

7 Biblical Principles *for* Being Purposeful,
Present, & Wildly Productive

REDEEMING

YOUR

TIME

SNEAK
PEEK



SAMPLE
ONLY

UNCORRECTED
PROOF

JORDAN RAYNOR

PRAISE FOR
REDEEMING YOUR TIME

“The Gospels are biographies of how Jesus walked. Why do we read biographies? To learn how to live. Who better to learn from than Jesus? Jordan Raynor’s paradigm of purpose, presence, and productivity is excellent. But learning it from Jesus? That’s the magic.”

—John Mark Comer, bestselling author
of *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

“Mixing the theological and the tactical, Jordan Raynor offers a deeply original and practical take on time management, busyness, and the human urge toward living meaningfully.”

—Cal Newport, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *A World Without Email* and *Deep Work*

“If wisdom had weight, this book would weigh a thousand pounds. Jordan Raynor gets it because he does it, and then he shows us all how to do it too. This book is honest, practical, and deeply actionable.”

—Jon Acuff, *New York Times* bestselling author
of *Soundtracks: The Surprising Solution to Overthinking*

“What can we learn about time management from the life of Christ? It turns out, quite a lot! I’m so grateful Jordan has written this book.”

—Janeen Uzzell, COO of Wikipedia

“For far too many of us, life feels like the meaningless passage of time between far too few meaningful moments. In this book, Jordan

is your guide to a better way, giving you a highly practical road map to ‘redeeming the time, because the days are evil’ (Ephesians 5:16, nkjv).”

—Mark Batterson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Circle Maker* and lead pastor of National Community Church

“In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan Raynor provides an outstanding guidebook to help you steward your time in ways that will make you more effective, productive, and content. Time is a gift from God, and we are called to be faithful stewards of it. *Redeeming Your Time* offers inspiration, tools, and tips to help you steward and maximize your gift of time. Jordan’s insights will transform the way you view time and help you focus on the highest priorities in your life.”

—Dee Ann Turner, bestselling author of *Bet on Talent* and *Crush Your Career*, and former vice president of talent and sustainability at Chick-fil-A

“Balance is not something you just achieve. It must be designed. In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan shows you how to design a simplified schedule that works for you!”

—Emily Ley, bestselling author of *A Simplified Life*

“Jordan Raynor is the master chief of productivity. In *Redeeming Your Time*, he has upped the ante on what it means to be truly productive as Christians. This book will not only change how you work but will also change how you view productivity as a whole.”

—John Brandon, *Forbes* columnist and author of *The 7-Minute Productivity Solution*

“Part of our response to the gospel is to manage our time wisely so we can serve others with excellence. This book will show you how.”

—Horst Schulze, cofounder of the Ritz-Carlton and author of *Excellence Wins*

“This book is a unique blend of theology, science, and practical tactics to help you redeem your time!”

—Dr. Caroline Leaf, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Switch On Your Brain

“I have read countless books on time management, yet none have left me transformed the way Jordan’s God-given insight in *Redeeming Your Time* has. Within just five minutes of reading it, I found myself with both paradigm-shifting concepts and practical takeaways that I could instantly begin applying to my life. Highly recommend.”

—Bob Lotich, author of *Simple Money, Rich Life*
and host of the SeedTime Money podcast

“Jordan Raynor has accomplished the rare feat of writing a thoughtful, theological, and highly practical book on how to manage your time. Best yet, he’s got a track record that demonstrates his approach works. If you want to get better at leading yourself, you’ll love *Redeeming Your Time*.”

—Carey Nieuwhof, author of *At Your Best*, podcast host, and speaker

“Jordan Raynor is one of my favorite authors. His writing is always jam-packed with unique insights and deeply practical wisdom while always being rigorously biblical. This book is the only productivity book you will ever need to read. I have read many and only wish that Jordan had written this book sooner. *Redeeming Your Time* will give you a vision for a wildly productive life that fulfills God’s purposes while avoiding the usual pitfalls. If you want to flourish, you don’t want to miss this book!”

—Daniel Fusco, pastor of Crossroads Community Church, author
of *Crazy Happy*, and host of the TV show *Real* with Daniel Fusco

“We can make more money and we can buy more stuff, but we can’t make or buy more time. In an era where people are wasting more and more time on things that have less and less importance, Jordan

Raynor's book is calling us back to focus on what really matters and equipping us to make every moment count."

—Nona Jones, bestselling author of *Success from the Inside Out*
and head of faith-based partnerships for Facebook

"In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan has connected the best ideas on time management into one cohesive, gospel-centered approach. This is a large step forward for the entire field of time management. I am so grateful for this book!"

—Matt Perman, bestselling author of *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* and director of career development
at the King's College

"Jordan has the amazing ability to combine deep and compelling theology with powerful data-driven insights. A one-two punch that makes this book powerful and hard to put down! Such a needed message!"

—Jefferson Bethke, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Take Back Your Family

"Jordan does a masterful job of showing how the gospel is our source of ambition and rest. Looking for a Christlike approach to productivity? Look no further than *Redeeming Your Time*."

—Brad Lomenick, author of *H3 Leadership*

"An operating system from the life of Jesus—that's what Jordan's book is about. No wonder it leads to purpose, presence, and more productivity."

—Jeff Henderson, author of *Know What You're FOR*
and founding lead pastor of Gwinnett Church

“*Redeeming Your Time* is full of biblical wisdom and common sense. It is the book I wish someone had given me when I started my business career.”

—Hugh Whelchel, executive director of the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics and author of *How Then Should We Work?*

“*Redeeming Your Time* is equal parts theologically rich and practically attainable. When we recognize that Christ is not only our example for successful time management but also our reason for it, everything in life starts finding its proper place. Distractions stop owning our days, which allows us to grow in devotion to the One who does.”

—Wendy Speake, author of *The 40-Day Social Media Fast*

“I’ve often prayed that God would give me direction on how to manage my time better. I never had enough paper for my to-do list. I tried waking up earlier, going to bed later, saying no, selling things, but none of that gave me the freedom I was looking for. After reading *Redeeming Your Time*, I learned that the perfecter of time management is Jesus Christ. He modeled what we can do in our everyday lives to glorify God while serving our spouses, kids, career, and communities. I am now equipped with biblical principles and proven strategies to help me redeem my time. I loved the book and I am sure you will too!”

—David Ragan, NASCAR driver

“The only truly limited resource for any leader is time. Jordan offers a gift to the leaders battling hustle, hurry, and haste with a gospel-centric master class in realizing true peace, purpose, and productivity. Thoughtful, practical, and powerfully anchored in the life and truth of Jesus—this book could alter the entire legacy of a leader.”

—Mike Sharrow, CEO of C12 Group

“The key to effectiveness is intentionality. In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan shows you how to model Jesus’s intentionality so that you can be more purposeful, present, and productive. If you are looking for a way to excel in the thing God made you to do, this book will show you how!”

—Tamika Catchings, four-time Olympic gold medalist,
ten-time WNBA All-Star, and former WNBA MVP

“*Redeeming Your Time* lands like a life ring in the stormy seas of modern work. It helped me catch a breath when I needed one most. As someone with a very full schedule, a company to run, a family, and many personal commitments, I know the toll that is taken on professionals in the current ever-changing world of work. What astounds me, however, is that Jordan’s schedule is much fuller than mine, yet he navigates the fullness and complexity of what he does with poise and focus that I only wish I had. In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan digs beyond surface-level time-management hacks that so many of us have tried and abandoned. His aim is not simply to help us find more time but to expose the root of our struggle and help us redeem one of the most precious things we have: the very minutes we have on earth.”

—Sam Eitzen, cofounder of Snapbar

“If you don’t have time to read a book on time, make time to read this one. Every chapter is a candid conversation with a gospel-centered mentor who is in the trenches with you. Jordan conversationally moves back and forth between theological wisdom and tactical tips, so you’ll walk away with both the deep-rooted why and the daily how to make the most of the time God gives you.”

—Michelle Myers, founder of she works His way

“Jordan Raynor teaches us to invest rather than spend time. As Einstein’s relativistic physics taught us, time is elastic and bendy and

pliable. In a poetic way, Jordan teaches us how to mold time to meet the things of eternity. Jordan was born for such a time as this.”

—Ben Courson, founder of Hope Generation and bestselling author
of *Flirting with Darkness*

“We all want to be more purposeful, present, and productive, but sadly most of us don’t really know where to start. *Redeeming Your Time* is the ultimate road map!”

—Patrice Washington, host of the *Redefining Wealth* podcast

“As Christ followers, we need to approach time management and productivity through a theological and worshipful lens. Jordan serves us well by leading the way.”

—Ruth Chou Simons, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *Beholding and Becoming* and *GraceLaced*, artist, and founder of gracelaced.com

“This book is a game changer. Plain and simple, if you take the principles within this book to heart and commit to practicing them, then you can expect your life (and the way you manage your time) to change in radical ways. Get ready to scribble down notes, highlight sections, and cling to the additional resources. This is a book to keep on the shelf and reread whenever you need to fine-tune the way you’re spending your time.”

—Hannah Brencher, author of *Fighting Forward* and *Come Matter Here*

“I read this book cover to cover in just one sitting . . . I couldn’t put it down! In an age where most of us feel like we can barely slow down long enough to read anything over 140 characters, that should serve as a testament to just how good, wise, important, and timely this book really is. Jordan’s words are the sharpening iron of a trusted friend, pointing us back to our true purpose with a gentle reminder of just how fleeting time really is. For all of us who long to make a kingdom-level impact with our gifts, our stories, our time—but find

ourselves lost in an ever-increasingly noisy and distracted world—*Redeeming Your Time* is the handbook for taking back the ‘good work’ God has prepared for us in advance. This book is the wake-up call that a stretched-thin digital generation has been waiting for!”

—Mary Marantz, bestselling author of *Dirt*
and host of *The Mary Marantz Show*

“Thank God this book exists! In *Redeeming Your Time*, Jordan has expertly balanced both the philosophical and the practical solutions for this chaotic and busy world we live in. As someone who struggles to find the line between rest and ambition, I was encouraged to see how Jesus models both and invites us to do the same. I highly recommend you take Jordan’s advice and dissent from the kingdom of noise all around you—just make this book the exception!”

—Graham Cochrane, author of *How To Get Paid for What You Know*

“If you truly desire a life of purpose and meaning . . . take your time to learn this operating system that helps you live more like Jesus. *Redeeming Your Time* offers you a new sacred way to live in this frantic world of busyness.”

—Michael Arrieta, CEO of Garden City Companies
and former DocuSign executive

REDEEMING YOUR TIME

*7 Biblical Principles for Being Purposeful,
Present, and Wildly Productive*



JORDAN RAYNOR



WATERBROOK

REDEEMING YOUR TIME

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Dedicated to the giants whose shoulders

I stood on to write this book:

John Mark Comer, Cal Newport,

David Allen, Matt Perman, Kevin DeYoung,

Jen Wilkin, Emily P. Freeman, Tim Keller,

and N. T. Wright

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INTRODUCTION

THE SOLUTION TO BEING SWAMPED

I'm *swamped*."

I've said it, you've said it—we've all said it at one point or another. Maybe you're in a season of feeling swamped right now. You roll out of bed each morning exhausted from not getting enough sleep. You pull open your phone to find a dozen text messages, from the ridiculous (another GIF of a dancing dog) to the exhausting ("Can you bring Chloe home from church tonight?"). If you manage to squeeze in a few minutes of "quiet time," you're quickly interrupted by your calendar notifying you of today's meeting that you didn't have enough time to fully prepare for.

At work, the struggle continues. Your to-do list seems to be getting longer, not shorter. Your day is filled with back-to-back meetings, with no time to think in between. When you are finally able to carve out some time to focus on some "real work," that familiar ambient anxiety creeps in, leading you to question if the project you're working on is the "right thing" for you to be focused on at that moment.

After work, you rush back home to have dinner with your family or friends. Sitting across from the people you care about the most, you're there but not really *there*, as your brain is trying to do the thinking you didn't have time to do during the day. After dinner, it's the mad rush of all rushes: clean up, help the kids with their homework, and pray that everyone finds time for a bath. After streaming your favorite show, studying for an exam, or cramming in a few minutes of reading, you check email one last time and go to bed, only to wake up and do it all over again the next day.

Sound familiar? Of course, this is an extreme picture of what it looks like to be swamped, but I'm afraid it's closer to reality than most of us care to admit. Increasingly, it feels like time happens *to* us—like we're running a race that's impossible to win. We feel beholden to our calendars, watches, and to-do lists rather than having dominion over these tools that promised to make our lives easier and more productive. We have too much to do and not nearly enough time to do it. In short, we're swamped.

The Bible tells us that more than two thousand years ago, Jesus's disciples were "swamped" in a different way. Luke 8:22–23 records the scene:

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples were out there on the lake, enjoying a quiet sail with Jesus, when all of a sudden, things spiraled out of control. You can imagine the boat taking on water from every side while the disciples frantically try to bail the water out, only to look back and see *more* water than before. (Sounds a lot like our never-ending to-do lists, am I right?) Luke says, "The boat was being swamped," leaving the disciples with only one thing to do. Recognizing they couldn't calm the chaos on their own, the disciples woke Jesus up and begged him to help. Verse 24 shares what happened next: "[Jesus] got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm."

This passage perfectly illustrates the core premise of this book—namely, that the solution to the disciples' being swamped by the wind and waves is the exact same solution to our being swamped by our to-do lists and hurried schedules. The solution to our perennial struggle with time management is found in Jesus Christ. How? In two ways.

The solution to our perennial struggle with time management is found in Jesus Christ.

First, *Jesus offers you peace before you do anything*. Nearly every time-management expert says that the path to peace and productivity is found in implementing his or her system. This is what we might call “works-based productivity,” which claims that *if you do exercises X, Y, and Z, then you will find peace*. This book begins with the opposite premise, in what we might call “grace-based productivity,” which says that through Jesus Christ, we *already have* peace, and we do time-management exercises X, Y, and Z as a response of worship.

Again, look at the disciples in the swamped boat. They didn’t do anything to calm the chaos. They merely trusted Jesus to still the storm. You and I can do the same. By trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, we have “peace with God” (Romans 5:1) that is secure regardless of how productive we are or how well we steward our time. Matt Perman, a former member of John Piper’s staff and the bestselling author of *What’s Best Next*, wrote that for Christians “peace comes first, not second. The mistake we often make is to make peace of mind the result of things we do rather than the source.”¹

Don’t get me wrong—in this book, you’re going to learn how to do *a lot* of practical things that transform you from feeling swamped to feeling peaceful and productive. But the tactics in this book will *never* be your most foundational source of peace. If they were, this book would be guaranteed to fail you at some point. As Christians, our ultimate source of peace—our ultimate solution to being swamped—is found in the God-man sleeping through the storm. As the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:14, “[Jesus] himself is our peace.”

Here’s the second way that Jesus is the solution to our time-management problems: *he shows us how God would manage his time*. This is a *wild* idea if you think about it, and we’re going to unpack it

at length in chapter 1. No, the gospel biographies do not show Jesus walking around with a to-do list, calendar, or smartwatch. But as we'll see throughout this book, the Gospels *do* show him prioritizing where he spent his time (see Mark 1:38), dealing with distractions at work (see Matthew 12:46–50), fighting for silence (see 14:13), and seeking to be busy without being hurried (see Mark 11:11). In other words, the Gospels show Jesus facing many of the same challenges we face today as we seek to steward our time. And because he was infallible God, we can assume that Jesus managed his time *perfectly*, providing us with the ideal model to follow.

DOES THE WORLD REALLY NEED ANOTHER TIME-MANAGEMENT BOOK?

I've read more than forty books on time management and productivity, including all the enduring bestsellers in this category. But that doesn't even scratch the surface of the *thousands* of books that have been published on this topic. If the time-management category is already so cluttered, why write this book? What makes *this* book different? I have three answers to that question.

First, *this book accounts for how the Author of time managed his time*. Jesus was the most productive person who ever lived, yet nearly every time-management book fails to address how he spent his time on earth. That's crazy! We'd be foolish not to study his lifestyle and the habits that led to his being so purposeful, present, and productive. I know you might not think the Gospels have much to say about how Jesus managed his time, but I promise they do. More on this in chapter 1.

Second, unlike most time-management titles, *this book seeks to collect and connect the previously disconnected pieces of the time-management puzzle*. Prior to writing this book, when people would ask me for advice on how to best manage their time, I would

recommend *nearly a dozen* different books for them to read.* Of course, that's the *last* thing a swamped person wants to hear. When you're overwhelmed, you barely have enough time to read *one* book, much less twelve! So why would I recommend so many books? Because each of those excellent titles deals with a critical piece of the time-management puzzle, but no single book contains all the pieces and links them together. My audacious goal is to zero in on the practices from these books that have worked for me and connect them together into a cohesive whole.

Finally, *this book attempts to create a unique balance between the theological, the theoretical, and the tactical*. In my experience, most time-management books overcompensate toward one of these three extremes. They're either so pie-in-the-sky that you can't *do* anything with them, or they're so dry that it feels like you're drinking sand.† In this book, I seek to strike a happy medium. But before I tell you *how* I plan to do this, I want to address an important question.

WHY SHOULD YOU TRUST ME WITH YOUR TIME?

There's no such thing as a PhD in time management, so how can you decide which alleged guru to trust? You have to rely on the *perspective* and *productivity* of your potential guide.

*If you're curious, I have included that list of books here. Each of these books is outstanding. I would encourage you to read each, as time permits: *Getting Things Done* by David Allen, *Deep Work* by Cal Newport, *The Way We're Working Isn't Working* by Tony Schwartz, *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown, *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport, *What's Best Next* by Matt Perman, *Measure What Matters* by John Doerr, *The 4-Hour Workweek* by Tim Ferriss, *Why We Sleep* by Matthew Walker, and *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer.

†Yes, that's an homage to one of Aaron Sorkin's greatest rants in *The American President*, the precursor to my all-time favorite, *The West Wing*.

My perspective on time management is shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's a big difference between a book that is biblically based and one that is gospel centric. My aim is the latter. As you'll see in chapter 1, the gospel is our ultimate source of ambition *and* rest, and that truth has tremendous practical applications for how we redeem our time.

But my perspective isn't enough reason for you to trust me. If I were you, I'd also want to know how productive I am as I practice what I'm going to preach throughout this book. Here's a summary of some of the things God has done through me over the past five years: As an entrepreneur, I've built two sizable businesses and created more than a hundred jobs. As a writer, I've signed seven book deals and helped more than three million Christians in every country connect the gospel with their work. At home, I've lost fifty pounds (and kept it off), been raising my daughters (currently ages six, four, and one), baptized my eldest, and grown a thriving marriage with my bride. In short, I think I've had a productive five-year run.

But let me make one thing crystal clear: *I am not the hero in this story*. God is. Deuteronomy 8:18 reminds us that it is “[God] who gives [us] the ability to produce wealth” and results. Over the years, God has graciously given me a wealth of knowledge and experience in stewarding my time well. Now I want to help you do the same. I want to help you redeem your time.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REDEEM YOUR TIME?

The gospel is at the heart of this book, and it's also at the heart of the book of Ephesians, where the concept of redeeming our time comes from. After expounding upon the gospel of grace in Ephesians 1–4, the apostle Paul reminded us of our status as “dearly loved children” of God in Ephesians 5:1. What is our response to our adoption as sons and daughters of God? Paul answered that question a few verses later, saying,

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (verses 15–17, NKJV)

Paul was saying that part of our response to the gospel is to redeem our time—to manage our time as carefully and wisely as possible. The Greek word *exagorazó*, which we translate to mean “redeeming” in “redeeming the time,” literally means to “buy up” or “ransom.”² If you’ve ever said, “I wish I could buy more time,” *that’s* the idea here. As Christians, we are called to “buy up” as much time as we can. Commenting on this passage, Timothy Keller said, “Christians are solemnly obliged not to waste time. Time-stewardship is a command!”³

*Part of our response to the gospel is to redeem our time—
to manage our time as carefully and wisely as possible.*

Why are we commanded to redeem our time? Not so we will have more time to spend on selfish pursuits. We are called to redeem our time because “the days are evil” and we are running out of time to do “the will of the Lord” (NKJV). One of my favorite Bible teachers, Jen Wilkin, put it this way: “We are commanded to be time redeemers, those who reclaim our time from useless pursuits and employ it to the glory of God.”⁴ Amen. We don’t redeem our time so we can “be more successful.” If that’s the book you’re looking for, you can put this one down right now. Success isn’t our primary aim—*service* is, and more specifically service to our Lord and his agenda.

*Success isn’t our primary aim—service is, and more
specifically service to our Lord and his agenda.*

So, what is his agenda? Why should you care about redeeming your time? Because redeeming your time allows you to do more “good works” for others that bring glory to God (see Matthew 5:16, *ESV*), create for his eternal kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 15:58), “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19), impress the Lord’s commands on your children (see Deuteronomy 6:6–7), and enjoy God and his good blessings (see Philippians 4:4).

Okay, so we’re called to redeem our time to do “the will of the Lord” (*NKJV*). But *how* do we do that? That’s what this book is all about.

A GUIDE TO THIS BOOK

Each of the seven chapters in this book is broken into two distinct parts: principles and practices.

Principles

The subtitle of this book promises seven biblical principles for being purposeful, present, and wildly productive. The first part of each chapter will introduce you to one of these seven principles, each drawn from the life or commands of Jesus Christ. Prior to this book, my teaching through these seven principles helped more than five hundred thousand Christ followers redeem their time, and I’m confident the same can be true for you.

While these principles will help you see that the key to redeeming your time is found in our Redeemer, that is far from the only place you will see them at work. Each chapter is chock-full of science and stories that illustrate the wisdom of Jesus’s habits, including case studies from C. S. Lewis, Tamika Catchings, William Wilberforce, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Shay Cochrane, and Mister Rogers.

Practices

After introducing each timeless principle, I will recommend a handful of practices to help you apply the principle in our modern context.

Each practice was developed through years of research, nearly one hundred podcast interviews with some of the world's most productive Christ followers, and *tons* of personal experimentation. The practices I've shared aren't things I started experimenting with last week; these are the practices I and others have stuck with for *years* as a means of redeeming our time.

But I want to make one thing clear: while the principles in this book find their root in Scripture, the practices do not. The practices are simply my opinion about how to best live out the biblical principles in our modern context. Because of that, some of these practices may not work for you. I'm confident *many* of them will, but I'd be naive to think they *all* will. Results may vary depending on your current work and life circumstances.

On that note, let me offer two tips. First, *feel free to skip practices you don't find helpful*. If you start reading a practice and find that you already "get it" or that it is too tactical for your taste, by all means, please skip ahead. Each chapter has two to nine practices, for a total of thirty-two in this book. That's *a lot* of practical opportunities to redeem your time. I'm confident that even if you adopt only one of the thirty-two practices, this book will have been well worth your time.

Second, *beware of implementing too many practices at once*. Many time-management books take the approach of "You have to do it all and do it now or it won't work." That's not my approach here. It's taken me *more than a decade* to work these practices into my life. You shouldn't expect to adopt them all in a month. While you might read this book in a couple of days, a week, or a month, my hope is that it will be a book you come back to over and over again for years to revisit principles and pick up new practices for redeeming your time.

MY PROMISE TO YOU

You know what the most shockingly consistent thing was in those forty-plus time-management books I read? Nearly every author promised that his or her method to solving our time-management problems is *easy*. I get it—that promise is how you sell books. There’s just one problem: *it’s not true*. Not even close. You know how I know? Because the Bible tells me so. Sin messed everything up, ensuring we will all die with unfinished symphonies. Genesis 3:17 says that “cursed is the ground” we walk on; “painful” is our “toil.” After the Fall, work is still good, work is still worship, but work—whether at the office or at home—is *hard*. So is redeeming our time.

But we choose to redeem our time not *despite* it being hard but precisely *because* it is hard. Oftentimes, saying something is hard is just another way of saying it’s worth doing. So here’s my promise to you: the work of redeeming your time *will not* be easy, but it *will* be worth it. Why? Because at the end of this road is a more Christlike version of yourself: purposeful, present, and *wildly* productive on his behalf. Are you up for the challenge? Then let’s begin!

CHAPTER 1

START WITH THE WORD

To redeem our time in the model of our Redeemer, we must first know the Author of time, his purposes for the world, and what he has called us to do with the time he has given us.

William Wilberforce was *easily* one of the most productive people of all time. He was elected to the British Parliament at the insanely young age of twenty-one.¹ At a single point in time, he held official roles with sixty-nine different social-reform groups in Great Britain.² Oh yeah, and he was chiefly responsible for abolishing the slave trade throughout the British Empire. In the words of one of Wilberforce's many biographers, "It's difficult to escape the verdict that William Wilberforce was simply the greatest social reformer in the history of the world."³

But Wilberforce wasn't always productive to such noble ends. For his first five years in Parliament, his ambition was largely for the acquisition of more power and wealth. But at the age of twenty-six, the boy-king surrendered himself to the lordship of King Jesus, ushering in what he called the "Great Change" of his life.⁴

That great change in his soul almost led to a dramatic change in his work. After his conversion, Wilberforce sought out career advice from his friend John Newton, the minister famous for writing the hymn "Amazing Grace." Wilberforce fully expected Newton to advise him to drop out of Parliament so he could "live now for God."⁵ But "Newton didn't tell him what he had expected—that to follow God he would have to leave politics. On the contrary, Newton encouraged Wilberforce to stay where he was, saying that God could use him there. Most others in Newton's place would likely have insisted

that Wilberforce pull away from the very place where his salt and light were most needed. How good that Newton did not.”⁶ Indeed. If Wilberforce’s “Great Change” had led to a great change in his work, where would the world be today? Certainly much further from God’s kingdom being “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

But while Wilberforce’s “Great Change” didn’t lead to a change in *what* he did vocationally, his salvation *did* lead to two dramatic changes in *how* he worked in Parliament. First, the object of his work changed from the raw pursuit of wealth and power to what he called his “great object”:⁷ the abolition of the slave trade. Second, and most relevant to the topic of this book, post-conversion Wilberforce dramatically changed how he managed his time.

In the days and weeks following his conversion experience, Wilberforce grieved over how he had spent his first twenty-six years on earth. One of his journal entries from this time reads, “I condemned myself for having wasted my precious time, and opportunities, and talents.”⁸ But Wilberforce didn’t grieve long, for he was determined to redeem whatever time he had left to work on behalf of God’s agenda rather than his own.

There was just one problem: Wilberforce was “an undisciplined mess” and “constitutionally weak . . . with regard to self-discipline”⁹ (an encouraging note if you’re starting this book believing that self-discipline and good time-management habits can’t be learned). Wilberforce knew he had to overcome these challenges in order to partner most fully with God on his mission in the world. In his journal, Wilberforce resolved that this was his aspiration: “to endeavour from this moment to amend my plan for time. I hope to live more than heretofore to God’s glory and my fellow-creatures’ good.”¹⁰

And amend his plan for time he did. Wilberforce’s newfound faith manifested itself in *incredibly* practical ways. He journaled instructions to himself, such as “Go to bed at eleven and wake at six,” to ensure he was getting adequate sleep.¹¹ He began carrying ink, quill,

and paper in his pockets so he would never lose track of an idea while walking through London.¹² And he ruthlessly sought out solitude as his celebrity status began to rise, knowing how critical it was to make space to pray and think about what precisely he should be spending his time on. These practical time-management tactics contributed to Wilberforce's transformation from "an undisciplined mess" to one of the most productive people who has ever lived.

And he wasn't just productive in Parliament. He was also a prolific writer. In 1797, in the middle of his fight against slavery, Wilberforce published the first of three significant books, a work of theology titled *A Practical View of Christianity*. Ironically, the book really wasn't "practical" at all, at least not in the way we typically think of that word. There were no five-step processes. There were no checklists or discussion questions at the end of each chapter. There was just Wilberforce expounding upon the core tenets of the gospel that led to such dramatic changes in his life, work, and habits for managing time.

The subject of Wilberforce's first book is surprising, to say the least. At the time, Wilberforce's celebrity was not insignificant. While he had yet to achieve his "great object" of abolishing the slave trade, he had become widely known for his underdog fight against slavery's powerful proponents. Undoubtedly, the British people were interested in anything Wilberforce would have to say in his first published work. So why not focus the book on the evils of slavery or a manifesto on how Christians could engage practically to shape culture? I think it's because Wilberforce knew this: *theology always shapes our practices*.

Like William Wilberforce, the book you hold in your hands is *extremely* practical. But it will start out as one of the most theological. Why? Because, as Wilberforce understood, our persistent problems with time management are rooted in something much deeper than the wrong to-do-list systems or daily planners. Our problems are rooted in misconceptions of what we believe about work, time, and the role we have to play in God's mission in the world.

FIVE BIBLICAL TRUTHS ABOUT TIME AND PRODUCTIVITY

There's an ancient proverb that says, "If you want to know what water is, the fish is the last thing to ask."¹³ Just as fish can't define what they're swimming in, neither can we. We swim in time, so to understand what time is, we must look outside ourselves for answers. In the words of Os Guinness, "If we are to master time, we must come to know the author of time, the meaning of time, and come to know the part he calls us to play in his grand story."¹⁴

Who is the author of time? God himself, of course. Genesis 1 shows God, a timeless being, creating the first day and time itself. Revelation 22:13 tells us that God is "the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." In short, God is the author and creator of the bookends of time.

In the 1970s, a Harvard professor found that the number one predictor of effectiveness in one's career is having a "long time perspective."¹⁵ Stephen Covey popularized this idea in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by imploring readers to "begin with the end in mind."¹⁶ As we've just seen, God is the keeper of the ultimate "long time perspective"—the creator of "the end" we are all to keep in mind. Thus, if our aim is to redeem our time, it is imperative that we start with his Word. Let's take a look at five things Scripture has to say about time and our role in it.

Truth #1: Our Longing for Timelessness Is Good and God Given

Deep in our bones, we know that we were created to live forever. It's why we are drawn to stories in which death is ultimately a lie. We love *The Lord of the Rings* because we know that everything sad *should* come untrue. We love *Tangled* because we believe there *should* be magical

hair that can heal any wound. We love *Frozen* because we feel we *should* live in a world where magical snowmen never die.*

But we don't just long to *live* forever—we also long to *be productive* forever. Now, we don't feel like this every day. Sin has made work and our efforts to be productive difficult. But something in our souls (and in God's Word) tells us that work was meant to be *very* good. You see this in Genesis 2:15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The Hebrew word for "work" here is *avodah*, which is also translated to mean "worship" in our Bibles.¹⁷ Work existed pre-sin. Work was good. Work was *more* than good—work was *worship*.

Work existed pre-sin. Work was good. Work was more than good—work was worship.

I think we all have caught glimpses of what work must have been like prior to the Fall. You deliver a killer sales pitch and feel completely in your element. You finish writing a great chapter and can't wait to share it with your spouse. You hammer the last nail into a table and step back and admire your creation with healthy pride. These moments are what we might call feeling God's pleasure in our work.[†] If you've experienced even just one of these moments, you know what it feels like to want work like that to last forever. You don't want it to end, because you know deep in your soul that you were put on this earth to *do* something—to "make a mark" toward some end. Playwright Arthur Miller said it best in *Death of a Salesman* when he wrote that

*Apologies in advance for the number of analogies from Disney princess movies. I'm writing this when our girls are six, four, and one, so those movies are basically all I'm watching these days.

†Curious to learn more about what this looks like? Check out chapter 11 of my previous book, *Master of One: Find and Focus on the Work You Were Created to Do*.

our desire “to leave a thumbprint somewhere on the world” is a “need greater than hunger or sex or thirst. . . . A need for immortality, and by admitting it, the knowing that one has carefully inscribed one’s name on a cake of ice on a hot July day.”¹⁸

I know some Christians believe that this longing for timelessness is rooted in pride. I certainly used to think that. But the more I study Scripture, the more I’m convinced that this desire to live and be productive forever was designed by God himself. Ecclesiastes 3:11 makes this crystal clear, saying that God has “set eternity in the human heart.” Jen Wilkin said it this way: “God . . . has given time-bound humans a longing for timelessness.”¹⁹

This is one of the main themes of the musical *Hamilton*.^{*} Summarizing what he wants out of life, Alexander says, “I wanna build something that’s gonna outlive me.”²⁰ But Alexander’s wife, Eliza, can’t understand her husband’s need for immortality. She urges her husband to “just stay alive—that would be enough.”²¹

But we all know that’s *not* enough. We *know* that we weren’t created to just stay alive and get through this life. Something in our God-designed DNA tells us that we were made for something more. To be human is to work with time that our minds tell us is finite but that our souls assure us *shouldn’t* be finite. So why *is* time finite?

Truth #2: Sin Has Ensured We Will All Die with Unfinished Symphonies

When sin entered the world, death was ushered in alongside it (see Genesis 3; 1 Corinthians 15:21). Human beings, who were created to be immortal, became mortal. Work, which was created to be good, became difficult. Time, which was created to be infinite, became finite.

^{*}If you thought my *Hamilton* references would stop by now, think again. There are *lots* of *Hamilton* “Easter eggs” in this book for you super fans. Happy hunting!

In short, sin has ensured that nobody will ever finish the work he or she envisions completing in a lifetime. Karl Rahner, an influential Catholic theologian, put it like this: “In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we learn that ultimately in this world there is no finished symphony.”²²

Haunting, depressing, and so true. We will all die with unfinished symphonies. Our to-do lists will never be completed. There will always be a gap between what we can imagine accomplishing in this life and what we actually get done. Even Wilberforce “went to the grave sincerely and deeply regretting that he hadn’t done much more.”²³ Are you kidding me? If the man who virtually ended slavery felt he had unfinished symphonies, you can guarantee you and I will too.

There will always be a gap between what we can imagine accomplishing in this life and what we actually get done. We will all die with unfinished symphonies.

Quite the uplifting start to this book, huh? Stick with me. I promise that *great* hope is right around the corner, but we have to start here because our grieving over the finiteness of time is the clue that gets us to that hope. In the words of one of Wilberforce’s biographers, Eric Metaxas, “No human impulse is more fundamental than our desire to transcend time, and none argues better that time is not the medium for which we are finally meant.”²⁴ C. S. Lewis put it this way: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”²⁵

So, if we long to accomplish more than what sin will allow us to in one lifetime, it’s logical to assume that we were made for a different, timeless story. And that is precisely what the Christian narrative is all about—that while it may appear that we will all die with unfinished symphonies, ultimately this is just an illusion, as “God is able to bring eternal results from our time-bound efforts.”²⁶

Truth #3: God Will Finish the Work We Leave Unfinished

Okay, so God created us to live forever, but sin has broken creation and made us mortal, time bound, and finite. Where's the hope? Our hope is found in Jesus Christ's walking out of the tomb that first Easter morning with a redeemed body that could not be destroyed again. The Resurrection was the emphatic "end of 'nevermore.'"²⁷ It was Jesus's way of declaring that our longing for immortality has been right all along and that through him, we too can experience eternal life.

The Resurrection was the emphatic "end of 'nevermore.'"

But Easter wasn't just the beginning of eternal *life*—it also marked the inauguration of God's eternal *kingdom*. Look at the Gospels: Jesus *hardly ever* talked about the gospel of individual salvation, focusing the majority of his teaching on what he called the "gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 24:14). The point? Easter isn't just good news for our *souls*. It's good news for the *world*.

What does this have to do with time management? It helps us make sense of where time is *going*. The Christian story is that God created us to live and work with him in a perfect garden. Sin messed everything up, but God promised to send a King to set everything right. With his defeat of death on Easter, Jesus proved emphatically that he is that promised King. And everything from that moment to the end of Revelation is about the building of God's kingdom until Jesus returns to finish what he started at the Resurrection and make "*all things new*" (Revelation 21:5, *ESV*).

So, if Jesus is coming back to finish his kingdom, why does it matter what you and I do in the present? Why does it matter that we redeem our time today? Because God has invited us to co-labor with him to build for his eternal kingdom! That is what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 3:9 when he called us "God's fellow workers" (*ESV*). And if you think about it, that is how God has been working since the

beginning. In Genesis, God created a lot in six days, but what's equally remarkable is what he did *not* create. The first few days of creation was God setting up a canvas. The sixth day was when he passed the baton of creation to us—his image bearers—and called us to *fill* that canvas [literally, to “fill the earth” (1:28)] with things that point to his glory.

The same thing happened Easter morning. Jesus inaugurated his kingdom with the Resurrection, but he left the work of building for that kingdom to us until he returns to finish the work once and for all. N. T. Wright, whom *Newsweek* has called “the world’s leading New Testament scholar,”²⁸ put it this way: “God’s kingdom, inaugurated through Jesus, is all about restoring creation the way it was meant to be. *God always wanted to work in his world through loyal human beings.*”²⁹

William Wilberforce is a perfect picture of this.* Slavery has no place in God’s kingdom, but God used Wilberforce and others to fight against that remnant of sin, bringing us a few steps closer to God’s kingdom. As the former president of Wilberforce University pointed out, “Wilberforce’s life allows us to witness that God has not finished his creative work.”³⁰

Our work matters *today* because it is a means of glorifying God and loving our neighbors as ourselves (see Matthew 22:39). But our work also matters for *eternity* because God can use it to build his kingdom. And because God alone will finish that work and ultimately bring heaven to earth, we can embrace this freeing truth today: *God doesn’t need you or me to finish our to-do lists.* If the things on our to-do lists are on *God’s* to-do list, he will complete them with or without us.

God doesn’t need you or me to finish our to-do lists. If the things on our to-do lists are on God’s to-do list, he will complete them with or without us.

*By the way, if you want to read more about Wilberforce’s remarkable story, check out my devotional series based on his life. You’ll find the link at JordanRaynor.com/RYT.

God didn't need Moses specifically to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, so he finished that work through Joshua. God didn't need David specifically to build the temple, so he finished that work through Solomon. If I die tomorrow and the Lord wants my work to continue, he will find someone else to do the job or he will simply finish my work when he brings heaven to earth.

God is directing a master narrative for the world, and I am just one of billions of actors in that story. In his great grace and wisdom, he has given me exactly as much time as I need to participate in that grand drama and work toward his kingdom. Not a moment more. Not a moment less. In the words of Job, "A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed" (Job 14:5). Thank God for those limits that ensure that he alone will get the glory for finishing the work we leave unfinished. As Jen Wilkin wrote, "Thanks be to God for the limit of time, by which we are bound and he is not."³¹

Truth #4: The Gospel Is Our Source of Rest and Ambition

As we've seen, God doesn't need us to be productive, but *we* often need *ourselves* to be productive in order to feel a sense of self-worth. There is certainly proper ambition for productivity, and we will get to that in just a moment, but before we go any further, we have to stop and let this truth sink in: *the gospel frees us from the need to be productive.*

The good news of the gospel is that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) and invited us to work for and live in his kingdom forever. And because we did nothing to *earn* his grace, there is nothing we can do to *lose* it. No matter how productive you are in this life, your status as an adopted child of God will never ever change. In the words of the great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "A Christian *is* something before he does anything."³²

Every night as I put our girls to bed, I ask them, “Do you know I love you no matter how many good things you do?” They nod their heads. “Do you know I love you no matter how many bad things you do?” They nod again. Then I ask, “Who else loves you like that?” and they always reply, “Jesus.” Or as Kate, my four-year-old stickler for theology, says, “God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.”

You and I need to hear those same words applied to our efforts to redeem our time. God loves us no matter how productive or unproductive we are in this life. And ironically, it’s that truth that leads us to be wildly productive. Why? Because working to earn someone’s favor is exhausting, but working in response to unconditional favor is intoxicating. For Christians, the key to being wildly productive is realizing that we don’t *need* to be productive.³³ Once we realize that God accepts us no matter how many good things we do, we *want* to be productive for his agenda as a loving act of worship.

Working to earn someone’s favor is exhausting, but working in response to unconditional favor is intoxicating.

So, what *is* his agenda? What does Scripture tell us God wants us doing with the time he has given us? The apostle Paul wrote, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10, esv). Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, esv). In other words, the very purpose of our lives—the reason we were created and saved—was to do good works that advance God’s kingdom and glorify him in the process.

Now, I can guess what you’re thinking: *But, Jordan, when Jesus and Paul said “good works,” they were talking about giving money to the poor, not writing an elegant line of code, right?* Wrong. Of course “good

works” implies charitable and evangelical things, but the meaning of *ergon* (the Greek word that translates to “good works” in these verses) is *much* broader. The word is used to connote “work, task, [and] employment.”³⁴

Remember, work was part of God’s perfect world prior to the Fall, and Jesus reaffirmed the goodness of what many would deem secular work by spending the vast majority of his adult life working as a carpenter. So why *shouldn’t* we expect plain old good work to be central to God’s call on our lives?

As we’ve seen, work—*good* work—is a means of advancing God’s kingdom and glorifying him. If that’s so, then the gospel of the kingdom should lead us to be *incredibly* ambitious for our work today. Pastor John Piper went as far as saying that “aimless, unproductive Christians contradict the creative, purposeful, powerful, merciful God we love.”³⁵

Furthermore, while Scripture tells us that our relative productivity has no bearing on our *status* as adopted children of God, it makes equally clear that we all will have different *rewards* in the kingdom based on how we steward our time in this life. The parable of the talents makes this clear (see Matthew 25:14–30), as does much of 1 Corinthians and Ephesians 6:8, which says, “The Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do.”

All of this should lead to a burning desire to steward our time well—not because we *need* to be productive, but because the gospel *compels* us to be. Part of our response to the gospel—to our security as “dearly loved children” (Ephesians 5:1) of God—is to redeem our time, stewarding every hour as wisely as we can for the good of others, the advancement of the kingdom, and God’s great glory.

The question now is straightforward: Where can we look for practical wisdom as to how to redeem our time? The answer is to God’s Word generally, but more specifically to the life of Christ—the eternal God who became a time-bound human being.

Truth #5: We Can Know How God Would Manage His Time

When the Author of time “became flesh” (John 1:14), he became *fully* human, meaning that he experienced the same day-to-day challenges other mortals faced. He had a business to run, a mother and father to care for, hunger to manage, and the need for sleep. Oh yeah, and he faced the same twenty-four-hour time constraint as every other human being. As pastor Timothy Keller explained, “Besides being vulnerable, subject to injury and death, [Jesus] had the limitations of being confined to one place in time and space.”³⁶ Like us, Jesus had a finite amount of time to finish the work the Father gave him to do (see 17:4).

All throughout the Gospels, you see that Jesus was painfully aware that the clock was ticking. In John 9:4, he said, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

Okay, Jordan, Jesus had a finite amount of time on earth. But surely the demands on his time in the first century can't compare to what we experience today, can they? Absolutely. As we'll see throughout this book, Jesus had to deal with interruptions, constant noise, and many of the other time-management challenges we struggle with today. As pastor Kevin DeYoung has written, “If Jesus were alive today, he'd get more e-mails than any of us. He'd have people calling his cell all the time. He'd have a zillion requests for interviews, television appearances, and conference gigs. Jesus did not float above the fray, untouched by the pressures of normal human existence.”³⁷

But, Jordan, do the Gospels really have anything to say about how Jesus spent his time on earth? Now we're getting somewhere! Yes, they do—quite a bit, in fact. But to see it, we must adjust the lens through which we read them.

One of my favorite pastors and writers, John Mark Comer, has written extensively about the fact that modern Christians read the

Gospels almost exclusively looking for *theology* and *ethics*. And while Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John certainly have a lot to say about theology and ethics, we must remember that their narratives are also *biographies* of the life of Christ. But as Comer explained, “*Very few followers of Jesus read the four Gospels that way. We read them as cute sermon illustrations or allegorical pick-me-ups or theological gold mines. Again, not bad, but we often miss the proverbial forest for the trees. They are biographies.*”³⁸

When you read a biography, “you don’t just look at what [the person] *said or did*; you look at *how* he or she *lived the details of day-to-day life*. If you’re smart, you copy those details, make the individual’s habits your habits; his or her routine, your routine; his or her values, your values in the hope that it will foster a similar kind of result in your own more ordinary life.”³⁹

The Gospels are our opportunity to see not just what Jesus said or what he did but *how he walked*, so that we can walk and manage our time as he did. In the words of the apostle John, “Whoever says he abides in [Christ] ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6, ESV). The biographies of the Gospels ensure that we don’t have to wonder how Jesus walked. In the words of author Emily P. Freeman, “We don’t have to wonder what God would do if he were a person. He is a person, and here is what he did.”⁴⁰

The Gospels are our opportunity to see not just what Jesus said or what he did but how he walked, so that we can walk and manage our time as he did.

Okay, then how did Jesus walk? How did he manage his time? Those are the questions we will explore throughout the remainder of this book as we examine seven time-management principles from the life of Christ and map them to corresponding practices that can help us live out those principles in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps the most obvious principle is this: Jesus's efforts to redeem his time started with the Word in both a theological sense and a practical one. Theologically, Jesus obviously knew the biblical truths about time we have been exploring in this chapter. Starting with the Word in this theological sense had to shape his perspective on time while he was on earth. But Jesus also started with the Word in a practical, day-to-day sense, frequently breaking away from the crowds and his disciples to spend time alone with his Father.

If you and I are to make the most of our time, we too must start with the Word, which brings us to our first principle in this book.

PRINCIPLE #1
START WITH THE WORD

To redeem our time in the model of our Redeemer, we must first know the Author of time, his purposes for the world, and what he has called us to do with the time he has given us.

How do we live out this principle on a day-to-day basis? Allow me to suggest two simple but crucial practices.

PRACTICE 1: SPEND TIME WITH THE AUTHOR OF
TIME

It's not enough to read the principle above just once. To redeem our time for God's purposes, we need to develop the habit of communing with him through the study of his Word on a daily basis.

Yes, the first practice I'm recommending in this supposedly revolutionary book on time management is to have a "quiet time." I know.

How novel. But if we are going to redeem our time, we've got to start where our Redeemer started. And as the Gospels make clear, Jesus prioritized time with his Father above everything else, including sleep (see Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12).

Why is this practice so important? Four reasons.

First and most obvious, time in the Word is how we commune with God. We spend time in the Scriptures not to get something from God but to “get God” himself. *He* is the prize.

Second, apart from him, we can do *nothing*. You picked up this book because you want to be purposeful, present, and productive. But Jesus stated clearly that we can do nothing of eternal significance without being connected to him: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). I love how bluntly author Matt Perman put it: “To live your life without God is the most unproductive thing you can do.”⁴¹

Third, time in Scripture gives us more time. For those of you thinking, *Jordan, I'm just too busy for a daily quiet time*, read what Proverbs 9:10–11 has to say: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through wisdom your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.” Proverbs 10:27 says the same thing: “The fear of the LORD adds length to life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.” Does time in God's Word *literally* extend our lives? That question is way above my pay grade. But what's impossible to dispute is that immersing ourselves in the wisdom of Scripture will help us make wiser use of our time toward God's purposes. And that, in effect, acts as a force multiplier to the fixed amount of time we have been given.

Finally, time in the Word is the keystone habit that makes every other time-management practice easier or more effective. In his book *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg popularized the idea of keystone habits, which “have the power to start a chain reaction, changing other habits” in our lives.⁴² According to Duhigg's research, “Keystone habits

start a process that, over time, transforms everything.”⁴³ *That* is the power of daily steeping ourselves in Scripture.

Time in the Word is the keystone habit that makes every other time-management practice easier or more effective.

Spending time in God’s Word reminds us of the importance of ensuring that our yes is yes (see chapter 2), as doing so is a means of preserving the reputation of Christ followers and the gospel. Time in Scripture guarantees that we regularly “dissent from the kingdom of noise” (see chapter 3) so we can hear and listen to God’s voice. The Word helps us define what really matters in our lives and our work (see chapter 4) by renewing our minds with eternal perspective. Focusing intensely and singularly on Scripture every day helps us work out our “focus muscles,” which are critical to cultivating depth at work and home (see chapter 5). Committing to time in the Word each day forces us to get enough rest so we don’t fall asleep on top of our Bibles (see chapter 6). And finally, daily time in the Word is one way you can “acknowledge him” so that “he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:6, ESV) as you plan your days and budget your time (see chapter 7).

So, what does this first practice actually look like? It’s not rocket science, and if you’re already in the habit of spending time each day in the Word, feel free to skip ahead to practice 2. But if time in Scripture is still a struggle for you, here are some practical tips.

First, you have to choose *when* you can be in God’s Word on a consistent basis. For me that’s first thing in the morning. As you’ll see in chapter 7, my daily Time Budget starts with time in the Word every morning from five to six. That’s the time when I am least likely to be interrupted. It’s also when I am at my best mentally.

But you might *not* be at your best at five in the morning. Although most people are morning larks, a significant percentage of people are biologically wired to be night owls. If you’re a night owl, five o’clock

in the morning probably isn't the best time to engage meaningfully with God's Word. In the Gospels, we see Jesus spending time with his Father both early in the morning (see Mark 1:35) and late at night (see Luke 6:12). Whatever works for you works. What's important is that you do it.

Once you've nailed down *when* you will be in the Word each day, you'll need a plan for *what* you will do with that time. Personally, I love Martin Luther's method of studying the Bible. It begins by reading a passage of Scripture (I usually read one chapter along with a commentary by Timothy Keller or N. T. Wright). Then we respond to the text by writing out:

1. Instruction (what the passage is commanding you to do)
2. Praise (what the passage leads you to praise God for)
3. Confession (where you have fallen short of the passage's instruction)
4. Petition (for God's grace in helping you live out the commands of the passage)⁴⁴

Time in God's Word can look a hundred different ways. Luther's way is just one of many. If you find it helpful, give it a shot.

God's Word is the source of all wisdom. How do you get wisdom? Solomon's answer to that question in Proverbs 4 is *so* good. The wisest man who ever lived spent the first nine verses of the chapter urging his reader to pursue godly wisdom at all cost. You can almost hear his reader saying, "Okay, yes! I need God's wisdom. Where do I start? What are the three steps to getting it?" Solomon replied, "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom" (verse 7, ESV). Essentially, Solomon said, "Just get it!" Pick a time, pick a method, and *just do it*.

But, Jordan, you don't understand how busy I am. There's no way I can add something new to my schedule! Trust me, I get it. Remember how crazy my life is right now? *Three* kids six and under. In the words of President Clinton, "I feel your pain."⁴⁵ But look at the biographies of

Jesus in the Gospels: the *busier* Jesus got, the *more* time he spent with his Father. We must do the same. Martin Luther once said, “I have so much to do today, I’ll need to spend another hour on my knees.”⁴⁶ That’s the sentiment. The busier we get (and let’s face it: we’re *all* busy), the more we need the wisdom of God to redeem our time for his purposes.

But, Jordan, I’ve done “quiet times” before and gotten nothing out of it. Me too—present tense. There are some days that I just sit with a passage and get nowhere. But remember, this is a *relationship*, and “relational time is wildly inefficient.”⁴⁷ If you’ve had young kids, you know what I’m talking about. About 80 percent of the conversations I have with my four-year-old are total nonsense, but I put in the effort to get to the 20 percent that are pure gold. Regardless of the proportions, *all* relational time—including our time with the Lord—can feel inefficient at certain moments. But that’s no excuse not to engage. John Mark Comer nailed it: “If you love God the Father and want a living, thriving relationship with him . . . then you need to carve out time to be alone with him. Full stop.”⁴⁸

But, Jordan, suggesting a daily quiet time sounds so legalistic. I hear you. Like many good things, we can easily become legalistic about personal quiet times. *Please* don’t think I’m saying that you have to have daily devotions to experience God’s favor. That is completely contrary to the gospel. *But* prioritizing daily time with the Author of time is one of the primary ways we can demonstrate our devotion to the Lord. And *nothing* will have a greater impact on our efforts to be purposeful, present, and productive toward his aims.

PRACTICE 2: PRAY WHAT YOU KNOW

When Phil Knight was starting Nike, the challenges were immense. In addition to the considerable hurdles that come standard with any entrepreneurial journey, Knight had to deal with dishonest partners, unjust lawsuits, the loss of key team members—the works. In his

inimitable autobiography, *Shoe Dog*, Knight explained how he relieved the pressure at the end of each day: “I’d retreat to my recliner, where I’d administer the nightly self-catechism.”⁴⁹ There in his living room, Knight would not dwell on what *might* happen to him and his business. Rather, he focused his thoughts on a single question: “What do I *know*?” Only by articulating what he *knew* to be true was he able to obtain calm in the everyday chaos.

As you and I seek to redeem our time, we would be wise to do the same, preaching to ourselves through prayer the biblical truths we’ve explored in this chapter. To that end, allow me to suggest that you pray what you now know regarding time and your role in it—daily, weekly, at whatever cadence feels right to you. Of course, you can use whatever words you’d like, but you’re also free to borrow my own prayer:

Lord, thank you that my longing for timelessness is not a mirage. Thank you for setting eternity inside my heart (see Ecclesiastes 3:11).

I humbly recognize that I will die with unfinished symphonies but that if my work is aligned with your will, *you* will finish my work in your time. As John the Baptist said, “I am not the Christ” (John 1:20, *ESV*), and therefore I don’t need to complete my to-do list in order for your purposes to prevail (see Proverbs 19:21).

Father, thank you that through Jesus I can never lose my status as your adopted child; thus, I have no *need* to be productive. But I graciously accept your invitation to do as many good works as I can for your glory, the good of others, and the advancement of your kingdom.

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” Lord, I commit my day and my

to-do list to you. Establish my plans in accordance with your will. Help me to be purposeful, present, and wildly productive for your purposes today.

But regardless of how productive I am, I will *know* that you love me. May the security of your love make me both peaceful and ambitious to do your will today. Amen.*

COLLECTING THE PUZZLE PIECES

To extend the puzzle analogy from the introduction, the cornerstone of Christ is the corner *piece* of the puzzle to redeeming your time. As Mr. Beaver said about Aslan the Christlike lion, “Once he’s with us, then we can begin doing things.”⁵⁰ But before we ensure we are focusing our time on doing the “right things,” it is critical that we extract everything we could be doing from our minds and put those items into a trusted external system. That’s the critical puzzle piece we will pick up in the next chapter. Oh, and if you’re still wondering when this book is going to get practical, buckle up. Chapter 2 is the most practical in the entire book.

*Want to keep this “productivity prayer” handy? There’s a link to print out a copy at JordanRaynor.com/RYT.