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## 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

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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

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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

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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.

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 graduated. 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

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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

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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

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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.

