

A One-Word Difference with a Huge Impact

Sleep _____
Consider health _____
Study _____
Be careful about what you spend _____
Devote time to God _____
Work on marriage _____
Discipline kids _____

The way a person fills in the above blanks says a LOT about their life. The vast majority of people will say (and even if their verbal answer is a little better, their life shows they live as if the answers were):

Go to sleep **when** you are tired.
Consider health **when** you feel bad.
Study **when** you have a test.
Be careful of what/how you spend **when** you find you are short.
Devote time to God **when** you have a crisis.
Work on marriage **when** one or the other spouse is dissatisfied.
Discipline kids **when** they are bad.

In other words "Don't worry – Be happy!" until crises/circumstances demand your attention; their motto is "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

The Alternative?

Be deliberate and purposeful; replacing "when" with "to," combined with a little thinking, can have a huge positive impact on the quality of a person's life.

Sleep **to** be well rested.
Consider health **to** eliminate or minimize the problems most people have.
Study **to** learn.
Be careful of what you spend **to** maximize what your income provides.
Devote time to God **to** provide the benefits of spiritual disciplines.
Work on marriage **to** have a great and, to the extent possible, less stressful problem filled life.
Discipline kids **to** teach them what is right and good.

Maintenance costs – repairs cost more. It does take time, and maybe money, to think and act in a conscious and planned way, but it costs more, in the long run, to wait until crises and circumstances necessitate attention.

Except for babies born within the last 24 hours, everyone living today has had the exact same time – 24 hours, 1440 minutes, a day. Some people have more responsibilities than others – which if they are smart they, all the more, understand they should be deliberate and intentional in their use of time (rather than, as most do, making excuses for why they don't have time to do what is smart and right).

People talk about “saving time,” but, of course, everyone knows there are no time banks in which they can deposit time to be used in the future – we cannot save time! But we can “invest” it – use it in a way that pays dividends later. People who squander today’s time are **when** people while **to** people are much better at investing to make the future better.

✚ People who sleep **to** be well rested may or may not live longer, but they will have a much better quality of life. The same is true for those who consider health **to** eliminate or minimize the problems most people have.

✚ People who study **to** learn may or may not make more money, but they will enjoy their work better.

✚ People who are careful to spend **to** maximize what their income provides will probably not initially live as well materially (not have as many “toys” early in life), but in the long-run they will have far more financial freedom – they tend to be masters of money rather than been a slave to it.

✚ Those who devote time to God **to** provide the benefits of spiritual disciplines may (they probably won’t, but they may) have as many problems and crisis as Christians, but they assuredly will be better able to cope with what they do face.

✚ Couples who work on their marriage **to** have a great and, to the extent possible, less stressful problem filled life will invariably accomplish this.

✚ Parents disciplining kids **to** teach them what is right and good will have children that not only know what is wrong (which is important) they will know what is right (which is even more important)!

Yes, yes, I know just saying “to” (rather than “when”) does not assure success – studying **to** earn good grades is no better than studying when there is a test, exercising **to** look good is not as effective as exercising to improve your health – but, focusing on a **to** purpose is the first step to initiative and success – even a poor “to” purpose is usually better than a “when” perspective!

The Bible provides wise counsel and a realistic view that bad tends to fill the vacuums of passivity and poor planning – if we do not seek to do good, bad is the normally the result. When we do not plan and execute right, wrong seems to fill the void. Thus we are told, as examples:

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” Ge 4:6 - 7

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Ro 12:21

And we are warned:

. . . each of us will give an account of himself to God. Ro 14:12

which can be a scary thought!

A farmer can look and feel superior to his contemporaries by grinding, cooking and eating the “seed” corn rather than doing the hard work of planting, tending and harvesting UNTIL the

year ends and he has no crop! He is responsible for investing the seed and effort to make a crop.

The essence of discipline is essentially the setting aside of time to do something. We only receive the benefits of disciplines by exercising disciplines. Learning the importance of disciplines (the benefits of doing them versus the costs and penalties of not doing what we should) will begin as children – (if children have thinking, disciplined, partners):

- Rest
- Brushing teeth
- Learning
- Physical activity
- Spiritual activity

But childhood is where disciplines begin, not where they should end! There are correct seasons for concentrating on and developing life's key disciplines, which, if missed, require additional effort later or result in suffering the often momentous consequences (or both). And I don't have to be great at knowing or following disciplines – even a fair to poor implementation of a discipline is usually far more profitable than simply being reactive (living as a **when** person).

Who is smart enough, has enough time, energy, motivation etc. to have great physical, spiritual, financial, child disciplining, work, marriage disciplines? An Olympic athlete may have great physical discipline, Dr. Phil may have a great marriage, Dr. Dobson, great children, Billy Graham, a great spiritual life, etc. If I hold myself to their levels, I will be frustrated and will eventually give up any attempt (if I am foolish enough to even begin!). Good disciplines are simply consistent, deliberate, actions take to minimize the inevitable destructive penalties of passivity and inactivity. If you don't brush your teeth . . .

Skimping on the foundations of life (the necessary disciplines) have similar consequences to poor building foundations – what is built on them is shaky and will not survive serious troubles. Foundations are not glamour, but they are vital! If we devote the necessary time to life's foundational disciplines we both build a solid foundation and properly use (rather than misuse) most of our time – we really don't have to make too many decisions about what to do, the questions about what to do will largely answer themselves.

- ✚ 8 – 9 hours of CONSISTENT sleep each night.
- ✚ Spiritual disciplines.
- ✚ Physical hygiene and exercise disciplines.
- ✚ Education
- ✚ Marriage
- ✚ Children
- ✚ Work

Fortunately, some "seasons" pass (child-rearing for example) so that we can have time for other disciplines (like exercise and spiritual disciplines) whose needs increase over time. We can be sure that God will give us enough time, when we need to, to do what we ought to do!

We see the results of today's lack of discipline in the area of healthcare, much of the wealth of the U.S. is being drained away by health costs – people in later year are living extra years of "nursery home lives" – existing, but feeble and feeling bad, kept alive only by expensive

medicines and treatments. All for the lack of a simple exercise “routine” – nothing strenuous, time-consuming or high-tech – they just can’t pull themselves away from their TV sets to make an investment that will pay the highest rewards and dividends!

For Americans, physical “things” are only a minor part of what God offers (in fact, most without and regard for God do very well physically and financially) – we find His greater blessings only by seeking to grow in the grace and knowledge, by exercise Christian disciplines of reading their Bibles, prayer, attending church, being around other Christians, etc.

It is clear that we won’t and can’t do better than we plan. By being a positive (deliberate and objective – “to”) person who believes thinking and acting (rather than passively reacting to what comes our way) we can have a significant positive impact on our life. In fact, disciplines feed on one another (which is why disciplines become easier and easier) – disciplines are mostly mental, not physical, often as simple as focusing on the “to” rather than waiting until crises and circumstances demand our time, attention and emotions.

Think TO – not When!