

## THINGS TO STOP AND START

### Stop Procrastinating and Start Following Through

*Ecclesiastes 3:1–11; Ephesians 5:15–17*

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### STUDY



#### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Many of us spend our days saying, “I’ll do it later!” or “I don’t have enough time!” But is that really the best way to approach life? Could it be that our problem is not our lack of temporal margin but making the most of the time we have? Convicting though it may be, everyone has the same amount of time in his or her day. The question we should ask ourselves is, *Will we use our time wisely?* More often than not, we’ve formed the habit of putting off rather than following through on those things we need to accomplish. While we waste our time on things that don’t matter, the weightier issues of life—things that are truly worth pursuing from God’s perspective—fall between the cracks. It’s time we get a handle on how we spend our hours and days. Remember, every minute, every breath is a gift from God—we’re accountable to Him for how we use His gifts.

#### *Finding Yourself in the Story*

As we live each day governed by the clock and tight schedules, we may think of time as a commodity that we can spend as we please. It’s easy to forget, as our smartphones buzz and chime, warning us not to be late for another appointment, that time belongs to God. Not only that, He is actively engaged in each minute, working triumphs, trials, and monotonous moments to achieve His glorious plan. God didn’t wind up the eternal clock and walk away. He *wants* to walk with us through each second.

As we examine the concept of time, we will turn our attention to Ecclesiastes 3:1–13.

Before you read this passage, let’s talk about the genre of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is one of the Poetry books of the Bible, along with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon. These five books contain songs, prayers, proverbial statements, and instructions, mostly in the form of poetry. Employing some of the most beautiful and vivid language in all of Scripture, these books tackle questions that penetrate to the core of life: How can we find meaning and purpose in life? How should we pray? How can we face suffering without losing our faith? Why do bad things happen to “good” people? And many more.

#### Quotable

*When we clear  
away our regrets,  
joy replaces  
resentment and  
peace replaces  
conflict.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Use a dictionary to define *time*. Next, look in a Bible concordance and write down three references where *time* is used. Look up those verses and make some notes on what you discover.

With this in mind, let's turn our attention to Ecclesiastes 3:1–13. As you read each verse, picture yourself in the verse. What are you struggling with? Are there any concerns or areas in your life where it feels like God has walked away? Are you struggling with contentment in your job or relationships? Has your hectic way of life brought you to the edge of a breakdown? Or are you feeling exhausted by the monotony of life, yearning for a change?

Take some time to write down how these verses speak to you. Allow the questions above to help you find yourself in the passage.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–3

Ecclesiastes 3:4–6

Ecclesiastes 3:7–9

Ecclesiastes 3:10–13



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### Applying the Message

Now that you have personalized Ecclesiastes 3:1–13 and learned about God’s intimate work in the moments of your life, turn to Ephesians 5:15–17. Let’s learn how to apply this passage to your life by examining how God wants you to use your time.

To *apply* God’s Word simply means that we take it personally and find specific ways to put it into practice. As you seek to apply God’s Word to your life, keep these following questions in mind:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an example for me to follow?</li> <li>• Is there a prayer I need to offer?</li> <li>• Is there a sin I need to confess?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a command I need to obey?</li> <li>• Is there a habit I need to break?</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

Before we jump to application, let’s get acquainted with the broader context of Ephesians 5:15–17 by *observing* Ephesians 5:1–20. Write down any repeated words, commands, questions, emphatic statements, and images or figures of speech.

If you have a copy of Swindoll’s *Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Galatians and Ephesians*, it would be helpful to read and reflect on the Ephesians 5:15–17 section.

In Ephesians 5:15–16, Paul made a negative command and a positive command. Put these commands in your own words, as if Paul was speaking to you personally. How does your understanding of Ecclesiastes 3:1–13 help you understand Ephesians 5:15–16?



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In Ephesians 5:17, Paul commanded believers to live and act with *thought*, not aimlessly without regard for God's will. As you begin to apply Scripture to your life and steward your time wisely, it's important to know God's will. What can you learn about God's will from Proverbs 6:6–11, and how can you *specifically* apply these truths to your life and use your time wisely?

Take some time and think about your priorities. Write below your top three priorities in the order of their importance. Examine your heart and think honestly about whether or not these priorities are reflected in how you use your time.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now think about the three tasks you're most likely to put off, as well as the reasons you procrastinate.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Having considered your top priorities and areas of procrastination, as well as the application questions above, write three ways you can apply Ephesians 5:15–17 to your life today.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, You are totally sovereign over all eternity and each second of my life. Thank You for not standing aloof but actively engaging in time. Father, You sent Your Son to live on the earth He created, bound by time and space, to give us an example of how to use our time wisely. Please give me wisdom to steward well the time You've given me. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ, amen.*



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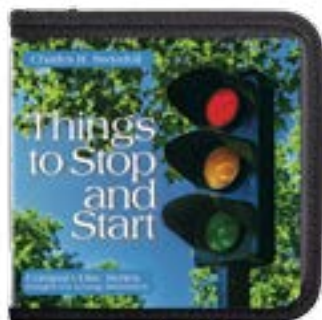
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## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### STUDY



### Tools for Digging Deeper



**Things to Stop and Start**  
by Charles R. Swindoll  
CD series



**Leisure: How to Recharge  
without Guilt**  
by Charles R. Swindoll  
booklet



**Rules for Running  
a Rewarding Race**  
by Charles R. Swindoll  
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For the 2017 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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