

# The Family Friend



*A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.*

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## "The Time Crunch"

In 1975 Jim Croce penned these memorable lyrics:

If I could save time in a bottle  
The first thing that I'd like to do  
Is to save every day  
'Til eternity passes away  
Just to spend them with you.

Everybody struggles with the time crunch. Like Jim Croce we dream of capturing time in a bottle - can it, freezing it, rewinding it, preserving it-- anyway we can. "Time in a bottle" works well as a song lyric, but as a practicality, we all know it's impossible. A composer will never work it into a song lyric, but time is more like a Styrofoam soft drink cup with a hole in the bottom. It seeps away until it's all gone and there's no way to patch the hole.

When we first marry, we intend to make time together our priority. We visualize future shared experiences. We plan to build a house, take memorable vacations together, walk hand-in-hand down scenic trails and laugh. We'll ignore the clock as we spend endless hours talking about everything in general and nothing in particular. We're

hoping to celebrate our golden wedding anniversary some day and there's even a day out there in the future when one of us will die, but we've got plenty of time for shared experiences between now and then.

Then the honeymoon ends before we really had a chance to get started on relationship building. Soon the children come along. Our dream focus changes slightly but it's still about family. There's plenty of time for that too. Eighteen or twenty years down the road, the first child will probably leave home, but for now, we're a big happy family. There's no need to get in a hurry about these things though, there's still plenty of time, or so we think.

Somehow it doesn't quite work out that way. We get caught in a time crunch. An incredibly large number of people compete for segments of your time - your employer, your child's teacher, your child's coach, your child's music teacher, your child's martial arts teacher, your doctor, your minister, your tax preparer and at least a dozen others all the way down to the vacuum cleaner salesman. You're tempted to ask them to pick a number and wait. Somehow that dream world of "saving every day 'til eternity passes away" just doesn't seem to fit our circum-

stances. Later on in Jim Croce's song, he wrote:

But there never seems to be enough time

To do the things you want to do

We're putting more time in at work than we used to.

Right? We're too busy to give proper attention to the things that matter most. Right?

There's something going on every night and it's all necessary. Right? We don't have time to build relationships, right?

There are those who would shake their heads and disagree on all counts. A couple of Penn State professors, John Robinson and Geoffery Godbey decided to find out. They asked ten thousand people to keep twenty-four hour diaries of the way they spent their time. Their findings challenge popular perceptions about time. Up front they asked the study participants, "How do you think you spend your time?" They added up the figures from the estimate and compared them to the diaries. The figures didn't agree. For example the men thought they spend an average of 46.2 hours at work every week, but their diaries revealed they only spent 40.2 hours. Compared to studies done in 1965, the research indicates we have actually gained leisure time.

You're probably asking the same thing we're asking. Where did they dig up these ten thousand study participants? They certainly didn't ask us. Whether you accept their findings or not, it's hard to disagree with their conclusions about free time. We squander most of it in front of the television set. Again you may protest, "Television? There's nothing on worth watching anymore. What makes you think I'm spending more time watching sitcoms and so-called reality shows? Actually it sneaks up on us. Very few of us watch television during all our discretionary time. We do it in tiny portions, a half an hour here and an hour there, but it all adds up.

An ancient insight from Scripture addresses our use of time. "Be careful, then, how you live - not as unwise, but as wise making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil." - Ephesians 5:15-16. When a married couple looks back over the chasm between their wedding and their golden anniversary, they will wonder how the time went so fast. When the nest empties, parents will shake their heads in disbelief. How could you go from "Rock a Bye Baby" to "Pomp and Circumstance" so quickly? Every moment is precious. But how do you "make the most of every opportunity?" Having made a lot of mistakes in the use of time, we'll share some of the ways we should have handled the time crunch.

We should have kept a diary of the way we actually spent our time over a two-week period. Recently a doctor asked us to keep a daily record of our medical progress over a couple of weeks. It was most helpful in

developing a treatment program. Wouldn't it also be helpful in treating our time sickness? ? We would toss the "quality time" rationalization in the garbage can. Try to imagine a corporate executive named Jason. He asks his secretary to get his wife Janet on the phone. Jason's too important to make the call himself. Once she's on the phone, he said, "Janet, I've scheduled you for a 3:30 appointment, right after my appointment with our bank president and just before my tee time at the golf course." Then he adds, "Janet, I only managed thirty minutes for you but it will be quality time. You don't have much of me, so be sure to make the most of it." Do you really think Janet is going to be impressed? We would suspect that Janet would tell him to move his tee time up another thirty minutes and forget about her appointment. Relationship building does require quality time, but it also requires quantity time and it must be unhurried time. ? We would limit extracurricular activities. Several years ago we heard a friend offer this unsolicited advice to his new son-in-law. "If you've got a job, a house, a car and if you're active in the church, you've got about all you can handle." It sounded severe at the time, but he wasn't that far off the mark. We can't put time in a bottle but we can slow the seepage from the Styrofoam cup if we'll mark a big red X through some of our appointments. While we're on that subject, we'll express an unpopular opinion based on our own failure to limit extracurricular activities. If we ran the world, no child would be involved in more than one extracurricular activity either at school or after school. ?

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We should have spent some vacations without agenda. Norman has always been a vacation planner. Six months before we leave, he knows where we're going to spend the night and how many miles we are going to make in a day. Because of our efficient vacation planning we've never driven on the Natchez Trace or the Blue Ridge Parkway and we wish we had. Try taking a vacation without an agenda. It will frustrate the Normans of the world, but they'll get over it and they'll like it when they see relationships improving. Elliott, our oldest son, has a different philosophy about vacations. He simply says, "We get there when we get there."

F. L. Eiland, a nineteenth century hymn writer began his most famous song, "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand" with these lyrics. "Time is filled with swift transition." A generation later Tillit S. Teddlie expanded on the same theme. His song lyrics challenge us to rethink our attitudes toward time:

Swiftly we're turning life's daily pages.  
Swiftly the hours are turning to years.  
How we are using God's previous moment,  
Shall we reap laughter shall we reap tears?

At the end of our time on this earth, which one will it be?  
Will it be laughter or will it be tears?

—Norman and Ann Bales,  
From All About Families,  
April 16, 2004