

“This book is a must read for every woman frantically trying to keep all the balls in the air, all the plates spinning while trying to look like grace under fire—more than just another self-help, ‘If I could only get more organized’ approach to managing our lives and the lives of our loved ones. The wisdom born in Susie’s own life, delivered with her ‘let’s get real’ enthusiasm, is the secret key you always knew existed and have been searching for. It’s time to surrender our own expectations. Now that is what I call a liberated woman.”

—LISA RYAN, author; speaker; TV personality:
In Touch with Charles Stanley, 700 Club

“If you are feeling overwhelmed and overloaded, then this book is for you! Susie Davis will give you permission to slow down and will inspire you to find the deeper rest that you long for.”

—DR. SAM ADAMS, coauthor, *Out of Control: Finding Peace for the Physically Exhausted and Spiritually Strung Out*

“Susie Davis offers the most help with nagging time issues I’ve ever received—by asking us to look not at the hours and minutes, but at ourselves. This book can be a life-changer.”

—NANCY RUE, author of the best-selling
Lily and Sophie series

“I count it an honor to endorse Susie Davis’s debut book, *The Time of Your Life*. Susie tackles a topic that plagues a majority of Christian women, myself included. Her transparent and authentic writing style makes the book a pleasure to read from start to finish. Reading this book is time well spent and a wise investment in your future!”

—VICKI COURTNEY, founder of Virtuous Reality Ministries,
national speaker, and best-selling author of
Your Girl and *Teen Virtue*

“This book is a timely reminder of the dangers that flow from a breathless lifestyle. Susie candidly presents insights for those who struggle with illusive time management.”

—JACKIE KENDALL, best-selling author of
Lady in Waiting

SUSIE DAVIS

The Time of YOUR Life

Finding God's Rest in Your Busy Schedule

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Introduction

Could you use a little rest? A little balance? A little more time to do what you need to do—or even better, what you *want* to do?

Even without knowing you, I believe your answer is yes. I believe that because almost every woman I know feels that way at least some of the time.

Think honestly—when was the last time you had a break, or at least a break unaccompanied by feelings of guilt or panic or some other clock-induced discomfort? When was the last time you felt fully rested, fully relaxed, fully in tune with what God wants for your life?

We live in a clock-watching culture. We're surrounded by the blinking and ticking and buzzing of clocks and watches, all of them pestering us to move along. They trail our schedules, hounding us until we finally collapse in bed at night, then blast us bleary-eyed into morning.

In the last fifty years, especially, the explosion of technology has pulled us into a rhythm that would have seemed quite unnatural for our ancestors. If you're like me, you're moving as fast as you can, breathing little prayers to God for help as you careen from item to item on your packed to-do list.

Sometimes you're wired, sailing along on a caffeine and adrenaline high, feeling the rush and the satisfaction of getting things done, but secretly wondering how long you can keep it up.

Sometimes you're tired, putting one foot in front of another and trudging through your schedule, but never daring to stop for fear you'd never get going again.

And sometimes you're just doing what needs to be done, aware that there has to be more to life than what you're living—but who has time to stop and figure it out?

Do you ever feel a tug at your soul to slow down and spend time

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with God, but you have this overwhelming sense that if you do that, you'll just get further behind? I know I do. All too often as much as I desire a sane and balanced life, the pull of my schedule seems to shoot me into overdrive. And I'm not a Wall Street executive. The fate of nations doesn't hang on my getting things done. I am what you are—an ordinary woman living an ordinary life that sometimes feels out of control. I am a pastor's wife and the mother of three. I work part-time in a ministry position, supervise a household, run the typical mothering taxi service, ride horses for fun and exercise, squeeze in my writing wherever I can—and try my best to keep it all together.

Do I always succeed? Unfortunately no. But I'm getting much better. Step by stumbling step, I've been learning to back off and accept the rest that is available for each of us, even in the midst of our hectic schedules. I'm learning that God really does have a plan for those of us who struggle with a lack of time in a busy schedule. And what He offers is not another endless list of to-dos, not even a new scheme for managing time. Instead, the One who created time in the first place offers us a whole new vision for the days and minutes of our lives. A new vision of what life can mean—purposeful, exciting, and yet filled with His peace.

The purpose of *The Time of Your Life* is to share with you some of what I've been learning about God and His design for our schedules and our lives. A lot of it concerns time, yet this is not really a time-management book. And although I'll suggest some practical steps for changing the way you handle your time (and some down-to-earth Time Out exercises at the end of every chapter), this is not fundamentally a self-help, “get organized” book.

If you're like me, you already have a couple of those (or a dozen) on your bookshelves. And books like that have a lot to offer. But few of them ever get to the root of our problems with time and schedule—which involves facing who we are, who God made us to be, and all the ways our fallen nature and our warp-speed culture can pull us away from what God has in mind. It's my firm belief that until we get those matters straight, no amount of organization in the world will give us what we really need.

My prayer for you upon reading this book is not that you will

Introduction

become queen of the organizational charts. Instead, I pray you will fall more deeply in love with God and will understand His will for you in a more whole fashion. I pray you will move from yearning for more time to actually claiming your schedule and getting real joy out of your time here on earth.

That kind of joy translates into loving God and His people in an authentic and timely way. It's the kind of joy that can nudge you to a new level of spirituality, a rediscovery of God and His plan for you and a new understanding of what it really means to rest in God.

Rest. It's a beautiful word, isn't it? You and I could both use a little more of it. But have you ever considered that rest is not only a privilege but a God-given *right*? Not only that, it's a divine *commandment*—the Lord has actually given us orders to slow down and rest. I've come to believe that rest is actually the key to a purposeful life. When you build a life in which rest balances activity, you can actually outpace those who are always driven and in a hurry.

God has promises for those of us who choose to live by His guidelines. Don't miss out on the success of living life at a God-designed pace. You'll love your life if you follow His principles. No more exhausted, fruitless living. No more always being tired and busy.

Understanding God's view of time can catapult joy directly into your life as you uncover His truth about time.

Your time.

His time.

Truly, the time of your life!



PART ONE

All the Time in the World:

Rethinking Your Hectic Life . . .
From God's Point of View

The Time of Your Life

“I have all the time in the world.”

Don't you wish you could speak that phrase honestly? The words have such a luxurious feel. They suggest an abundance of a resource that often feels painfully scarce.

The truth is, we could never speak those words honestly because time isn't ours in the first place. Though we spend time, we don't really own it. And though time shapes our lives and choices, it's never really under our control.

Only one Being holds and controls all the time in the world—God. As the Creator of time and space, He holds the ultimate knowledge of what time is and how it is best spent. So the only truly effective way for us to enjoy the riches of God's time is to draw closer to Him and glean our understanding about time from Him. This section provides a beginning point for doing just that.

As you read these chapters, remember that God holds the keys to your time struggles, your scheduling woes, your worry and exhaustion.

He wants you to share in His abundance, to show you how to live more purposefully and joyfully.

Best of all, He's there for you always.

After all, He does have all the time in the world!

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A Fresh Perspective:

Why It's Not Really "My Time"



I have had a few epiphanies in my life that defy description. One such event involved climbing the mountains in Estes Park, Colorado. A friend and I had decided on a lake hike, an uncomplicated six-mile round-trip. We had just emerged from an area of dense forest and turned to climb slightly higher before we spiraled down toward a nestled lake. When I crested the rise and looked down toward the lake, I was surprised by a breathtaking sight—a gigantic mountain reflected on the surface of the water. And then the epiphany. I lifted my eyes to see what was reflected—the monumental mountain itself.

It was a moment filled with awe. I wept, silenced and stunned by the grandness of God's handiwork, weakened by the beauty of it, and overwhelmed by His love for me—a very small me. A speck in a grand world of tremendous landscapes. A tiny speck of humanity in a world full of millions of people. A speck of life history in hundreds of thousands of years of lifetimes.

I realized then, as if for the first time, that God is *very big* and I am *very small*. It was a life-changing experience for me, one that brought an inexplicable truth to my life.

A change of perspective can do that for a person. Shifting the way

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we look at things can make all the difference in the way we live our lives—and the way we handle our time. Understanding time from God's perspective and adapting ourselves to His view can truly revolutionize the way we handle our schedules.

So what is God's perspective on time? The very first pages of the Bible make it clear:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

Time, in other words, was one of God's earliest acts of creation. First He formed the heavens and the earth. Matter. Bulk. We can see it and touch it. But His very next act was to separate light from darkness, and that was the beginning of time as we know it.

Time—invisible and untouchable, yet ticking away. A piece of God's original, intangible artwork, mysterious and elusive, framed only by day and night. From the beginning we've tried to grab it, hold it, and manage it. It remains a steady work, set in motion by God, and we are still unable to get our hands around it.

As awed as I am at the mountains in Colorado and the ocean's expansive hold on the Texas border, I am absolutely flabbergasted at God's design of time. It sits bookended by eternity itself, its start and finish beyond human description. Try as we may to see it and conquer it, it moves on, unstoppable.

And yet God maintains an absolute hold over time. He is its Creator, its resolute Master. If we were able to see all of time as we know it, from the earliest record of man to this moment's headline news, and then were able to frame this monstrous time line, in all its enormity . . . it still would dangle beneath God's little finger. This massive, unprecedented, impregnable masterpiece is dwarfed by the greatness of the One who made it.

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Time is perpetual innovation, a synonym for continuous creation. Time is God's gift to the world of space. A world in time is a world going on through God; realization of an infinite design; not a thing in itself but a thing for God. (Joshua Heschel)

That is the way God sees time. He views all time—our personal days and hours and the history of time itself—as a tiny part of His very large plan. It exists because He dreamed it up. He maintains it with no effort or worry. He knows its beginning from its end, its possibilities and its limitations. Time remains under His complete authority, His undisturbed control. And it is one of God's greatest gifts to us—a workable framework in which we can live our lives and accomplish His will and develop a relationship with Him.

And yet how many of us think of time that way? I know I don't always (though I try). Instead, I struggle against time. I struggle within it. I waste time. I try to hold it too tightly. And all too often I see it as a nemesis instead of a gift.

I think, *I'd really like to get involved with that ministry . . . or read that book . . . or exercise more . . . but I don't have time.*

Or I look back at what I had hoped to accomplish in life and grow depressed because the years are ticking away faster than I had planned.

Or I get held up in a meeting or a conversation or a traffic jam and fuss and fume because other people are "wasting my time."

But that's just the problem, I think, or a big part of it. I get obsessed with "my time" because I lose perspective. I lose track of the basic truth that time *isn't* mine.

Surely our greatest frustrations with time all begin with that faulty assumption that our time belongs to us—that we're in charge of how our lives unfold, that we can control our minutes and hours. The truth is, we'll never come to terms with time until we understand God's view on time.

Simply put, all time belongs to Him. He lends each of us an allotted amount of time for our use, but our time is ours only to use, not to own. And we're responsible to the Creator of time for how we treat His gift.

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In the Gospel of Mark we find a fascinating exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees. It's not specifically about time, but it does illuminate this basic idea of ownership. It started when the Pharisees asked Jesus a question:

“Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” And they brought one. And he said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to him, “Caesar’s.” Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled at him. (12:14-17)

Now the Pharisees asked their question to trap Jesus, but they ended up entrapping themselves. And I wonder if we sometimes do the same thing when it comes to time.

Jesus asked the Pharisees to look at the face on the denarius, a Roman coin. Clearly it was Caesar’s likeness and belonged to Caesar. But do we have a scope of imagination large enough to look on time and recognize whose likeness it bears—who owns it, who’s in charge?

God’s image is unmistakably stamped on the face of all time. But the problem is, we rarely think that way—at least not when it comes to that minuscule slice of time that makes up our own lives.

I know that’s true of me. When I talk about “my time,” I tend to stuff my perception of time into a small frame, a cheap reproduction. I forget that God is giving me minutes and hours and days and is allowing me the freedom to choose how to use them. Time is one of His greatest gifts—granting us stewardship, letting us loose with His precious time. God lets us handle His masterpiece day by day, knowing full well it may be squandered or underappreciated. Most artists couldn’t bear to see their creation so undervalued.

So here’s a question to consider: when you look at your watch, do you think of the minutes as being your own? Do you look down at it, silently cursing at whatever takes away minutes and hours and days

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you wanted to spend your way? Do you ever remember to think about your time as God's time and wonder how He wants you to use it? Have you ever searched for the face of your watch, seeing those hands tick away, and considered that those minutes are a reflection of the artistry of God?

I must say that such occasions in my own life have been rare. Yet when I have managed to keep that basic reality in mind, when I have tried to see my time from God's perspective and to render to God what is God's, my schedule frustrations have almost always been eased.

Jesus was always exhorting His disciples to get some eyes that could see. He meant learning to look at things in a spiritual sense, to see things God's way. He explained that seeing with spiritual eyes, through God's perspective, was a key to happiness and joy in life. "But blessed are your eyes, for they see," He said, "and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16).

I need some more of that, and I suspect you do too. I want the blessing that comes with seeing all of life—including time—from God's frame of reference. And seeing things God's way has to begin with realizing how often we *don't* see that way. Only when we realize how limited our perception is can we start viewing things afresh.

We clearly have two options: the worldly view and the spiritual view. The worldly outlook says, "This time is mine. I possess it. And I need lots more of it."

The spiritual view counters, "This time is a gift. God has entrusted me with it. *God, please help me discover the best way to use it.*"

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. (Henry David Thoreau)

How do we achieve such a spiritually based outlook? To a large degree, it involves changing our habits of thinking. We must be willing consciously to relinquish our perceptions of control and yield to

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God's eternal perspective. And we need to do that again and again, exposing ourselves to the truth through prayer and Bible study and fellowship with other believers, reminding ourselves again and again of the truth about time until our thought habits begin to change.

In my own life I have found that the most significant change in my thinking has come about by my strategically inputting God's Word in my mind and in my heart. I tend to think of myself as fragile without a constant drip of the Bible into my daily life. So my morning starts with reading the Word and praying. That is followed by listening to a Bible teacher on TV or radio. I often listen to Christian music while driving the kids to school or running errands. And I try to remind myself every time I am outside to look up—literally—and remember who is in charge.

One small area of my life where my new habits have paid off is driving in traffic. I tend to think I can get to a certain location in a set amount of time. And while that may sometimes be true, it does not always happen in Austin, Texas, where I live. It's a growing city with lots of construction and unpredictable, frustrating traffic jams, and these have been a frequent source of irritation to me. I've been known to rant and rave, feeling as though the traffic tangles were stealing my time. Then I realized that, honestly, I cannot control the traffic anymore than I control the clock. And after accepting the truth of that, I was able to relax a little, knowing that God is aware of what's going on with the traffic. He's just as sovereign over the time it takes to move me from here to there as He is over the rest of time.

Does that revised perspective mean I never get frustrated in traffic these days? No, but it really has helped. Remembering that God is in control helps keep my stress levels lower. I've learned to accept traffic as a reality and to be more diligent about seeking God's wisdom about my scheduling choices. I've even started wondering what I had hoped to do with that few minutes I thought I "lost" in traffic.

God's desire for us to have an eternal perspective in life most certainly includes our time. And though our limited human brains could never take in the whole scope of His work, that does not excuse us from exerting ourselves to His best purpose. We need to be a people set on the tremendous task of ever yielding to God's teaching about Himself

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through the Word and creation. In our schedules, as with all our lives, we must become loving and prayerful learners—surrendered to Him, open to His ways, allowing Him to bring all things into His eternal focus.

In God's good time—not yours, and not mine.

Time Out

- Discuss or journal the notion that time is “God’s original, intangible artwork, framed only by day and night.”
- Finish the statement, “Time is a gift in my life because . . .”
- Finish the statement, “I struggle with thinking I own my time because . . .”
- How is the ability to steward your time one of the greatest gifts God has given you?
 - Stewards have responsibilities. What is your responsibility to God as a steward of the time He has given you? List five ways you can honor God with your time.
 - List at least three practical strategies for reminding yourself of God’s perspective on time.