

Youth Update

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Time: Do You Use It, Lose It, Abuse It?

by ELOISE K. PODRAZA

In the beginning, Genesis tells us, the world was formed by an orderly, loving Creator. In this world of precise and gentle timing, from the rise of the sun to the flow of the tide, each of you has an important part in God's plan.

Yet your Creator gives you the wonderful element of time so you may have the privilege of shaping your own life. God wants you to use this gift, the time in which you live and move, to fulfill your special purpose, finding joy and peace.

William Penn is reported to have said that

time is "what we want most, but what we use worst." The following teenagers, like you, struggle with how to use this gift well.

Cassandra is involved in her school's track team, cheerleading squad, Spanish club, National Honor Society, drama club and choral group and has been elected class representative. She isn't dating anyone now but has a couple of close friends and a whole group from school that keep her busy on weekends on the phone or on the road. Cassandra is the type of person who always likes to be doing something. Her family complains that they hardly

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see her anymore.

Miguel works hard for average grades, has a job stocking shelves at a local discount store at least 20 hours each week and has been going out with Chela for five months. Sometimes he feels he has no time for himself. He looks forward to quiet time to spend lying around, listening to music or just thinking things through.

Brian's friends think he's a great guy and know him as a person willing to do anything for you, but his grades aren't as good as they could be, and his teachers tell him he doesn't work to his potential. He has a hard time saying no to friends and makes plans and promises he can't always keep. He seems to squeak by at the last minute in everything he does.

His parents want him to do better in school and to be successful. Brian knows he has a problem meeting deadlines, but there are always so many things in the way. He says it's tough to get organized when you have a bunch of brothers and sisters and no privacy, so he gives up and instead goes to hang out with friends.

It's Easy to Figure Out What Someone Else Should Be Doing

Your first reaction might be "Cassandra doesn't have to join everything. She should drop a club or two for starters, and maybe she would have time for her family or something useful—like a job. And she doesn't have to see or talk to her friends every waking hour."

Or "Twenty hours of work averages to just over two hours a day. Maybe Miguel should cut back on dates with Chela if he wants time by himself."

And "If Brian can't handle his time, he should just say no once in a while to his friends and go to the library to study if he needs a quiet place."

These would seem to be easy and logical arguments to point the way to a stockpile of time to use for the "right" reasons. Cassandra, Miguel and Brian could borrow from this new inventory to make their schedules more workable and productive.

Unfortunately, this quick-fix method of dropping interests or activities to create "more time" only puts a bandage on an underlying problem: using time in a manner uniquely best for you.

If you don't begin to treat your time as a valuable commodity, any stockpile you think you've gained will more than likely be bom-

barded by old habits and dwindle right before your eyes.

These three teenagers' use of time is tied up in a multitude of factors like their individual personalities, family expectations, finances, talents and sense of purpose. Their use of time is as personal to them as the 24 hours in your day are to you.

There are steps you can take to evaluate your own time and be more in tune with what you want to do and how and when you'll do it. You will be sitting in the driver's seat and be in control.

Pick Your Priorities

Whether, like Cassandra, you want to somehow shove more into your schedule, like Miguel you want more time to relax or, like Brian, have trouble finishing what you begin, view your situation realistically.

School, sports, friends, dating, jobs, Church and community service may be some of the biggest time consumers in your life—and in many ways the most important. Don't forget those other necessary time bandits to be considered, however, in your overall schedule: sleeping, household chores, family obligations (things like your Great-aunt Marie's 80th birthday party).

Your Creator expects you to use the time given you in a way that will make you flourish. Consider those things that occupy big chunks of your life, write them down and give each an honest appraisal.

Ask yourself questions—don't simply assume that if you really didn't want to use up your time with an activity, you just wouldn't do it. Sometimes you can be subtly pressured by outside circumstances to participate in things that use up your minutes and hours in ways not best for you.

Why I Do What I Do

Do the things I do let me keep in touch with my family, my Church and myself? Is being on the cheerleading squad important enough to me to practice several hours each week and attend games? Do I feel a sense of satisfaction? Do I give all I can to contribute to the success of the squad? Do I enjoy what I'm doing?

Did I get a job out of necessity? Do I take pride in a job well done? Does balancing school and a job work for me?

Am I committed to the football team

Q.

I doubt that all teenagers—or adults—are list-makers, a way to remember that might just suit *some* personalities.

Can you suggest some other alternatives?

A.

You're right! Although a helpful tool for many people, list-making might feel like a burden to others. How about getting into the habit of "day-blocking" instead? Use specific time slots for certain tasks. For instance, take care of homework every day before making any phone calls; do household chores like room-straightening and laundry by, say, Friday afternoon; make the minutes you use to blow-dry your hair a time of prayer and reflection.

enough to follow all the rules, including those pertaining to exercise, diet, curfew, smoking and alcohol? Am I eager for practice and games whether the coach will put me in or not? Am I having fun as well as learning? Do I enjoy being with my teammates?

If you are giving a lot of so-so or no answers to these questions about your activities, begin asking yourself other questions that might be more difficult to answer.

Your Time—Where Does It Go?

Did I try out for the play only because it's supposed to be the "cool" thing to do? Am I playing basketball mainly because my dad wants me on the team? Do I go out so often to be "one of the guys" rather than the real me? Do I really need to work so many hours at my job while my grades suffer? Do I rush from one activity to the next and skimp on personal moments of prayer that I need?

Uncovering the genuine nitty-gritty reason for using your time on a particular activity will help you determine what goes and what stays.

Once you give yourself honest answers about why you are doing what you do, you'll feel more comfortable with decisions on what purpose you want your life to have.

Sometimes these will be difficult choices to make. It's not easy to explain to a coach or teammates that football isn't right for you. Nor is it easy to tell your friends that you can't go out—even if they rag on you to join them—because you want or need time to "get yourself together."

One Day at a Time

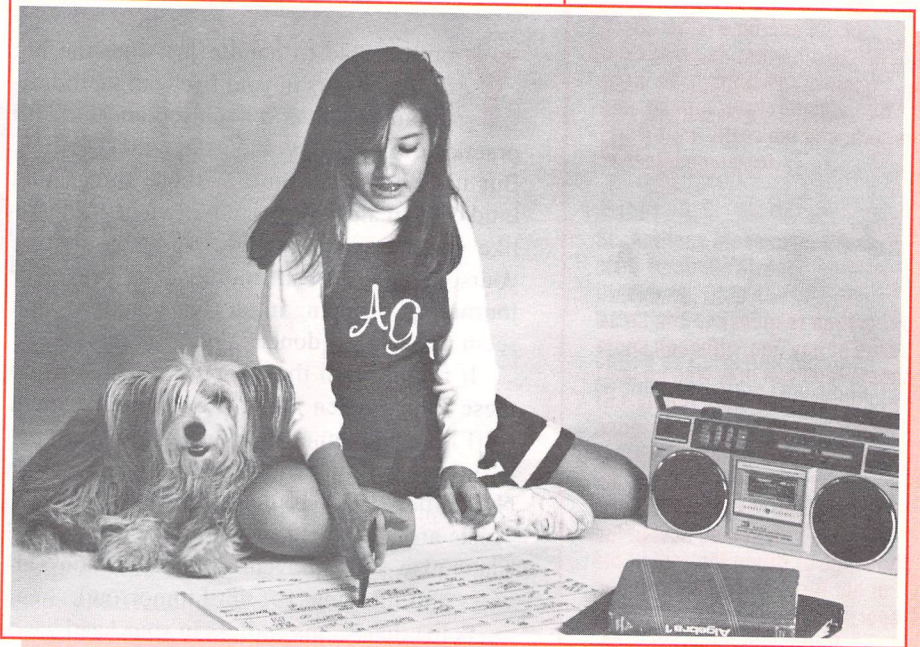
Have a plan. Imagine that you are a master architect whose creation will depend on precision. Allow some flexibility for settling in and for unforeseen circumstances. Draw up a blueprint for your time so you will know what to expect and how to proceed.

You can find a big blocked calendar with plenty of space for writing at your local office supply store, or you can simply use a lined notebook to plot out your time. The point is to get your "appointments" down in black and white so you see what needs to be done. You'll also be able to zero in on "empty time" to treasure and use however you wish.

First write down activities and commitments that have definite time slots. For instance, "Track practice, every day, 2:30-4 p.m.; Student council, Monday at 3 p.m.; Movie with Sue on Friday, 7:15 p.m.; Gram's birth-

day party, Sunday at 2 p.m.; Pick up Mom from train, every day, 6:20 p.m."

As you begin to plot your course with must-dos, you will immediately recognize if



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there are any conflicts. This will allow you the opportunity to make adjustments. For instance, since track practice and the student council meeting clash on Monday, you can decide in advance, with courtesy to the groups involved, how you will handle your commitments.

Study your options and then follow through in a manner most workable and fair to all concerned. Most people are understanding and agreeable when you let them know you are aware of a commitment and want to do your best to fulfill it.

Some of the things you might do are obtain permission from the track coach to miss part of one practice; make arrangements to make up practice another time; notify the student council president that you will be absent and why; submit your ideas to the council president in writing. Plotting a course gives you the luxury of control.

Even though you may need to put things on your schedule for weeks or months ahead, try to focus on only one week's worth of activities at a time. You won't feel so overwhelmed by long-range commitments.

This isn't to say, however, that if a term paper is due the last week of April you make your first notation on April 25th! Remind yourself in mid-March to go to the library and begin research. Then, a few days later, tell yourself in writing that it's time to scratch out the beginnings of a rough draft. Have regular checks on yourself by sprinkling progress

Q.

Parents, teachers and coaches have more to say about our time than we do. I feel like I don't so much decide as I just follow other people's leads. Are you saying teens should have more control over their own time?

A.

There's no getting around time restrictions that adults set for teens, which include curfews and school schedules. But the time you call your own—the two hours, for example, you spend in your room after dinner—should be consciously controlled by you. Is that time spent sprawled across your bed staring at the ceiling dreading the history test you'll have tomorrow, or are you using some of that time to study?

deadlines through your agenda to make sure you meet your obligations.

Q.

I'm 15 and time is not much of an issue for me. Is using time responsibly perhaps an issue for teenagers with jobs or cars or both, and not really a difficulty for younger teens?

A.

Using time responsibly can be an issue at any age, although some people (and you may well be one) seem to be born organized! Have you ever heard someone say, "The busier I am, the more I accomplish"? A teen who accepts the responsibility of a job must also accept the challenge of fitting the rest of his or her life—family, spirituality, sports, school—around the time frame that a job imposes.

Sweating the Small Stuff

You are able to handle just fine the big time-chewers in your life with their definite time slots. School, job and football practice present no problems in your schedule. But it's the "small stuff"—those things that kind of float along as should- or want-to-dos—like sorting your laundry, studying, getting yourself together with moments of prayer or journaling, dropping in on your grandpa—that seem never to get done.

It might seem that there is no time to do these things when all of the necessary small stuff lumps together in your brain. Again, put it on paper. An article on priorities in the November 1989 issue of *Seventeen* says, "Lists are a powerful weapon against chaos." They also help prevent procrastination (always putting things off until tomorrow).

A list that seems endless in your head has a way of shrinking when it's written down. Number your tasks in order of importance. You'll have a sense of power when you choose an item to be done, see it to its conclusion and then draw a thick, black line through it. Often some things you think will take too much time or can't possibly fit into your schedule can be done simultaneously or in a flash.

You can study and do laundry at the same time. You can pray and reflect while on the way to pick up your date or while cleaning your room. And how about stopping by Grandpa's with your date before you go to the movie? He'd probably love to see both of you!

Sometimes those thick, black "job done" lines move so quickly through

your list that you'll find yourself basking not only in self-satisfaction but bonus time—deserved lazy time made sweeter by a sense of accomplishment.

If you run out of gas before reaching the end of the list, don't be discouraged by carry-

over items. Tomorrow they'll be first on a fresh roster waiting to be attacked by those cross-out lines.

There might be times when things get especially hairy and you find yourself bogged down or upset by too many things to do. Explain your situation to an understanding parent, teacher or friend. Often, you will receive practical advice or even hands-on assistance in cutting through the chaos. Ask the Holy Spirit to send healing gifts to help you through trying times. But remember it's up to you to get the controlling rein. Remember these six steps:

1. Review your obligations.
2. Find your priorities.
3. Organize your schedule.
4. Don't forget the small stuff.
5. See a task to its conclusion.
6. Rejoice in your free time.

Time for Every Purpose

One of the best examples of a time manager is, of course, Jesus. As difficult as his life was—organizing apostles, preaching, performing miracles, traveling—he found time for himself, family and friends.

And he didn't forget to be flexible. He allowed some slack in order to handle unforeseen circumstances. Look to him as an example of what can be accomplished by having a plan. In order to wrap up the things he did in his short life, there must have been a definite time crunch!

Jesus said, "My hour has not yet come," when the wine ran out at the marriage feast at Cana (see John 2:4). But he was in control, knew what was expected of him, adjusted his schedule and decided to perform his first miracle by changing water into wine.

Teenagers like Cassandra, Miguel, Brian and you—all with distinct personalities, interests and commitments—can gain more control of each precious moment and how it is spent. Let your time be filled in a manner that applauds what is uniquely you and follows the plan of your Creator. ■

N E X T
Francis of Assisi
by Wayne Simsic

TO EXTEND THIS ISSUE

Get in touch with time spent in one day by writing an hour-by-hour diary. Is there a healthy balance of work and play? Did you make time for tranquil reflection, an important buffer during the bustling times of your life? Are there many "empty hours"?

In a group, discuss time models. Name those you admire because of accomplishments made in the short period of time which we call "life." For example, how do you think people you admire, such as a favorite teacher, a friend, Michael Jordan or Mother Teresa, accomplished what they have? What did they give up and what did they gain?

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