

Contents

Introduction	11
1. Don't wait until you "have time" to develop healthy habits	15
2. Use the energy you have while you have it	23
3. All investments require time to grow	29
4. Porn is more toxic than you realize	35
5. You will never regret time spent with the Lord	41
6. Church membership isn't optional	47
7. Find a mentor (or two or seven)	53
8. Chasing your dreams is overrated	59
9. Take care of your mind and body	65
10. Take care with money	71
11. Never try to be the expert in the room	77
12. Find your friends carefully	83

13. Practice hospitality	89
14. Marriage won't complete you	99
15. Go outside	103
16. Learn to be friends with Jesus	109
17. Appreciate people more than you need them	115
18. Center on the gospel	121
19. It is more important to be kind and helpful than to win	127
20. You are not only as good as what you haven't done	131
Acknowledgments	137



1.

Don't wait until you "have time" to develop healthy habits

(Becky)

It's easy to believe that once you graduate, get married, get a better job, settle down, or [insert whatever other milestone you're hoping to reach next], you will have more time to focus on Bible study, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines. Quite the opposite is true. For most people, responsibilities and time-consumers will not decrease as you grow older—at least, not until you have retired and all of your children (if you

GO OUTSIDE

have them) are grown. Even then, if you are well connected with a church family, you will likely realize that your calendar can easily stay overpopulated in every season of life. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean you need to develop healthy habits now for staying grounded in Scripture, focused on the gospel, and engaged in ongoing conversation with the Lord through prayer.

Just a couple weeks ago, Jared and I delivered our youngest daughter across the country to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where she attends college. Currently we're on week six of being "empty nesters." But man, that nest stays buzzing.

We have lived through many seasons of life, all of which I think we somehow assumed would become at least a bit less busy than the ones before and all of which were not at all less busy, including this one. At this very moment I am typing in a hotel room many, many miles from home, where Jared is speaking at a conference, and we will catch another plane in a couple days to fly to a different location many, many miles from home so that he can do it again. And then we will do this about five more times over the next six weeks or so, staying home just long enough to unpack, do some laundry, and repack.

To be clear, it is our choice to travel together in this season of life as much as possible. We have spent a great deal of time apart

1. Don't wait until you "have time" to develop healthy habits

over the last ten years as Jared has traveled to preach and teach and I have stayed behind to care for our daughters and our home.

Now that both of our girls are grown, I am able to join Jared much more often without shirking any major responsibilities at home, so I'm thrilled to be able to join him on the road, but this doesn't exactly provide long stretches of quiet time in Scripture on a regular basis. It would be easy to look at my current calendar and see that most of my busyness is optional and that I could have much more free time in my schedule if I chose to. And that would be true. But that's kind of the whole point.

Almost all of us could create more quiet space or downtime in our lives if we really wanted to. But almost all of us fill those quiet spaces and downtimes with activity of some kind. The key is to make sure we prioritize behavior that is necessary for health and wholeness before we begin adding layers of voluntary busyness over a schedule that is already full. This of course will look different for everyone, and there's no need to compare ourselves with anyone else.

In this season of frequent travel for me, this looks like reading or listening to Scripture and theology in airports and on airplanes. And choosing not to tune out while Jared is speaking, even if it's a message I've already heard several times. (Can't we all use frequent reminders?) I wish I had more time

GO OUTSIDE

to sit on my big comfy couch at home with a cup of coffee in one hand and my Bible in the other. I wish I could worship with my church family in Missouri more often. But this is not the season for that. So I desperately need personal spiritual disciplines that will keep me grounded in Scripture and consistently communicating with the Lord. And so do you.

It's best to get serious about our spiritual lives now so we'll be prepared with a steady discipline that can be our lifeline for every season.

Maybe you're thinking you'll get "really serious" about these things once life settles down. When you're settled at school. When you've grad-

uated. When you finally land a job and land a spouse and land the life you've always wanted.

But the truth is, you will always come up with reasons why spiritual disciplines can wait. And every stage of our lives comes with its own unique busyness. It's best to get serious about our spiritual lives now so we'll be prepared with a steady discipline that can be our lifeline for every season.

So, whatever it is that keeps you busy these days—traveling, working long hours, or studying late into the night—there are creative ways to nourish your soul through prayer and the intake

1. Don't wait until you "have time" to develop healthy habits

of Scripture. Here are just a few suggestions for incorporating spiritual disciplines into your life, even if you think you have no time for them:

- Instead of picking up your phone to scroll through social media as soon as the alarm goes off, first open your Bible (or even a Bible app on your phone) and read for just five minutes. In a year's time, that's over thirty hours of reading in just five minutes a day, which is enough to read through almost half of the Bible!
- Invest in an audio Bible app. They are wonderfully inexpensive. My favorite is the Dwell Bible app, which is about the cost of one cup of coffee per month. Listen to it while you get ready in the morning, while you commute, while you exercise, while you cook or do chores, or even while you shower if you have some water-resistant earbuds. I suspect you will be surprised at just how much these little moments will add up. But even if they are much briefer than you would like, you will still be developing a habit. And this isn't a race. There is no deadline for getting through Scripture within a specific timeframe. The goal is simply to take it in on a regular basis, no matter how small or large the quantity. It's a

GO OUTSIDE

rhythm of life that always includes a desire for Scripture intake we're after here, not a begrudgingly completed checklist of verses for the day.

- Make it a habit to pray every time you are preparing a cup of coffee (or scooping up a bowl of ice cream, or . . . you get it, whatever you do somewhat habitually that doesn't require a lot of brainpower so that you can focus your thoughts on prayer). It might seem almost silly at first since these moments feel so brief, but I firmly believe you will find yourself craving these encounters of intimacy with your Savior and looking for ways to extend the time you spend with Him. Again, quantity is not as important as consistency. The hope is that these regular conversations with your Creator and Comforter and Provider and King will become so satisfying that they will lead to a desire for more. But if you wait until your lifestyle is magically so flexible and relaxed that you can comfortably dedicate hours to prayer every day, you will likely never start the conversation.
- Go to church regularly. Busyness can make it awfully easy to excuse ourselves "just this once." And then "well, maybe just until this paper is finished." Or "just until after finals." "Okay . . . definitely once this semester is over." The enemy

1. Don't wait until you "have time" to develop healthy habits

will always try to provide you with excuses to stay home from church. Don't buy the lie. Attending and serving in a local church develops spiritual depth and disciplines that are difficult if not impossible to gain any other way.

- Pray through stress. I know, you don't "have time." But I fully believe that even a ten-second prayer whispered in desperation can have a greater impact than you might believe. If you ask the Lord to help you find ways to spend more time with Him, He will help you. Try it. From now on, every time you're running a little late or leaving home frustrated because you didn't have time to read your Bible or pray, just speak a quick prayer, "Lord, help me find ways to spend more time with You!" Do this once, twice, three times a day. I promise He will answer.

I could list several more ideas, but since everyone's life is so different, my hope is that this will stir up your own thoughts about how to personally find ways to seek the Lord in prayer and immerse yourself in Scripture as close to daily as possible. Whatever you think you might lose in less time with friends or movies or games or work or exercise, the Lord will richly redeem in the most life-changing relationship you will ever know and the greatest education you will ever receive.



2.

Use the energy you have while you have it

(Jared)

I vividly remember the exact moment I got old. My first mistake was accepting a friend's invitation to play full-court basketball. I hadn't played any ball in years, but I missed it, and I longed to get back on the court. Back in the day, I was pretty darn good. I was always first or second pick in regular weekend pickup games at the park, and my buddies and I had played in the NBA's touring Hoop It Up tournament when it came to Houston every summer. But years of a sedentary lifestyle were about to catch up with me.

GO OUTSIDE

The game started well enough. I was keeping up, trying to get the rust off, mainly passing. You know, just kind of laying low, biding my time. I was huffing and puffing a little harder than I expected, but I was trying to push through.

Then it happened. We were on defense, and one of my teammates nabbed a steal. Direction shifted back up the court, and I was leading the way running toward the opposing goal. My teammate threw a perfect football pass across half court, which landed beautifully in my hands while I was mid-stride. I immediately began dribbling a line of fire up the court, heading to an easy layup.

But it was possible I was not moving as fast as I thought I was. And in my peripheral vision, I could see one of the opposing players remarkably moving across the court faster than I'd ever seen a person move, and before I knew it, he was between me and the goal. As I approached this collision with my defender, my brain was sending signals that felt wonderfully familiar. When you're young and athletic, you don't really even have to think about such things. There's no time at all between the brain sending signals and the body obeying. My brain sent the signal to "fake left and go right." It's something I once did instinctively, smoothly, convincingly.

At this moment, my brain said "fake left and go right," but my body basically said, "Nah, I don't think we're going to do

that today.” In fact, my body said, “We’re probably not ever going to do that.” And instead of picking up the move to fake out my defender and dart around him, my legs got confused and instantly locked up. I’m ashamed to tell you that I fell face forward onto the court, and the ball bounced sadly out of my dribble and rolled out of bounds.

One of my buddies came to give me a hand and pull me off the court. “What happened?” he said. I said, “I don’t know. But I think I just got old.” Another teammate very helpfully said to me after the game, “If it matters, I could tell you used to be good.” That was a cold comfort.

I think about this moment a lot, especially since I’m significantly older now than I was then! But I mark it as the moment of my reaching the “other side” of the journey of aging. Firmly ensconced now in middle age, I look back at the days of my youth with a lot of warmth—but also a lot of regret.

I feel warmth because I am grateful for the joys of seemingly boundless energy, of the “glory days” of legendary games of weekend football and basketball with my friends, of feeling like the world was brimming with possibilities and I was brimming with potential. But I feel regret, because I think I squandered so much of those days focusing on things that don’t ultimately matter.

GO OUTSIDE

If I could go back and talk to myself then, I would say, first of all, “Enjoy this! Enjoy it more than you already are enjoying it.” I would tell myself to really cherish the days of youth and all the energy and strength and health that often come with it. Because those days go by so much faster than you think they will. When you’re young, time seems to move slowly. But it’s really not. And all the abilities of youth are a great gift from God. We should really appreciate them—to the glory of God—

while we have them and not take them for granted. Don’t let them go to waste in your twenties and thirties. Stay active. Get outside (see chapter 15). Enjoy God’s creation. Join a team. Go for regular walks or runs or swims. Don’t let your body get lazy or unkempt.

**While you have
the energy, use it
to serve and
to love.**

The book of Ecclesiastes is basically the old King Solomon reflecting back on his life with both warmth and regret. He is, in a way, talking to his younger self. He warns his younger self. He encourages his younger self. He longs for young people reading to not make the mistakes he made. And in Ecclesiastes 12:1, he refers to how the “days of adversity come” and the years approach where the pleasures of being young are impossible. And the word of exhortation he gives to the young

2. Use the energy you have while you have it

who so often cannot yet feel or see the approach of the days of “getting old” is this: “Remember your Creator.”

While you’re still young and have so much energy and ability, remember your Creator. Don’t waste these precious gifts on everything but the Lord’s business. While you have the energy, use it to serve and to love. Use your youthful energy to repent of laziness and work hard at your studies and your job. Use your youthful energy to go on mission trips. Serve in local outreach efforts. Be a faithful evangelist to your friends and classmates.

I wish that I had spent more of my energy on things that matter more when I had the energy to spend. It’s gotten harder as I’ve gotten older, and in a lot of ways, I have felt like I’m trying to make up for lost time. I have a lot more interest in pursuing a kingdom vision these days but a lot less energy to do it. I don’t want you to share this experience.

You don’t get these youthful days back. Even if you’re dedicated to maintaining physical health, make sure not to neglect your spiritual health. Channel your energy that way too. Because, as strong and healthy as you are now, it’s going to go away. You won’t be young forever. But Christ is yours forever. You’ll never

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GO OUTSIDE

regret investing intensely in the business of His kingdom. And your investment *there* is something that will never get old, never decay, never be lost.

Abandon yourself, then, with gusto to the pursuit of Christ's kingdom.