

Question: In Psalm 90:12 we are commanded to “number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Discuss how you as a minister or teacher can teach and personally apply a true Christian approach to time management and prioritization.

We are commanded in Psalm 90:12 to “number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.” This verse is referring to the use of Christian time management, a subject that should not be overlooked. As a future Protestant Reformed school teacher, I must heed my calling of helping to rear God-fearing children in the walk of God. This includes providing them with subconscious and conscious learning about how and why to prioritize through a number of efforts made throughout my classroom, which will aim at providing them with a foundation of faithful lifetime prioritization.

What is time management? Time management means to pursue systematically and order events, schedules, and duties according to importance, while giving each a certain amount of time and dedication. In other words, it means to prioritize according to level of importance. For followers of Christ, time management has significant meaning and application for our lives. Time management orders the Christian to ask him or herself, “What is most important to me if I am to walk a godly life?” In essence, it is to prioritize one’s life with the fundamental priority laid as being a disciple of Christ, and from this all the other duties of life should revolve. Paul speaks to us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 about how we should prioritize in life. Here he writes, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” It is clear from this verse that God requires of us a life of God-fearing priorities and not excessive idleness or wasting of time, but rather a life always geared toward the “work of the Lord”.

Time management not only helps create enough time to get the most important tasks completed, but it is also required by God. God has proclaimed there is a time for all things, and since we are disciples of his word we are meant to heed to this declaration and apply it to our lives. This meaning of time as defined on earth is best described by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3:1 where he writes, “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” God has acknowledged that we must consciously consider our time and the purposes with which we spend our time.

Also because we are disciples of God, we are made in his image. God is the creator of order; therefore since we have been granted this attribute of God, we are capable and commanded to adhere to living orderly, prioritized lives dedicated to him. Scripture is full of examples testifying God as an orderly God. The clearest example is the creation, when God set aside each of the six days for a new creation and a seventh day for rest.¹ In the fourth commandment, God expands on this by requiring that we diligently labor six days out of the week and rest on the seventh day; this is a broad yet descriptive overview of our weekly schedule.² For example, do we restrain ourselves on the Sabbath from other labors such as working or mowing our lawns, and instead make it a wanted priority to attend church to enjoy the fellowship of God and his believers?

If we truly manage our schedules to reflect how God wants us to use our time, then we are “redeeming the time”.³ Our time, then, is useful and serves the purpose of glorifying God. It also serves as a blessing for us as a way to avoid sin when we schedule our time wisely. God

¹ Genesis 1:27

² *The Psalter*, Lord's Day 38 Q. &.A. 103.

³ Colossians 4:5–6

calls us always to be laboring in Christ.⁴ If we are consciously considering how our days should be spent, then we are less prone to the evils such as drunkenness or slothfulness.⁵ There are numerous distractions in life that can take us away from what God wills us to be doing, such as pursuing our callings in work, school, family, or in the church, but with God-fearing prioritization more of these distractions are defeated because we know what is required of us and the tasks that must be done.

When we are able to avoid these distractions, this provides the time needed for God. How easy it is for us to put earthly priorities first or to become distracted by earth's entertainment when we no longer find the time for deep communion with God at home as well as in church. Personal devotions are necessary for a follower of Christ. Professor Herman Hanko emphasizes the importance of prayer as part of personal devotions and throughout our days: "Prayer is to the Christian what breathing is to a healthy person." We desperately need prayer constantly, as it is a "holy conversation between the living and eternal God and the redeemed child of God."⁶ Prayer and knowing God are both required by God, because they are both ways in which we worship God and dwell closer to him. In reality, it does take time to search and study the Scriptures thoroughly and to have intimate prayers with him where we ask for his grace. However, if we are faithfully managing our time, we soon find we have the blessing of abundant time and ways to seek this communion in which we find deep joy.

Another part of fulfilling a sincere desire for living to God means providing time for his saints. Each one of his saints is blessed with abilities and characteristics suited for tasks within

⁴ Rev. Miersma, "Discerning the Good in the Activity of Life." *The Standard Bearer* 87.1215 Mar. (2011): 284-85. Print.

⁵ Proverbs 6:6-8; Romans 13: 11-14

⁶ Herman Hanko, *When You Pray: Scripture's Teaching on Prayer*. Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006. pg.1. Print.

the church. Central to Christ's heart is his love for the needy, who are those who fill the church. This is truly reflected in his calling for us to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."⁷ We are constantly to seek ways to follow this calling, and it is important to note it is a continual, lifelong calling. This means putting constant, conscious effort into planning and implementing ways to use our talents and abilities within the church universal and to live a holy, God-fearing life.

It is important to establish what is meant by time management and why it is required of Christ's citizens, because it will be part of my duty to teach my students these things and how to apply time management to their lives. Because these children are coming from God-fearing parents, I will bear in mind that they are little children who have the mind of Christ, and that the parents are saying to me, "The mind of Christ in these covenant children must be informed, instructed, and through your instruction disciplined and developed."⁸ This is an extremely humbling duty and privilege to help God's children build a foundation for life established in the Lord. Especially since I will be an elementary teacher I have a great responsibility to help children learn how to manage their time so that the later distractions in life can be averted.

Herman Bavinck gives an excellent definition of what he believes is the goal of Christian educators when he says, "True piety organically combined with sound knowledge and genuine culture. Thus we form men of God, equipped unto every good work, completely equipped unto every good work."⁹ When I teach my students what is meant to prioritize and why it is important, I am really giving them equipment for handling present and future tasks in life. Time

⁷ James 1:27

⁸Marvin Kamps, "The Spiritual Capacity of Covenant Children." *Perspectives in Covenant Education: Teaching with Technology*35.1 (2009): 10-13. Print.

⁹ Engelsma, David J. *Reformed Education: The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant*. N.p.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000. 86. Print.

management governs our whole lives; everything about our lives revolves around some aspect of time. This does not mean that there can be no relaxation, but it does mean there are responsibilities and a calling to seek God with every minute.

How will I teach my students in both upper and lower elementary what it means to be faithful stewards of time? As a teacher, I will serve as a role model for my students, so the way I manage my time will drastically reveal itself to my students. Are my lesson plans completed, and is my classroom organized? Do I talk openly with my students about what I do throughout the day, the importance of my own devotion time? Do I make sure to schedule a sufficient amount of time for class devotions, and not rush through them because we are running behind on curriculum materials? My life will be a living testimony to the students of how I prioritize my life, whether for the good or the bad. Lord willing, I hope they will see my work as being dedicated to God in that I am faithful to my tasks as a teacher, meet the individual needs of my students in love, and live a God-fearing life outside of my work too.

Ideas for teaching students how to apply time management to their lives greatly revolve around how my classroom will be organized. These are the basic elements of the classroom that will subconsciously teach the students about making decisions with their time. These elements will include having the schedule on the front of the room so the students know what their day consists of, having a class calendar with important dates emphasized, notes home to parents about the agenda for the week so they can assist the students in completing the tasks, and take-home folders with completed and uncompleted assignments. I would also like each of my students to start a planner, even in early elementary education, of what tasks they need to complete by a certain date and to keep track of what they have completed. These ideas immediately give the students the knowledge of how to implement a time management system.

They also give me a perfect opportunity to introduce priorities and time management while I am explaining these different items.

I would also like to discuss with my students at the beginning of the year some possible choices for them to do during free time once their tasks such as tests or assignments have been completed. This will be a great opportunity for me to discuss with them the importance of not wasting time, while also giving them some ideas geared towards their interests to do during this time. For example, spare time options could be drawing and coloring, reading, or completing other assignments that are not complete. This is showing them that there is always something worthwhile to be doing during free time.

Another idea that comes to mind is to have a journaling system that will greatly help with students practicing their writing, and it is a great method for specific topics to be discussed and motivates them to put deliberate thought into what they are writing about. Some of the topics would include writing about their devotion time at home, what they have learned or read about, their God-given talents and what they are doing with them, and hobbies that they like to do in their free time. This is also a great way for me to get to know my students even better, to know their strengths, motivations, and interests. It gives us a great range of discussion topics, either sharing amongst the class or solely between the teacher and a student.

As difficult as it is to admit, homework is a way for managing the students' time so that they stay focused on a task, gain practice with a task, and avoid wasting time playing such as video games or overuse of Facebook. I will not promote excessive or non-constructive homework assignments, because there is great benefit and need in relaxation too. However, I believe it is possible to have constructive homework assignments that are greatly beneficial. An

idea would be the journaling system, or another idea would be for the students to practice or create ideas based on class lessons. I desire to give my students options for their lives so that they can actively pursue their callings in life from God at an early age, using their talents. I also want to provide other options for them to do during their free time that are enjoyable but constructive as well. For example, while discussing health or after gym class we would have some lessons on a healthy lifestyle. I would ask them to think of and try some activities that promote this, for example, taking walks, running, or playing outside. While showing them fun games at school, I would hope they would want to play them at home. I would also promote their interests such as piano lessons, band, musical instruments, or sports related activities. It is here that I would like to mention the importance of keeping the parents involved by sending notes home so that the parents can add to this encouragement and so they are informed of my goals.

A simple yet often neglected way to teach time management in the classroom is to discuss it openly. I want to know from my students if they know what “time management” or “prioritization” means and why it is important. This adds greatly to integrating multiple subject areas as we can discuss this throughout our writings, studying time, and Bible lessons regarding God’s orderliness and our responsibility. Bible memory and discussion are excellent ways to employ these requirements of God while also discussing priorities. I think this most influential: let them talk and explore it.

While reiterating to myself what is meant by time management and its God-given and required purposes, I am humbled to find this such a necessary building block for my students’ education in a Protestant Reformed Christian elementary school. Time management is a true blessing from the Father to his children to help them stay focused on his works and to glorify

him. It is my heartfelt desire that by teaching my future elementary children the importance of time management, I am adding a foundation for their future lives that are built on Christ, so that each of us may shout in unison, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”¹⁰

¹⁰ John 17:4