

Time to Get to Work

September 3, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

John 9:1-7; James 4:13-17

Session Outline

1. The Time Is Now (John 9:1-7)
2. The Time Is Short (James 4:13-15)
3. Do What You Know to Do (James 4:16-17)

Theological Theme

Our time on earth is limited. Christians need to follow the example of Jesus and take every opportunity to bring glory to God in the way we respond to the people around us.





Leader Guide

Time to Get to Work

Introduction

Think about what the following list of people have in common: Kobe Bryant, Paul Walker, Heath Ledger, Whitney Houston, Elvis Presley, John Belushi, Payne Stewart. These are all well know people who died suddenly. Some were still very young while others were middle-aged, but all their lives were seemingly cut short. While this list is of famous people, we all have friends, loved ones, or acquaintances that passed on in what seemed like the prime of their lives.

The truth is none of us know how much time we have on this earth. Regardless of the average life expectancy, only God knows the number of days we will have. This reality makes it even more important that we learn to live our lives to the fullest. While most people will agree with the need to live life to its fullest, the difference comes in the pursuit of a full life. The world encourages us to chase certain things and live a particular way while Scripture gives a different perspective on what is truly important so we can maximize the time we have. Which one will you listen to?

-  Whose unexpected death impacted you deeply?
-  Psalm 90:12 says we “develop wisdom” by remembering the brevity of our lives. How do we gain wisdom by reflecting on this truth?

Session Summary

Jesus knew His time on earth was limited, and He lived every day to the fullest, taking advantage of teaching moments with His disciples along the way. When they encountered a blind man, Jesus said it was the right time to do something about the man’s situation and not only discuss it. He exhorted the disciples to go to work for the glory of God. His words still apply today, and the church would do well to take them to heart by doing the work of the gospel while we still have time.


To make the best use of our time, we can look to the words of James and evaluate the way we spend the minutes, hours, and days we have been given. James compared our lives to a vapor, emphasizing the brevity of life and the importance of making it count as much as possible. He instructed us to not be arrogant about the way we plan and spend our lives but instead to follow God's will and let Him dictate our days.

1. The Time is Now (John 9:1-7)

Jesus and His disciples encountered a man who had been blind from birth. This sparked a conversation about the source of the man's blindness. When reading this passage, we often focus on Jesus's words about blindness not being the result of sin in the man's life but rather an opportunity for God to be glorified and reveal His power. It is easy to overlook the other point Jesus made as you read and celebrate how the man's life was changed and how nothing is impossible for the Lord.

The disciples used this blind man as an opportunity to ask Jesus about the nature of the man's affliction. Their first inclination seemed to be to diagnose the man rather than ask how Jesus might help him. How often do we react the same way? We may notice what is happening around us but instead of seeing it as an opportunity to bring glory to God, we see it as a discussion topic or a head scratching moment.

But Jesus was not content to only discuss the matter at hand. He told the disciples in verse 4 that they were to do the works of the One who sent Jesus. He went on to emphasize that time is short, and they must be willing to take advantage of the time they had been given. Instead of looking at the blind man as a theological matter to be dissected, Jesus saw an opportunity to do the works of His Father.

 When have you found yourself distracted by a theological discussion of a situation instead of using it as an opportunity to serve?

Jesus's words and actions showed a sense of urgency. His time on earth was ending. He reinforced that action must be taken, "while it is day" (v. 4). It is too easy to get into the habit of putting off the work God has called us to for another day. Many of us procrastinate about many things, and spiritual things are no different. Jesus's words to the disciples should be a challenge for us as well.

Sight for the Blind

Jesus performed more miracles related to giving sight to the blind than any other miracle. Such an activity was forecast in prophecy as a messianic act (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:7). Jesus came to clear the sight of human beings who had become blinded to the things of God.

- What are some things you have been procrastinating about spiritually?

In pointing out that night was coming when no one could work, Jesus indicated that opportunities for serving the Lord do not last forever. Some God ordained moments must be taken advantage of with urgency or they will pass. Think about the blind man. This was the one encounter he had with Jesus and the disciples. Have you ever felt the Spirit prompt you to respond to a person that “randomly” crossed your path? If you don’t obey immediately, there is a chance you will not have that opportunity again. Time is short, and we must do the work of the Father while it is still today. The disciples needed this reminder and we do too.

- Application: What current opportunity has God given for you for obedience?

2. Trust the Lord (James 4:13-15)

Jesus’s words in John 9 are not the only place Scripture addresses the urgency of obedience to God. James also spoke to this matter in his letter. Not having a godly view of time can indicate pride. God calls us to depend on Him, not on ourselves. The way we spend our time matters to God. James rebuked the person who makes plans without regard for God. He pointed out that it makes no sense to trust our limited knowledge when we can depend on the God of the universe.

- How might you have been guilty of viewing time wrongly and wasting the opportunities God has given you to live for Him?

To help stress his point, James compared the human life to a vapor. It appears for a little while and then vanishes. As we discussed in the introduction, most of us have known someone who died before he or she was expected to. This helps us grasp the reality of this image James gave. The question is, what will we do with that knowledge?

- Why is it important to be intentional about how you spend your life? What are the consequences of not living this way?

Note that James did not discourage people from making plans or scheduling things. It is not bad or wrong to plan and prepare, in fact, other places in Scripture like Proverbs (21:5; 6:6-8) encourage us to practice these things. However, the problem arises when we start to plan and prepare without the Lord’s guidance. We should depend on Him in the way we live every day. When we make that our starting point, our vapor of a life will be spent wisely for the glory of God.

No one sets out to forgotten when they are gone. God has put it in our hearts to live in a way that matters and leave a legacy when we are gone. It can be sobering to consider the wide variety of things people do to try and leave a legacy, considering today's Scripture passages. What if more Christ followers viewed their lives as a vapor that is precious and limited? How would that change our daily habits and decisions?

- ❓ Application: How does thinking of your life as vanishing give you urgency to live in a way that matters? How might you keep this reality before you daily?

3. Do What You Know to Do (James 4:16-17)

Thankfully, James did not only tell us our problem. He went on to say what to do instead of living for ourselves and only following our own desires. The solution is to surrender our lives to God's will and follow His plans over ours. If we do this, we avoid living lives of arrogance that boast of the wrong things.

- ❓ How is living according to your own plans and desires a sign of arrogance? How does seeking God's will in all things show humility?

It is important that we live with an awareness of God's hand in our lives and understand our limitations. Realizing God cares about every detail of how you spend your days and placing your trust in His power changes your life. The other option is to place your trust in your own strength and reasoning, both of which are limited and restrictive. Look back at the worst decisions of your life and you will likely notice a similar thread echoing James's words. The only way to maximize your life is to live it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

- ❓ How do you respond to the idea that your worst decision-making has resulted from relying on yourself instead of God?

It is much easier to say you depend on God than it is to live in humility and dependence. This relates to the story of Jesus, the disciples, and the blind man in John 9. The disciples discussed the man's situation and gave it attention, but Jesus was moved to action over discussion. Many willingly talk about trusting God and depending on Him. Yet, how are we putting this into practice? As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

James knew this tendency to settle for thinking and talking about God's plans without letting the will of God be the driving force of our lives. He addressed the topic head on in verse 17. James challenged believers to live

out their faith in a real way. He said to know the right thing but not do it is sin. What God is calling us to do may not always seem clear, but many times it is clear, and the issue isn't discernment but obedience. One of the ways God has clearly called us to obedience is regular reliance on Him over trusting ourselves.

- ❓ Application: How do you need to show obedience to God in trusting Him with every moment He has given you? What do you need to start doing in this regard? What do you need to stop doing?

Conclusion

Time is a gift from God, and we don't know how much we will receive. Jesus reminded us our time is limited and we must be willing to do whatever we can to make the most of the time we have. He challenged the disciples to not just talk what God calls us to do but to take advantage of every opportunity to serve and love others in a way that brings glory to God.

James wrote about the same idea and instructed his readers to stop being arrogant and prideful in the way we treat time. When you plan your days and spend your time chasing your desires and pleasures, you allow pride to rule. The key is to recognize that time is a gift from God and the way to make the best use of your time is to live it surrendered to the Holy Spirit in humility. It is always the right time to do the right thing, so believers need to get to work while we still have today.

- ❓ What types of circumstances tempt you to have a wrong view of time and lose a sense of urgency for living each day for the Lord?
- ❓ How can we as a group encourage one another to view our time rightly and pursue the will of God each day?
- ❓ How should the brevity of life encourage us to seek gospel conversations with others regularly?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for the gift of time. Ask for the wisdom know how to spend your time and bring glory to God in every opportunity you have.

Additional Resources

- *Be Alive* by Warren Wiersbe
- *John Chapters 1-10* by J. Vernon McGee
- *Exalting Jesus in James* by David Platt

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

For Next Week

Session Title

- What the World Needs Now

Main Passages

- 1 Corinthians 13

Session Outline

1. Why Love? (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)
2. Love Is . . . (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)
3. Love Endures (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

Memorize

“We must do the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.” - John 9:4

Historical Context of John

Purpose

The purpose statement in 20:30–31 indicates that John wrote with an evangelistic purpose, probably seeking to reach unbelievers through Christian readers of his Gospel. If the date of composition was after AD 70, the time of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is likely that John sought to present Jesus as the new temple and center of worship for God’s people in replacement of the old sanctuary.

Author

A close reading of the Gospel of John suggests that the author was an apostle (1:14; cp. 2:11; 19:35); one of the Twelve (“the disciple Jesus loved,” 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:20; cp. 21:24–25); and, still more specifically, John, the son of Zebedee (note the association of “the disciple Jesus loved” with Peter in 13:23–24; 18:15–16; 20:2–9; 21; and in Lk 22:8; Ac 1:13; 3–4; 8:14–25; Gl 2:9). The church fathers, too, attested to this identification (e.g., Irenaeus). Since the apostolic office was foundational in the history of the church (Ac 2:42; Eph 2:20), the apostolic authorship of John’s Gospel invests it with special authority as firsthand eyewitness (Jn 15:27; 1Jn 1:1–4).

Setting

The most plausible date of writing is the period between AD 70 (the date of the destruction of the temple) and 100 (the end of John’s lifetime), with a date in the 80s most likely. A date after 70 is suggested by the references to the Sea of Tiberias in 6:1 and 21:1 (a name widely used for the Sea of Galilee only toward the end of the first century); Thomas’s confession of Jesus as “my Lord and my God” in 20:28 (possibly a statement against emperor worship in the time of Domitian); the reference to Peter’s martyrdom, which occurred in 65 or 66 (21:19); the lack of reference to the Sadducees, who ceased to be a Jewish religious party after 70; and the comparative ease with which John equated Jesus with God (1:1, 14, 18; 10:30; 20:28).

Special Features

The Gospel of John is different from the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in that more than ninety percent of its material is unique. John’s Gospel does not focus on the miracles, parables, and public speeches that are so prominent in the other accounts. Instead, the Gospel of John emphasizes the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and how we, as believers, should respond to his teachings.

Extended Commentary

9:1–41 Jesus’s identity as “the light of the world” was illustrated in his sixth and penultimate “sign” recorded in John’s Gospel—the healing of a man born blind (see note at 2:11). As in chap. 5, Jesus healed on the Sabbath and thus suffered persecution from the Jewish leaders. But in contrast to the lame man of chap. 5, who showed no faith and reported Jesus to the authorities, the formerly blind man showed a progression of faith and ended up worshiping Jesus (9:38). Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their spiritual blindness (vv. 40–41).

9:2 The disciples’ question reflected the assumption, customary in ancient Judaism, that suffering could be traced to specific sins (cp. Jb 4:7). The underlying concern of this assumption is to clear God of wrongdoing against innocent people (Ex 20:5; Nm 14:18; Dt 5:9). Yet the NT makes clear that suffering is not always a direct result of a person’s sin (Lk 13:2–3; 2Co 12:7; Gl 4:13). We should not speculate about the cause of a person’s suffering but realize that even evil can contribute to the greater glory of God (esp. the crucifixion; cp. Jn 12:28, 37–41; 17:1, 5).

9:3 Jesus did not explain why the man was born blind; he only announced what would be the result: God’s glory.

9:4 That Jesus included the disciples in his ministry by saying *We must do the works* is remarkable. Jesus realized that his time on earth was limited.

9:6–7 Jesus’s sending the man to wash in the pool of Siloam is reminiscent of Elisha’s sending Naaman to wash in the Jordan River (2Kg 5:10–13). The words which means “Sent” may echo the messianic reference in Gn 49:10 (cp. Is 8:6). After 9:7, Jesus is not heard from again until v. 35.¹

James 4:13–17

4:13–14 In a hypothetical but realistic scenario, James accused a merchant who had big designs on making a profit of leaving God out of his plans. Neglecting to entrust our hopes and plans to God and his counsel is paramount to arrogance and unbelief. If he is really the Lord of our lives, we see all things as coming from his hands, and we speak of plans and outcomes accordingly.

4:15–16 The phrase *you should say* and what follows indicate that it is God’s will that conditions the course of life. The merchants did not recognize this; they were boasting, but such boasting is arrogance and evil.

4:17 This was probably a maxim known to James. An example of this verse is found in 5:4.²

References

1. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1684–1685.
2. R. Gregg Watson, “James,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1971.

Author Bio

Warren Wiersbe (Be Alive)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

J. Vernon McGee (John Chapters 1-10)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) spent more than 50 years teaching the Bible on his “Thru the Bible” radio broadcast. He pastored for more than 40 years and has authored many best-selling books, including *Doctrine for Difficult Days*.

David Platt (Exalting Jesus in James)

David Platt is the author of three New York Times bestsellers, including *Radical*. He is lead pastor at McLean Bible Church in metro Washington, D.C., the former president of the IMB (International Mission Board), and founder of Radical Inc., a global center for the unreached that serves churches in accomplishing the mission of Christ. Platt received his master of divinity (MDiv), master of theology (ThM), and doctor of philosophy (PhD) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia with his wife and their children.