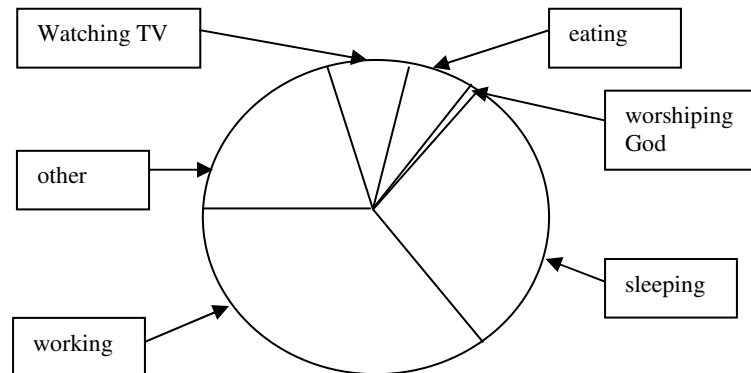


Making 100% of Our Time God's Time

Maybe you've seen a preacher use a pie chart to make the point that we don't spend enough of our time serving God. It goes something like this: there are 168 hours in the week, and we use, at most, four of them to worship God.



The preacher will then emphasize how thin a sliver of time this represents. He will conclude that all the other activities, from sleeping to working to eating, obviously are more important to us than God Himself, and that we are thankless oafs.

I cannot stand this guilt trip, because I believe it is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches.

Worshipping God is not the only way people serve God. It is a mistake to think that an individual is in God's service only during the time between his entrance into the church building and his exit from the church building, as if there were a time-clock to punch.

God gives His children admonitions, for example, to work hard and earn a living (Eph. 4:28, 2 Thess. 3:6–13, 1 Tim. 4:13–14). The time one spends doing this *is* time spent serving God. I cannot abide the suggestion that because a man spent 40 hours at work, he somehow robbed God of 40 hours that should have been spent in Bible study or in a pew. No, that man is doing exactly what God wants him to do—support his family!

In fact, the Apostle Paul suggests that the man who refuses to support his family is has a religious problem, a spiritual problem, that he is “worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). Paul points out that people will judge a Christian family poorly if they watch them do nothing but sit around the yard and live on the public dole.

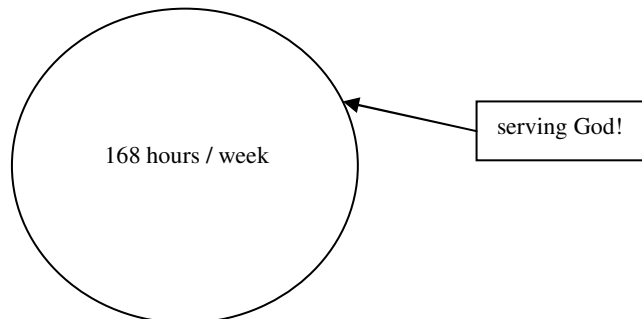
“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need” (1 Thess. 4:11–12).

God gives His children admonitions to nurture the family (Eph. 5:22–6:4). The time one spends doing this—loving his wife, sitting down at the dinner table, spending time with his children for fun and influence and instruction—*is* time spent serving God.

God gives His children admonitions to be mindful of the community (Matt. 5:14, Mark 14:7, John 17:15–16, 1 Tim. 2:2, 3:7). The time one spends doing this—participating in the community, going to political meetings, reading the paper and becoming informed on public debates, volunteering for worthy causes, helping the poor—*is* time spent serving God.

Even time spent sleeping or relaxing is not necessarily time frittered away. It is time spent according to God’s will for man. Remember that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). Jesus encouraged His disciples, “ ‘Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while’ for there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat” (Mark 6:31–32). Mankind is not designed to go helter-skelter without a break, and time spent in recreation and sleep allows him to operate more efficiently later.

Really, then, the pie chart of our lives should look like this:



Consider each aspect of your 168 hours, and test whether or not it is serving God's revealed plan. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17)!

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Now, let me be careful to clarify two things.

First, I am *not* suggesting that any ol' activity substitutes for assembling together with the saints to worship and study and the appointed times. I am *not* suggesting that it is OK to say, "well, since I spent 50 hours this week 'serving God' (wink wink) by earning a living, I don't need to bother going to church."

Assembling to worship and learn is a commandment of God (Heb. 10:24–25). It honors Him and it's good for us. We should take advantage of every opportunity the Lord provides. We should even learn to study the Bible and pray at home. No one needs to have a conflict between the two. Certainly none of us are such poor managers of our time that we have to say, "well, I'd go to church services, but I really have to load the dishwasher."

Second, I am *not* suggesting that God is unconcerned about time, and that all time is equal. It is very easy for our hobbies to get the best of us. Please let no one say, "Oh boy, that John Guzzetta said that 15 hours of X-box is a great way to serve God, and I am getting busy on that right away!" I certainly don't wish to substitute one abuse (that only pew-time is God-time) with an even worse abuse (that any time is God-time). On the contrary, it is important for a godly person to keep all of the elements of life upon the earth in their proper perspective, with balance.

We must look in the mirror and admit that much of our time is simply wasted. While every person needs some downtime and relaxation, it is very easy to turn hobbies into obsessions, to make leisure the object of life rather than a brief respite from it. It is very easy to stuff our schedules with things that really don't matter, and neglect the weightier needs of study and evangelism. It is very easy to rationalize that I *have* to work eighty hours (thereby neglecting other important ways to serve God) to make ends meet,

when really it's to buy a faster car or indulge my greed. That is why Paul warns,

Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:15–17).

—*John Guzzetta*