

SMALL GROUPS

Key Scripture References

- Luke 21:34 -- Jesus warns that as the end times approach, hearts can become weighed down by dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, catching people off guard like a trap
- Job 9:25 -- A reflection on how quickly days pass and how joy can slip away in the middle of a frantic pace of life
- Daniel 5:1-28 -- The account of King Belshazzar's feast, the handwriting on the wall, and Daniel's interpretation that Belshazzar's kingdom was numbered, found out of balance, and divided
- Hebrews 9:27 -- A reminder that every person is appointed to die and then face judgment, underscoring the reality that our days are finite
- Ecclesiastes 4:6 -- Solomon's counsel that one handful with tranquility is better than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind
- Ecclesiastes 4:12 -- A person standing alone is vulnerable, but two together can stand firm, and a triple-braided cord is not easily broken
- Psalms 90:12 -- A prayer asking God to teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom
- Acts 20:24 -- Paul's declaration that his life is worth nothing to him unless he uses it to finish the work the Lord assigned to him
- Matthew 6:31-33 -- Jesus instructs his followers not to worry about daily necessities, because those who seek God's kingdom first will find that all these things are provided

Key Takeaways

1. Our days are numbered. Life is described in Scripture as a vapor -- here and then gone. When we truly internalize that our time is finite, we stop squandering it and start stewarding it.
2. Our lives can easily get out of balance. Just like the writing on the wall declared that Belshazzar had been "weighed and found wanting," our own calendars and priorities can become dangerously imbalanced without regular evaluation.
3. Our misuse of time will always cost us something. Time spent on non-essentials is not neutral. It always comes at the expense of something or someone that matters more.
4. Order determines capacity. It is not just what we do that matters -- it is what we do first. When we prioritize God and the things that matter most, there is more room for everything else.

Three Practical Responses

The sermon offered three action steps for anyone feeling crushed by the pressure of a packed schedule:

Refocus on what matters most -- Relationships, purpose, and eternity deserve the center of our attention.

Reduce the non-essentials -- We cannot eliminate every minor obligation, but we can honestly evaluate what is truly necessary and what is simply filling space.

Reprioritize your life -- Like placing large rocks in a jar before the small pebbles, putting God and people first creates more capacity, not less.

Discussion Questions

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your stress level related to your schedule right now? What is driving that number?

1. When was the last time you felt genuinely rested and unhurried? What made that possible?

Digging Deeper

2. The sermon referenced Luke 21:34, where Jesus warns that the anxieties of life can weigh down our hearts from the inside. How have you personally experienced stress moving from your circumstances into your inner life? What did that feel like?
3. King Belshazzar ignored God until a dramatic moment of crisis forced him to pay attention. In what ways does God sometimes allow "handwriting on the wall" moments in our own lives? Have you ever experienced one?
4. Pastor Mack made this statement: "If you don't prioritize your life, someone else will." Who or what tends to set your schedule when you are not intentional about it? How does that make you feel?
5. The sermon drew a distinction between things that are bad and things that are simply non-essential. What is something in your life right now that is not necessarily wrong but may be taking up space that belongs to something more important?
6. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4:6 that one handful with tranquility is better than two handfuls with toil. What would it look like practically for you to choose the one handful? What would you have to let go of?
7. Pastor Mack said: "God didn't save you so you can survive your calendar. He saved you that you can experience an abundant life." How does that statement challenge or encourage you?

Personal Reflection

8. When you honestly evaluate your weekly schedule, what do your priorities appear to be -- not what you say they are, but what your time actually reflects?
9. The sermon mentioned that relationships, purpose, and eternity are the things that matter most. Which of these three tends to get the least attention in your current season of life? Why?
10. Matthew 6:33 promises that when we seek God's kingdom first, everything else will be provided. Is there an area of your life where you are struggling to trust that promise? What would it look like to surrender that area to God this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again:

- Audit your calendar. Set aside 20 to 30 minutes this week to look honestly at how your time is being spent. Ask yourself which commitments align with your stated priorities and which ones do not.
- Create a not-to-do list. Write down three to five things you will intentionally say no to this week in order to protect time for what matters most.
- Practice a Sabbath. Identify one day or half-day this week to rest, worship, and refocus -- not as a religious obligation but as an act of trust that God can handle things when you stop.
- Put the big rocks in first. Before the week begins, schedule the non-negotiables -- time with God, time with family, and time serving your purpose -- before filling in everything else.
- Invest in a relationship. Reach out to one person this week simply to be present with them, not to accomplish anything, but because relationships matter.
- Consider joining a small group. If you are not already connected to a group, take a step toward community this fall semester.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time together by praying over these specific areas:

- That God would give each group member the wisdom to number their days and live with intention
- That the Holy Spirit would reveal what is truly out of balance in each person's life
- That each person would have the courage to say no to good things in order to say yes to the best things
- That God would restore joy to anyone who has lost it in the middle of a frantic pace of life

Memory Verse for the Week

Psalms 90:12 -- Ask God to teach you to number your days so that you may gain a heart of wisdom.