:2?

We have seen that life is short and that all the things we manage ultimately belong to God, who will hold us accountable to the kinds of managers we are in this life. Knowing this, we look to the Scripture to tell us the specifics of managing the gifts God gives. While we cannot cover how to healthily manage every single area of life, a few important areas stand out in the Scriptures: our time, our energy, our relationships, and our resources.

First, Ephesians 5 tells us to make very wise use of our behavior, specifically our time, given that “the days are evil.” In a culture that will behave immorally and spend time on meaningless pursuits, the Christian’s use of time should stand in curious and striking contrast. The same goes for our energy. Whereas the culture spends its time and energy on self, entertainment, success, comfort, and extremes, the Christian spends time and energy on God, others, sacrifice, rest, and balance. For example, we have all met the workaholic who can barely keep his eyes open outside of work hours or the entertainment-guru who never misses a show, even if it means skipping out on really important family events or tuning out conversations. Whereas these personality types are common in our culture, they should not be in the body of Christ. Instead of being dominated by one pursuit, the Scriptures call us to a balanced lifestyle that resembles Jesus, who spends his time and energy in proportion to what matters most.

What principle does Proverbs 22:7 help us see about financial debt?

*What happens when we worship money instead of stewarding it as God intends?
[1 Timothy 6:9-10]?*

What kind of pursuits should fill our time, according to 1 Tim. 6:11?

Another area of life we are called to steward is relationships. As we watch Jesus and the disciples, we see that their time and relational capacity was spent on the things of God and ministering to others—whether that be family members, lost friends, or the lowly of society. When they did pull away (which is definitely necessary!) to recover, it was not due to fear of lost people, of being exposed to other people’s messy sin, or in order to neglect their family. The margin they built to pull away and rest was for the sake of refueling in order to go back toward those people in a healthy and rested state. Due to the proper margin Jesus taught them to build into their ministry, they avoided being ministry machines as well as recluses. We can also note that the disciples sometimes rested together as a kindred, family unit of sorts—something we would do well to mimic in our family time. We, too, must build in time to enjoy God and become refreshed in his presence, so that we can re-enter our relationships with renewed purpose and compassion.

A last area of stewardship is our resources. While the culture around us spends exorbitant amounts of money on self, even if it requires getting into heavy debt, the Christian’s use of money should reveal that they believe it belongs to God. First, if our financial situation truly belongs to God, we will not allow ourselves to be enslaved to lenders. Excessive debt is crippling and a poor use of the money God has granted us. Second, if we truly believe our money belongs to the Lord, we will be generous with it, not grasping onto it for success or security as the world does. We must be incredibly diligent to build financial margins in our lives in order to save and give instead of spend, for Jesus himself attests that this particular area of life is the hardest for even believers to bring under God’s submission. If we do not pause to build margin in this area, we are warned that we will end up in destruction. In sum, as we pause to bring margin in these areas of life as the Scriptures direct us, we will be good stewards of all God has given us and he will be pleased when he returns to evaluate our management.

*When we choose to build margin in our lives for the things that matter and become good stewards of what God has given, what is promised to us?
[Mt. 6:19-21]*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God’s Word to your daily life. Process how what you’ve learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

How can you build more margin in your life to protect from exhaustion?

Compare your use of time and money to that of a non-Christian friend. What are the major differences?

Which of these do you most struggle to view as belonging to you instead of something belonging to God that he calls you to manage?

Energy/Time

Resources/Possessions

Relationships

Which of these is not getting used in a balanced way:

Energy/Time

Resources/Possessions

Relationships

In what ways can you change your current routine of life to create more balance in this area?

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

God, grant me the right perspective on my life: that it is short, it is yours, and it's something to be stewarded for your glory.

God, give me clarity on the areas of my life that have no margin or are out of balance.

God, protect me from the love of money and see you as my ultimate security.

God, help me make wise use of my time, my energy, my relationships, and my resources.

CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

A lot of times, the constant interruptions of everyday life gets in the way of engaging with those we consider most important to us. When life gets busy and distracted, one of the first things to go is the quality of our relationships.

In order to combat this tendency, take time right now to identify the most important person in your life (other than the Lord). Reach out to that person, and plan a time this week when you can spend a specific amount of quality time together. Write this appointment down on your calendar, and make sure to not only show up to it, but to remove the constant distractions that usually interrupt your relational time with others (your phone, computer, etc.).

COMMENTARY

JOHN 9:4: “While it is day” refers to the time when Jesus is here in his earthly ministry, for he is “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5) whose presence makes everything “day.” “Night” would then be the time of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. Jesus shows an intense awareness of the need to fulfill all that the Father sent him to accomplish during his earthly ministry. By saying “we,” Jesus indicates that he is involving his disciples in that work as well.

ROMANS 14:12 // 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10: Every person will give an account of his life to God at the judgment. Though justification is by faith alone, and our salvation itself is not on the line, what Christians do in their earthly lifetime will affect God’s evaluation of their service to him and the rewards they will receive (1 Cor. 3:10–17)

PSALM 127:2: This verse does not support the idea that believers should not put forth effort in day to day life, but that effort without the Lord’s empowerment is useless (v. 1). Diligence of the Christian is required, but he must practice his diligence in faith—in this case by receiving the sleep that God wants to give to his beloved. These verses share their theme with the wisdom in Proverbs, which promotes diligence but clarifies that diligence is not equivalent with greed nor restless anxiety.

PROVERBS 22:7: This verse stands in contrast to the bountiful person who shares with the poor (v. 9). One cannot be bountiful to give to the poor if they are chained by debts.

MATTHEW 6:20: “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” implies that people often have a choice between activities that lead to greater earthly reward in the present and those that store up greater future reward in heaven. Jesus invites us to choose that which gives us eternal, lasting reward instead of temporary reward that will eventually deteriorate.

**All commentary resourcing for Lesson 3 was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the NIV Compact Bible Commentary.*

