

It Began with Chaos

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2

God saw chaos as His Spirit hovered over the waters. Darkness and formless-- it might have seemed hopeless, but not to God. Creative ability within God spilled out as He added light, color, and life to replace the darkness. His imagination and work filled the universe.

God didn't randomly create the world. He focused on one task at a time. He stopped at the end of each day, even though the first day only accomplished part of the larger goal of creating the universe.

Some of those six days he appeared to accomplish more, such as filling the earth with numerous plants or creatures, while other days he appeared to accomplish one or two things, such as separating the heavens from the earth and water from land. Each day God looked and saw the good in his results.

When we look around our home, office, or life and see confusion we can turn to God's example and trust that beauty can replace the mess, but know it may take time. We too, should start with light, the light of the word. And then we should focus on one task at a time and understand when it is time to stop for the day and leave other tasks for the next day and reflect on what you accomplished.

Life application: Each morning, choose one step of your larger goal to reach for the day. Each evening stop, and reflect on the day's work to see the good in what you did accomplish.

The Beginning of Change

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2

I had set out bags of unlabeled supplies that my son mistook for garbage. He tossed them out on garbage day before I realized the mistake. Only when I heard the truck pull away from the driveway did I recall seeing my precious silver trash bags at the end of the drive.

In my over-committed and disorganized lifestyle, I ended up racing a garbage truck to the dump. I sunk in muck as I stood next to the truck unloading bags of trash. On the way home, bags retrieved, I listened to my two-year-old daughter's ditty about her stinky mommy and thought, "Lord, this is not how I envisioned my life!" I didn't want this day to be my daughter's typical memory of me. I cried for help. I prayed for guidance.

God responded by bringing me back to the beginning of the Bible and creation when he hovered over chaos, a world without order and beauty. I discovered many principles about organization and time management in that first chapter of the Bible. Every time I reread the chapter new ideas pop out for me to apply.

It began as God hovered, or brooded, over the dark, emptiness. We can't create order until we face the darkness and chaos and evaluate it. Then we can find a vision and begin, day by day, to change. We can read and apply principles from creation, such as sorting things out, grouping tasks, working on what is fruitful, plus taking time to rest and enjoy the results.

Today's Focus: Take a look around and evaluate your spaces

Too Much Stuff

But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. Genesis 13:6

So often we let our greed control us instead of controlling our possessions. Hoarders face serious problems that often cause divisions in relationships. When a home is a wreck it's embarrassing to have friends drop by and difficult to invite anyone over. Couples or parents and children can spend hours arguing over the mess clutter creates. Moving to a bigger pad, or buying more containers to fill with more stuff that bulges out doesn't stop the continual collection of clutter and piles scattered everywhere. Even maintaining all our stuff takes time that also separates us from the people we love. Too much stuff isn't just a modern problem.

Lot and Abraham encountered a big problem when they grew wealthy. They accumulated too much stuff. It caused division and quarrels among their workers. The land could not support them because their possessions were too great.

Did they give away stuff? No. They parted. They let the stuff come between them. Abraham gave Lot the choice of the land he wanted. Lot saw green pastures with plenty of water and chose the best for himself. Abraham let go of desire for the better land and cared more about Lot. Lot's greed led him to choose the most fertile land. Alas, for Lot the move also removed him from his mentor and relationship with God.

List the people you love and why they are important. Focus on the list to help realize they are more important than possessions. Focus on relationships and collecting friends. Each time you discard and give away items praise God that there's less to keep you from him and loved ones.

Today's focus: Invest in relationships rather than stuff

Offering Work to God

Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. 2 Samuel 24:24

One morning I looked at a jumbled bookcase. I had avoided tackling the mess and, as with all messes, I was suffering from living with it. Still, I procrastinated because it seemed like a big, ugly job. I had no heart for it.

After my morning time with God one day, a new thought occurred to me. “I can do it for the Lord! Perhaps it would make him happy to know this is an act of worship to him.”

The distasteful job was transformed. It was my pleasure to create something nice for him. My movements were dedicated to him. My bookcase became a little altar and my “sacrifice,” small in some ways but large in others, was the neatness there.

David went to Araunah to buy a threshing floor to make an altar. Araunah offered the place and also the oven for the offering. But deep in his heart David recognized that worship demanded personal involvement on his part. He insisted on paying for what he needed and then personally made the offering.

We are not required to be neat in order to be accepted nor would I suggest for a moment that cleanliness is next to godliness. It is not wise to equate all of our housework with worship. Then every undone housekeeping job becomes a spiritual condemnation. Many a disorganized housekeeper has communed with her Maker in the midst of clutter.

On the other hand, as the Spirit moves us to see, one little unkempt table, a small, cluttered corner, or maybe a needy refrigerator can become an opportunity for worship.

It cost me something to arrange that bookcase. But it was a price I gladly paid.

Today's focus: Do a dreaded task as a sacrifice to God

Letting Go of Contention

He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land." From there he went up to Beersheba. That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham." Genesis 26:22-24

After I spend hours organizing a space and a family member comes in and dump a mess and takes over the space again it's hard to smile and know they need to use the space for a project or activity. I can remember they too need space to work. Peace is found when I accept that we share the spaces and focus on cleaning a little at a time.

Contention often accompanies busyness and work when others want to invade our space. Isaac worked hard to dig deep in the desert for water. Each time water started to bubble up out of the ground, he felt pleased. Then, selfish people argued and wanted the land with the well. Isaac let them have the wells. They didn't do the work or even figure out the best place to dig. Isaac wanted peace, in spite of needing water to flow in a scorching hot land.

At last Isaac moved and dug where no one wanted to take over his work and get the blessings of his labor. He recognized that God gave him the land and would bless his efforts. He trusted he would flourish in that place where he could live and work in peace.

Reflecting on Isaac brings hope. I found little spots in the midst of a family of seven, in a wide hallway and in a large closet. Joy came with space others don't bother to invade.

God blessed Isaac with family and relationship with him. That's a reminder to focus on what's most important and that's relationships. I am free from worry and free to worship God. I can trust he will bless me at the right time. For today, I can look to God and thank him for being with me and giving me a few clutter-free spaces.

Today's focus: Create order in a few spots you can claim as your own

Discovering Purpose through God's Word

The birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. Psalm 8:8

Commodore Matthew Fontaine Maury is called the Pathfinder of the Sea and considered the founder of oceanography. He spent the later part of his life charting ocean currents and mapped out paths for ships to follow. He found this focus during a hard time as he battled an illness. His daughter read Psalm 8:8 to him. The words excited him and he decided to believe God knows there are paths in the ocean. He dedicated his life to following that one scripture.

The Bible and listening to God is our first great source to find our purpose in life. We must take time to read and study scriptures to let God speak to us and reveal purpose. We do this as we read and contemplate the words. When something strikes us and our mind continues to dwell on it, that's a clue to pursue the thought and see if it leads us to a plan God has for us.

Many read those words before Maury but no one acted on them as he did, and the words had not stirred someone to scientific action in the same way. Maury knew the ocean and had sailed it many times. He understood how to do soundings and listen for echoes that revealed land ridges beneath water. He saw God's order in the pathways. God equipped him for many years for this purpose and Maury's work created paths for ships that saved time crossing the oceans and traveling the seas.

There's an individual element to our purpose but we may not be ready for it until we have gained experience and knowledge.

Today's Focus: Be alert and ready to respond when God calls you to a purpose. You may bless many through the work.

Refer to Your to Do List Regularly

That night the king could not sleep; so, he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

"What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked.

"Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered. Esther 6:1-3

The to-do list is an ancient memory device. In the passage it's used by the king to make sure he has done everything he intended to do. Let's take a hint from him.

For most people, the TO-DO list is a memory device for changeable daily items basically in four areas, buying, calling, doing, and writing. Perhaps your four basic areas will be different from these. Fold a piece of writing paper into four squares and label each square the following activities:

BUY (Things you generally do in the car) - Paper clips, bridal present, etc. Take the clothes to the charity store.

CALL (Things you do with the phone) The children's camp, the phone company, make doctor appt.

DO (Special activities at the house, not the usual routine items) - Sew on the red button, get out Easter decorations, change air conditioner filter.

WRITE (Done at the computer or with a pen and paper) - Return e-mail letters, inquire about class reunion, write thank you note.

You don't want to carry these little details around in your head. Free your mind by writing them down.

Life application

Note the sample To-do list. Using it or one of your own design, begin writing down activities you want to accomplish.

Time and Accountability Partners

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 127:7

Accountability partnership is teaming up with someone to be what Proverbs 27:7 describes “as iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another.” You hold one another accountable for progress, life choices, ministry, personal growth, and any other areas you want to develop. Sparks fly when sharpening iron but that’s part of the process of smoothing rough edges. So, too, you may feel some sting from constructive criticism that will bring improvements.

Seek and become the right person for an accountability relationship. The virtues needed include trust (keeping confidences), availability, good listening skills, discernment, encourager, speak truth with love, not jealous, compatible personalities, and able to correct in a way acceptable to one another. You should also believe in one another’s goals and visions.

Once you find an accountability partner establish some ground rules and regular meeting times. You may want to start with a friendly chat to catch up on personal lives or you may prefer a meeting with an agenda. Suggested guidelines include:

- Focus on one person at a time and allow time for both of you.
- Commit to pray for on your partner’s hectic days.
- Review past goals and progress.
- Discuss frustrations to progress and brainstorm ways to move forward.
- Discuss frustrations since the last meetings and possible solutions.
- Bring up any new desires and goals.
- Plan steps to achieve goals and hold the other accountable for the next step.
- Discuss action steps to take before next meeting and set deadlines.

Consider ways to encourage partner between meetings (emails, notes, calls) and commit to decisions made so you can both thrive and grow.

Life application: Make sure you have the virtues to be an accountability partner. Then pray for one.

Diligence in All Seasons

Be diligent in season, out of season. 2 Timothy 4:2

Paul exhorts his young friend, Timothy, to be diligent to do the work God had for him to do that was to preach the word. We all have a certain amount of opportunity to work for the Lord. It is our responsibility to really throw ourselves into what we feel God wants us to do, whatever it is.

The writer of the hymn, “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” Sabine Baring-Gould had two organizational rules to explain his very productive life. He said that:

- When he had begun a task he stuck to it until it was done
- He never waited for “inspiration” but plunged ahead with determination in his work. He said that he often did his best work when he least felt like it.

And what were his accomplishments?

He owned 3,000 acres of land and held an important government position. He wrote a fifteen-volume set of “Lives of the Saints” and “Curious Myths of the Middle Ages” and “Legends of the Old Testaments.” He also wrote many other learned books, and devotional writings and volumes of sermons. He was a very popular novelist producing about a volume a year. In total, he wrote more than seventy-three titles, all by hand without a secretary. Amazing!

He wrote other hymns as well as “Onward, Christian Soldiers.” “Now the Day is Over” is another one familiar to many people.

Life application

What do you think about the two rules of Sabine Baring-Gould? To what extent do you follow either one of them in your life?

Reflect

It's easy to get caught up in business but that's not the same as being fulfilled of living well.

Weekends provide time for a break from work, time for worship, and time to invest in people.

Sprinkle joy into lives, including your own.

Use the current or upcoming weekend to sprinkle joy into the lives of loved ones.

- Listen with your eyes and heart as you sit with family and friends
- Cuddle up or hug loved ones
- Call someone you have not spoken to in a while—just to ask how she or he is doing
- Make or buy a special treat to share
- Respond with joy and encouragement to someone's good news
- Stay in the pew at the end of service a few extra minutes to tell God you love him and thank him for all he has done for you
- Sit and do nothing for at least half an hour to refresh yourself and you'll find it easier to be joyful
- Compliment each person with whom you spend time
- Dress for the weather and take a walk with a loved one

Refresh

Proverbs 15:23

Philippians 2:2

Reflect

Today we have no time even to
look at each other, to talk to each
other, to enjoy each other, and still
less to be what our children expect
from us, what the husband expects
from the wife, what the wife
expects from the husband.
And so more and more we are out
of our homes, and less and less
in touch with each other.

~ Mother Teresa

Resting

By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Genesis 2:2

Busyness is often the center of messiness. Rest replenishes a person's mind, body, and soul. It gives us time to evaluate and see our real needs. God blessed the day he rested. He saw goodness in rest.

Busyness keeps us from enjoying life, from quieting down to reflect on beauty. Busyness also spoils our eyes from seeing that what is truly gratifying is free, a world to enjoy.

I recall days of endless laundry, making meals, changing diapers, and helping with homework as I raised our five children. My husband often worked sixteen-hour days. Keeping the home organized depleted my energy. Saturdays we'd spend the morning cleaning with the promise of fun the rest of the weekend, especially Sunday.

Thank God for Sundays. We started the day with church and then rested and played. We often spent Sundays outdoors enjoying walks and sports. We watched clouds roll by and then the setting sun. We didn't worry about making beds or using fine China when we could toss out paper plates and skip cleaning dishes. Sundays made facing Mondays and cleaning easier.

Give yourself time to relax and re-energize. Let a few things go one day a week to enjoy God's creation, especially the loved ones he has blessed you with in your life.