

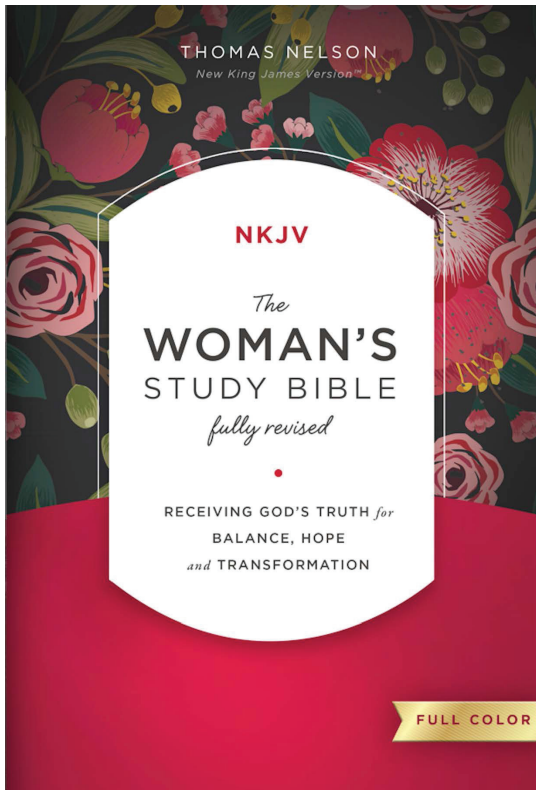


LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

7-Day Devotional



LIVING A BALANCED LIFE



This 7-day devotional offers reminders of what is most important from God's perspective – and encouragement for living a healthy, productive and content life. Drawn from *The Woman's Study Bible*, the devotions contain numerous additional references for even deeper study. Topics include: the gift of time, refueling for renewed service, making a positive choice, a time for rest and worship, laughter and more.

DAY 1: Using God's Gift of Time

DAY 2: Peace That Passes Understanding

DAY 3: A Time for Rest and Worship

DAY 4: Refueling for Renewed Service

DAY 5: A Positive Choice

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DAY 7: A Time to Rest and Play

DAY 1

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

Using God's Gift of Time

Time management is not just keeping busy but includes finding God's focus for you—choosing a direction and moving ahead to accomplish your goals. Managing time is one of the most difficult yet helpful skills a woman can develop. It takes maximum effort and realistic planning.

First, you must acknowledge that you have time—the same amount God has given to everyone. You, with God's help, must determine how to use your time (Proverbs 3:5-6). You err in letting others decide your priorities and make your schedule (Romans 12:2). Remember that by using small bits of time faithfully, you can accomplish great things (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

The foremost challenge a woman faces is not to orchestrate her life or to plan her year but to order each day, allowing for sufficient rest, proper nourishment and exercise, and a quiet time spent exclusively with the Lord. To focus on what is really important, meaningful time must be assigned for vital relationships, especially with a spouse and children in the home.

The woman of strength arose early to plan for the day's activities (Proverbs 31:15). Just as she had maidservants, women today have appliances, vehicles, as well as utility and telephone services. These blessings of God are ready to help and serve women in daily, mundane tasks, giving them a maximum amount of time to spend with the Lord and to serve others!

To the Hebrews, a day began in the evening—with rest, family fellowship, as well as study and meditation in God's Word (Psalm 55:17). Jesus, said, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). One way to do that is to devote the evening hours to quiet rest, reflection and inner preparing—in other words, to prepare yourself in the evening for the coming day as well as to plan your day's schedule upon rising in the morning.

DAY 2

Peace That Passes Understanding

Through prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving, you can realize a “peace . . . which surpasses all understanding” and know that this peace “will guard your hearts and minds” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Your natural human desire for acceptance, status, and possessions can create tension within. If you perceive that your needs or desires are not going to be met, you may experience anxiety and stress. How can you “be anxious for nothing” in the face of such situations?

Managing stress for a Christian begins with understanding yourself and knowing what Scripture teaches about the nature of God. To understand yourself means to know your basic nature, the potential of your strengths, and the limits of your weaknesses. This is no small task, for self-deception can prevent clear discernment (Jeremiah 17:9). Pride and independence can block self-awareness. God Himself must give the self-awareness needed (Jeremiah 17:10). Only He can show clearly where change is needed and bring about that change in basic human nature (Psalm 139:23, 24).

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked; Who can know it?
I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.”*

JER.17.9-10

An understanding of the nature of God comes from His self-revelation in Scripture and in Christ (John 1:14, 18). Knowing and accepting the unchanging nature of God produces stability and peace (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8). Understanding the quality of His character inspires trust (1 John 1:5).

Much of stress dissipates when you acknowledge your dependence upon God and submit to His leadership (Psalm 73:26; 1 Peter 5:6, 7), recognizing that you are locked into time and space as finite creatures, while He is infinite, eternal, and omnipresent.

DAY 3

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11

A Time for Rest and Worship

The Sabbath—which means “rest”—is the seventh day of the Hebrew week (Genesis 2:2, 3). The Israelites were commanded to keep this day as a holy day of rest, reflection, and re-creation in honor of the Lord (Exodus 20:8–11).

The Sabbath served to remind the Israelites of their identity as God’s covenant people and of their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 31:12–17; Deuteronomy 5:15; Isaiah 58:13, 14). It was a day that offered refreshment from work, both spiritually and physically (Exodus 23:10–12). Traditionally, Jews spend three days each week in eager anticipation of the Sabbath, then after it has passed, three days reflecting on its joy. The Old Testament has very sharp reminders to keep the Sabbath day (Isaiah 56:2; Jeremiah 17:19–27; Ezekiel 44:24), as well as harsh punishment for a person who broke the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32–36).

The Lord’s Day, by comparison, was considered to be the “first day” of the week. A sign of the new beginning marked by the Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb, the Lord’s Day quickly became the day on which the early church met for weekly worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Yet rest remains an important part of the Lord’s Day.

The Lord’s Day is not to be filled with legalism, for that is what Christ frequently rebuked in His day. It should be the joyful focal point of the week, a day eagerly anticipated by the believer. We should approach it physically rested and attitudinally ready for the Lord to reveal Himself to us (Psalm 118:24).

DAY 4

Refueling for Renewed Service

Fatigue can make a “nag” of anyone! Nothing goes further to make a woman less able to cope with unruly children, household or job crises, and thousands of other mundane irritations. Scripture offers ways for women to reduce fatigue and avoid weariness.

- Support from an understanding husband or close friend helps you handle pressure and stress more effectively. Knowing that someone not only knows about the burden but comes alongside to help you bear up under the load (Isaiah 50:4; Galatians 6:2) makes every crisis more tolerable.
- Women are refreshed and invigorated by being able to walk away from burdens even for a few hours. Such time for yourself can provide renewal of energies and revival of spirit and can produce creativity and re-create productivity (Ecclesiastes 5:18).
- Women need to guard against over commitment. Even good and godly pursuits must be against the purposes of God (Hebrews 12:1). You must learn to say “no,” determine to slow your frantic pace, resist the temptation to add more and more to your schedule. Busyness is not necessarily godliness. Perhaps your “R and R” should become Reprioritizing responsibilities (Matthew 6:33) and Rethinking free time (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8).

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Mathew 6:33

Being tired is a physical affliction. Being weary, on the other hand, is a spiritual attitude that results in part from blaming God for your own sinfulness. Life will never free you from fatigue, but fatigue can bring you to the point of setting aside the mundane cares of the world in order to open your heart and soul to the Lord (Ecclesiastes 12:12).

God can use fatigue:

- to cause you to look to Him for satisfaction (Isaiah 28:12, 13),
- to administer correction (Hebrews 12:5) as He pulls back His hand of strength to force your body to slow down for refueling, and
- to prepare you for a greater challenge (Jeremiah 12:5).

God has promised to satisfy fully the weary soul and replenish faithfully the sorrowful heart (Jeremiah 31:25). Sometimes that means, “He makes me to lie down” (Psalm 23:2). Physical frailties may cause you to miss earthly fun and fellowship, but spiritual resources will enable you to grow stronger on the bed of affliction.

DAY 5

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28

A Positive Choice

Happiness can be defined as a feeling of spiritual contentment that will carry you through the triumphs, pitfalls or even heartaches of life with calm stability, serenity, peace of mind and tranquility (Matthew 5:3-12). Happiness may or may not be related to the happenings in your life. In many instances, the outward happenings in a life affect our attitudes. However, happiness is also an act of the will (Psalm 144:15). We all have things happen in our lives that give us reason to be unhappy, but we have the power through Christ to make our own response to those happenings. Happiness is a potential positive choice.

Jesus gives some characteristics that promote a response of happiness (meekness, righteousness, merciful, peacemakers; Matthew 5:3-11). A Believer must concentrate not on doing, but on BEING and LIVING! Total commitment to the Lord will result in a believer instinctive Christlike response to various happenings as they occur. You must appropriate the tools God has given (his Word and his indwelling Spirit) in order to pursue happiness

(Proverbs 3:13, 29:18). When a believer's faith and conduct are balanced, happiness will always result. Happiness is enjoying everything the Lord has given you and not fretting about the things that have been taken away or withheld (Matthew 6:33-34). Happiness is trusting in God's sovereignty and omniscience. You must believe that in every happening God will work for your good (Romans 8:28). Happiness comes from a daily obedience and faith in the Lord.

DAY 6

*A merry heart does good, like medicine,
But a broken spirit dries the bones.*

Proverbs 17:22

A Time to Laugh

The psalmist declares that God himself sits in the heavens and laughs (Psalm 2:4), and the writer of Proverbs describes the woman of strength as one who rejoices in (literally “laughs at”) times to come (Proverbs 31:25). Life can become taxing at times, and moments come when we desperately need a change. Laughter is one way the Creator gave us to switch gears and punctuate monotony with joy. Humor is an exit from the mundane road of life. Laughter is a simple yet reasonable prescription for some of life’s ills and most of its tedium (Proverbs 17:22). Physicians have assigned healing properties to humor, especially in cases of mental illness, such as depression. Certainly humor defuses tensions and helps put at ease.

With so much tragedy in life, choosing humor instead of despair is good scriptural advice. Humor generally involves an acceptance of the ups and downs of life and the determination not to take ourselves too seriously. To combat stress, to relieve tension and even to provide delightful diversion in the midst of trials and sufferings, laughter and a keen sense of humor may prove to be previous possessions.

Jesus himself was unpredictable and witty and full of life in his responses. He used irony, word play and hyperbole to get across his messages (see Matthew 22:15-22, in which Jesus cleverly eludes the trap of the Pharisees and unmasks their hypocrisy). Jesus asks a Pharisee for a coin with an image of Caesar and an inscription proclaiming Caesar to be god, knowing that to carry such a coin was breaking two commandments (Exodus 20:3-4).

At the end of life’s road we may all end up in the same place someday, but because of laughter along the way, some will have enjoyed the journey and arrived more refreshed.

DAY 7

And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.

Mathew 14:23

A Time to Rest and Play

The Bible speaks in a negative way about “idleness” (Proverbs 6:6–11; 1 Timothy 5:13), referring to those who are lazy by such loathsome words as “slothful,” “sluggard,” and “slack hand”—and very positively about labor and work (Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 3:8, 9; Ephesians 4:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:11). Given the admonition that we are to work six days and rest one (Exodus 34:21), we might conclude that the Bible is about all work and no fun. That is far from the truth!

Jesus expected His disciples to “come aside” periodically for rest, and Scripture has repeated references to the benefits of “making merry” (Proverbs 15:13, 15; 17:22; Luke 15:32).

The Bible speaks of more than seventy days a year in which “no customary work” is to be done (Leviticus 23:7, 8): the seven-day feasts that mark Passover, Tabernacles, and Weeks, as well as the Feast of Trumpets, and every Sabbath day! In addition to rest and prayer, leisure days in the Bible are associated with food, gift-giving, singing, and great joy (Revelation 11:10).

A time of rest from work is advocated for those who are experiencing grief (Matthew 14:10–13), those who are seeking spiritual empowerment to do God’s will (Matthew 4:1, 11), those who are entering into an intense period of prayer (Matthew 14:23), and those who are newly married (Deuteronomy 24:5).

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