

THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom... ~ Psalm 90:12

*Simply put, time is measurable segments of life itself. Because your life is important, your time is important.
Because your life is precious, your time is precious. Because your life matters,
your time matters. – Vicki Lynn Gordy*

The following is an amusing scenario – one which most of us can identify with, at least to some degree:

My Morning

I decide to water my garden.

As I turn on the hose in the driveway, I look over at my car and decide it needs washing. I start toward the garage and notice there is mail on the porch table that I brought up from the mailbox earlier.

I decide to go through the mail before I wash the car. I lay my car keys down on the table, put the junk mail in the garbage can under the table, and notice the can is full.

So, I decide to put the bills back on the table and take out the garbage first. But then I think, since I'm going to be near the mailbox when I take out the garbage anyway, I may as well pay the bills first.

I take my checkbook off the table, and see that there is only one check left. My extra checks are in my desk, so I go to my desk where I find the can of soda that I had been drinking.

I'm going to look for my checks, but first I need to push the can aside so I don't accidentally knock it over. The drink is getting warm so I decide to put it back in the refrigerator.

As I head toward the kitchen, a vase of flowers on the counter catches my eye. They need to be watered and I set the can down again.

At the end of the morning, my garden hasn't been watered, the car isn't washed, the garbage hasn't been taken out, the bills aren't paid, there is a warm can of soda sitting on the counter, and there is still only one check in my checkbook. Then, when I try to figure out why nothing got done this morning, I'm really baffled because I know I was busy, and I'm really tired!

~ Author Unknown

Have you ever had times like this? Do you often have times like this? Everywhere you look there is something that needs your time and attention. And, although you are busy, you accomplish very little.

Time management issues are common in our society. We have too much to do. We have too many distractions. Our pace is too fast. And, very often our schedules don't reflect our true priorities.

These problems are more widespread than we might think. James Dobson of Focus on the Family once said, "this overcommitted and breathless way of life, which I call 'routine panic,' characterizes the vast

majority of people in Western nations.” He then posed a question that is worth considering: “Have you ever asked yourself why in the world you have chosen to live like this?”

Living this way greatly affects people’s lives, their relationships, and their health. And although many are quick to admit they would prefer things to be different, they are slow to do anything about it. Donna Goldfein noted this curiosity in her book *Everywoman’s Guide to Time Management*. She asked, “Isn’t it ironic to think we spend hours and hours selecting a certain wardrobe that will serve us for a season, or perhaps a few years, but, a plan that involves our future life doesn’t get that much attention?”

Why *do* we live like this?

Perhaps we have forgotten that we have other options. But recent generations didn’t live like this. Sunday drives; stopping by to sit and visit with a relative or friend; evenings sitting outside while the kids played; those lazy days of summer – were all characteristic of life not very long ago. Why do these luxuries seem so foreign to us today?

Or, maybe we know there are other options but think they are out of our reach. We just don’t know where to start or what to do to live differently.

While the lifestyle of generations past may not be a realistic goal for many of us, there is certainly a way of life somewhere between how things used to be and the way we live now, that *is* possible and is worth pursuing.

Although we don’t have control over everything that affects our time, we can manage more of our schedule than we may think. *Orderly Living*[™] will show you where to start and what to do to make the most of *The Time of Your Life*!

Through *The Time of Your Life* you will...

- assess how you are currently spending your time
- define your priorities
- set scheduling goals based on your priorities
- translate your goals into your daily schedule

The clock is ticking. There is no better time to begin than now!

Before You Begin...

FIRST THINGS FIRST

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness... ~ Matthew 6:33a

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

This is the first and greatest commandment. ~ Matthew 22:37-38

You have probably heard the expression "can't see the forest for the trees." Scripture puts it another way in Matthew 23:24: "... You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." However you phrase it, the message is the same ... let's not become so focused on the minor things that we overlook the big picture!

What good will it be if we become experts at managing the minutes and hours of our time (our life), yet miss the very purpose of our life in the process? So, before we delve into the details of time management, let's first step back from the trees and envision the majestic forest.

GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

In *The Purpose Driven Life*, author Rick Warren states:

Nothing matters more than knowing God's purposes for your life, and nothing can compensate for not knowing them – not success, wealth, fame, or pleasure. Without a purpose, life is motion without meaning, activity without direction, and events without reason.

So, where do you go to discover God's plan? Warren offers the following:

You didn't create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for! If I handed you an invention you had never seen before, you wouldn't know its purpose, and the invention itself wouldn't be able to tell you either. Only the creator or the owner's manual could reveal its purpose.

Thankfully, God revealed his plan for us in our "owner's manual" – the Bible. Through the Bible, we learn who we are, why we're here and where we're going. We learn that God loves us more than we can imagine. And, above all else, he wants us to love him and have a personal relationship with him for eternity, beginning now – a relationship which is made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Plain and simple, *this* is the primary purpose for our existence. And this relationship is also the starting point for us to be able to live the lives we were intended to live.

God also created each person to be unique. We have different abilities, personalities, gifts, talents, and missions. As we seek to know and live God's will, he will reveal to us his very specific plans for our individual lives.

- ❑ Before you begin this system, set aside some time to reflect on the big picture of your life. Pray for God's guidance in the decisions you will make regarding this precious gift of time he has given you.

(If you would like more information about God's plan for your life, I invite you to read "A Life of Faith," Appendix page 91.)

TIME ASSESSMENT

You have to have a dream before you can have a dream come true. ~ Author Unknown

*A clear vision has the power to bring what's most important
to the surface of your schedule and lifestyle. ~ Andy Stanley (Visioneering)*

NEEDED:

___ Time Assessment form

Successful time management is not about cramming as much as you can into a day. And it is not just about schedule efficiency. It is about living a quality life that is in sync with your priorities.

You have to know what your priorities are before you can know that you are living them. The Time Assessment form not only serves as a tool to help you define your priorities, it will also guide you through a process of forming your goals based on those priorities.

Because this form requires personal reflection, it is recommended that you complete it in an atmosphere that is quiet and without distractions. And, if right now you are thinking, "A few moments of quiet ...without distractions?!" then this book is *definitely* for you!

TIME INVENTORY

- ❑ Where does your time go? On what, and with whom, are you spending time? Are you spending more time in certain areas than you would prefer, and not as much as you want in others? Time inventory is helpful because it gives us an honest look at where our time is going. Column one of the Time Assessment form, titled "Time Inventory," includes common areas in which people spend time. To personalize this list, scratch through anything that does not apply to you (or, if completing the downloadable form on your computer, delete the lines of items that do not apply to you) and in the blank spaces add whatever else applies. Include areas in which you currently spend time, as well as anything new you want to incorporate into your schedule.

NOTE: The objective of this form is to account for as much of your time as possible. Therefore, the list includes some very basic items that are automatic to all schedules, such as sleep and meals/nutrition. These items are included because goals sometimes include time adjustments in these areas.

PRIORITY LEVEL

There are a variety of factors that might prompt us to consider something a priority: our relationships (with God, family, friends, and others), our well-being (physical and psychological), our sense of responsibility, our dreams and ambitions.

Throughout each day we are presented with opportunities to live out our priorities. To do so we must maintain an awareness of what is most important to us and base our decisions accordingly. Maybe you are already keenly aware of your priorities and the scheduling choices you make are based on them. But some might say they are slightly off course when it comes to living in line with what matters most to them. Others may have ventured down a path of decision-making without considering their priorities, and now they are

so far along that path that they barely see what they once considered to be very important. Sometimes a sobering life experience can serve as a wake-up call for us to re-evaluate how we spend our time. There are also people who, look back and wish they had spent their time differently. Perhaps they wish they had taken better care of their health or spent more time with those they love.

The good news is that we certainly do not have to experience a riveting life situation or let the years pass, to recognize what matters most. Actually, getting in touch with our priorities is easy. We only need to pause long enough to really think about it! That is the next step in our time assessment.

- ❑ Carefully consider each item you have listed. In column two (Priority Level) assign a priority level to each listing. Is it someone or something “very important” to you? (Some listings will be easily identifiable as high priority.) Is it “important” or “somewhat important?” Is it of “minor importance” or “not important?”

TIME EVALUATION

Are low priority items taking up too much of your time? Are your high priority items receiving enough time and attention? Being mindful of your priorities is the right place to start, but it is just the beginning. To *live* your priorities may require making schedule adjustments. Some will be easy to make while others may require moderate or major changes. All will be worth the effort.

- ❑ The third column of your Time Assessment form is “Time Evaluation.” Rate how satisfied you are with the amount of time you are *currently* spending in each area. Based on the priority level, do you feel that you are spending an appropriate amount of time in this area? Do you need to make a minor time adjustment (slightly more time, or slightly less time)? Or, perhaps a major time adjustment is in order (significantly more time or significantly less time).

GOALS

It is important that your goals are not just random but that they reflect your priorities. This form guides you to create goals based on your priorities. As you complete this part of the form, if a goal is something that involves other family members, you may need to include them in the decision-making process.

- ❑ After reviewing tips for goal setting (“When Setting Your Goals”) on the following page, list a specific goal for each item in which you determined that you need a time adjustment. The more specific you are in setting your goals, the greater the likelihood that you will achieve them.

Examples of specific goals:

- Prayer – Wake up 20 minutes earlier each day in order to have prayer time.
- Spouse – Begin having a date night every other Friday.
- Transportation to/from School – Arrange to carpool.
- Sleep – Go to bed by 10pm.
- Housecleaning / Grocery Shopping / Paperwork – Implement *Orderly Living*™ Systems.
- Lawn & Garden – Hire someone to mow the lawn.
- Career – Begin leaving work on time!
- Pastimes – Instead of watching the evening news, check out headline stories on the web.
- Pastimes – Use phone headset to do household chores while talking on the phone.
- Clubs/Organizations – Finish term as secretary of Parents Club, but do not volunteer next term.

WHEN SETTING YOUR GOALS:

Consider your current schedule before making major changes.

Do not overwhelm yourself with too many goals at once if they are goals that require more of your time. Focus first on goals for your highest priority items.

Set realistic goals.

Avoid the “all or nothing” trap. Perfectionism is stifling when, if you cannot imagine doing something perfectly, you are not motivated to even begin. Start seeing the value in doing the best you can in a situation. You may not be able to make perfect progress, but it is still progress! For instance, suppose your family currently does not eat dinner together and dinner is most often fast food. You *envision* everyone sitting down at the table each night to a wonderful home-cooked meal at the table. That is the “perfect” scenario. Perhaps you are setting your goals too high for now. Maybe a more realistic goal for now would be to just have your family come together for dinner twice a week. Enjoy the fact that your family is spending time together and make the most of it. As time permits, you can gradually transition from your current menus to the meals that are more of what you have in mind.

Consider overlapping goals.

Combine goals when possible. If you want to spend more quality time with your husband and you both want to get more exercise, begin walking together each evening. Do you hope to spend more time with your daughter? And you want to begin a hobby? Find a hobby that you and your daughter are both interested in and make plans to enjoy the hobby together.

Count the cost.

Know what you will be trading off to reach a certain goal and decide whether or not it is worth it.

Remember that timing matters.

Maybe you would like to go back to school to finish your degree, but right now your children are young. Would it be better to complete your education after your children are in school? Consider the different seasons of life and your current life circumstances when setting your goals.

Pursue your dreams.

What would you like to do “one day?” Is there something you can do now toward making this dream a reality, even if it is a small step?

YOUR PERSONAL CALENDAR

*A vision without a task is a dream; a task without a vision is drudgery;
a vision and a task are the hope of the world. – Author Unknown*

NEEDED:

___ Smart phone (Use the calendar component of your email account and sync it with your smart phone. Or, use a small electronic tablet with a calendar feature.)

NOTE: Some tablets can be purchased for under \$100. If neither the smart phone nor a tablet is available to you, use a paper calendar small enough to carry with you.

As the saying goes...*This is where the rubber meets the road.* It is your personal calendar that you will use on a daily basis. Your Time Assessment form is simply to help ensure that your daily calendar will be a true reflection of your priorities and goals.

Your calendar will serve not only as your appointment schedule and to-do list, but also as your reminder system. Using your calendar will free your mind of countless dates and details while at the same time giving you the peace and assurance that important events and things you need to do will not be overlooked. Since you will be relying on your calendar for important info that you need, it is imperative that you develop the habit of referring to your calendar at least once a day – preferably each night for the following day or first thing in the morning.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR CALENDAR

Include the following:

☐ Special Days to Remember

Include birthdays and anniversary dates of significant events. The nice feature with electronic calendars is that dates can be set as “recurring” so you only have to enter these dates once.

☐ Appointments

(any commitment with a fixed *or preferred* timeframe)

Examples include meetings, doctor appointments, business appointments, deadlines, social engagements, and anything else you want to do on a specific day/time that, if not on your calendar, could be overlooked. Make use of the recurring feature for any events that will be repeated.

TIP If you are considering adding an event or activity to your calendar but plans are still tentative, include it on your calendar. Place a question mark after it until the plans become firm.

- ☐ Review your Time Assessment form and transfer to your personal calendar all of the activities and goals you want to include in your schedule that are *not yet routine*. Something is considered routine when you easily remember to do it without any prompting. You will probably find that most of what is listed on your plan is already routine. List everything else. Some people also list certain high priority items on their calendar, such as the time they have set aside for family members, not because they think they will forget, but just as a visual reminder of who and what are most important to them.

❑ To-Do Items

(things to do that do not require being done on a fixed or preferred timeframe)

When a thought crosses your mind about something you need to do or want to do, assign it to a particular day. You will not have to try to remember it once it is written down. Some examples: have portrait framed; call Susan; email neighbors about ideas for next neighborhood party. Since to-do items do not require being done on a fixed or preferred timeframe, you might want to assign all of your to-do items to a Monday or other set day of the week. When Monday comes you will have a better idea of what you have planned for the rest of the week and can determine what you have time to do and which day is best. Items that cannot be done that week would be shifted to another week.

TIP When planning major projects, events, holidays, and other special occasions, it is helpful to first draft a list of everything you need to do. Note how long it should take to accomplish each step, and if you intend to overlap some of the steps within the same timeframe, group those steps together. Cushion your time, i.e., schedule more time than you think you will need. Add up the total time necessary to complete all of the steps. Then calculate backwards from the deadline to determine when you need to begin. Transfer each step on your list to the appropriate days on your calendar.

❑ Reminders

• Future Appointments and To-Do Items:

Include appointments and to-do items you are not ready to schedule but do not want to overlook scheduling them in the future. Some examples:

- Routine medical/dental visits and medical tests. Ladies, remember to calendar your monthly breast self exam. Ask your physician or check online for instructions.
- Pet immunizations and exams
- Drivers license renewal
- Brake inspections
- Auto registration renewal
- Auto maintenance schedule
- Maintenance schedule on household appliances and electronics

• Follow-up Reminders:

Also include follow-up reminders. For example, if you order an item to be mailed to you and it should arrive within one to two weeks, jot down a reminder two weeks from when you place the order so that if it hasn't arrived by then you will remember to follow up. If you borrowed a book from a friend and you anticipate finishing the book within a month, add a reminder to return it. Or if you loan something to someone, include a reminder so it is not forgotten.

• Goals:

How often are goals made and then forgotten? List goal reminders on your calendar.

• Other Notables

Include any type of information for a specific date that you want to have handy that is not an appointment or a to-do item, but would be helpful information to have noted – such as work and school holidays and pay days.

SCHEDULING TIPS

Work in concert with your personal style.

Know your work-style preferences and plan your schedule accordingly whenever possible. This will help your productivity and make your work more enjoyable. • Are you a morning person or an evening person? • Do you prefer doing things all at once or a little at a time? • Do you like to begin with the easiest and work up to the most difficult, or would you rather get the most challenging part over with first? • Do you work best alone or with others?

Designate regular chores to specific days.

Examples: Thursdays for grocery shopping, Saturday mornings for housework, Mondays for errands. When life is too routine it becomes boring and confining, but the proper use of routines can add predictability, reduce stress, and conserve both physical and mental energy.

Cushion your time.

Allow more time than you think you will need. Expect the unexpected (especially if you have young children). Do not pack every minute with something to do. Create margin.

Route your errands.

Save time and avoid back-tracking by planning your route.

Consolidate errands when possible.

Shop once or twice a year for greeting cards, birthday gifts, and anything else you buy regularly that can be purchased in advance.

Timing matters.

When possible, shop and run errands at off peak times to avoid long lines.

Keep your calendar with you!

You will benefit most from your calendar if you use it often and you will use it often if it is with you.

Don't confuse self-imposed deadlines with actual deadlines.

If you are becoming stressed over a deadline, first stop and consider whether your deadline is an actual deadline or a self-imposed artificial deadline. If creating an artificial deadline is what you need to increase your motivation, then it can be useful. However, if artificial deadlines are used too often, they can create unnecessary stress.

Stay mindful of your priorities.

In *Tyranny of the Urgent*, Charles E. Hummel teaches that we must sometimes abandon the urgent to do the important. He points out that urgent things are seldom important and important things are seldom urgent.

Remain flexible.

Your calendar is a wonderful tool that will serve you well. However, keep your calendar in proper perspective. Remain flexible. Sometimes interruptions may be opportunities for special, or even God-appointed moments, presenting themselves in unexpected ways. It is great to have a plan, but remember that the best plan is a flexible plan!

Remember that you have more control over how you spend your time than you might think!

Claire Cloninger, in her book, *A Place Called Simplicity*, states: "If we were to strip our daily lives back to their simplest, most basic brain activity, that activity would be choosing. Choosing is the way we get from 'here' to 'there' on any given day. Think about it. We choose to get out of bed or to pull the covers over our heads. We choose to eat breakfast or to skip it. We choose to eat healthy or to 'pork it up.' We choose to go to our jobs or to stay home and risk not having a job to go to. We choose to be concerned about others or to live totally for ourselves. And should we choose not to choose, even then we are choosing: In effect, we are choosing to let life choose for us!" Although we don't have control over everything that affects our time, we have more choices with regard to our schedules than we may realize. Make a decision to live your life intentionally!

TIME MAINTENANCE

REVIEW CALENDAR

Review your calendar at least once a day, updating it as needed. Transfer anything left undone to the next day or other future date. Forming the habit of checking your calendar daily is not only important for time management, but for all *Orderly Living*TM Systems since your calendar will serve as a reminder of what needs to be done to maintain your systems.

Suggested frequency: Daily – at a set time, such as before bedtime, or first thing in the morning.

COMPLETE TIME ASSESSMENT FORM

At the end of each year, complete a new Time Assessment form. Begin by reviewing your goals from the previous year. Were those goals achieved? If not, you might want to include them with any new goals you have for the coming year.

Suggested frequency: Annually – December or January/Add calendar reminder, if needed.

OPTIONAL SYSTEM ENHANCEMENT

SHARE CALENDARS

Most electronic calendars can be shared. For families, the easiest way to accomplish a coordination of activities, and information such as dinner menus, days off school, etc., is to share your calendars.

For more time-related tips, see the following Appendix sections:

Taming Time Wasters ~ page 98

Reducing Commitments ~ page 101

Self-Care ~ page 104

Family Time ~ page 108

Preserving Precious Memories ~ page 111