Punctuality in Scripture

The Character of God

- **God created time.** (See Genesis 1:14.)
- **In the fulness of time, God accomplished the most important event in history.** (See Galatians 4:4–5.)
- **Jesus was aware of the Father’s timetable and honored it.** (See John 7:3–8 and John 11:1–6.)
- **Jesus esteemed His Father and accomplished salvation at the proper time.** (See Romans 5:6.)
- **The Holy Spirit gives us the words to speak at the right time.** (See Mark 13:11.)

Key Concepts

1. **God’s Timing is Perfect.** We see examples of His perfect timing in history. In the Old Testament a restless, sleepless king spent the night reading through court records and discovered Mordecai's good deeds right before Haman entered with a plot to kill Mordecai. God's timing caused Haman's plot to backfire and not only spared Mordecai, but honored him! (See Esther 6:1–11.) In the life of Christ, people thought Jesus arrived too late to heal Lazarus; however, Jesus waited for the perfect time, raising Lazarus from the dead so that many would believe. (See John 11:4, 6, 45.) The Holy Spirit directed Philip to go talk to the Ethiopian who, at the very same moment, was reading Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus and needed someone to help him understand. Philip's prompt obedience resulted in a timely meeting and the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch. (See Acts 8:29–37.)

2. **Time is a Valuable Gift.** Time and money have much in common. Both can be spent. Both can be invested. How are you investing your time? Also, both attract robbers. Just as thieves steal money, “time bandits” break in and pilfer minutes and hours out of each day. Are you a “time robber”? Being late actually “steals” another's time. Being five minutes late to family devotions or a meeting wastes five minutes for those who were on time and are now waiting for the tardy person. A punctual person plans to arrive early, allowing time to absorb unexpected delays. Because time is priceless, God exhorts us to use it wisely. (See Psalm 90:12 and Ephesians 5:15–16.) What advance preparation or planning would help you to arrive early instead of late?

3. **Be Ready for the Return of Christ.** Jesus is coming! We don’t know when He will come so we need to be prepared since His return can be at any moment. We can be prepared for His return by having a right relationship with Him. Have you received Christ as your Savior, thanking God for His gift of forgiveness from sin through Jesus dying on the cross for you? (See John 3:16.) If you do not know how to accept God’s gift of salvation, ask your mom or dad so you will be ready. Then, when Jesus returns, He will find you watching and waiting, ready to be with Him forever and ever!

Punctuality in My Life

- **Genesis 24:11**—Do I do my chores at the expected times?
- **I Samuel 3:4–10**—How did I respond the last time my mom or dad called me at an inconvenient time?
- **Proverbs 6:9–11**—What mindset can hinder me from being punctual?
- **Proverbs 25:11**—What is it like to speak the right words at the right time?
- **Romans 12:10–12**—What other traits will be developed as I esteem others and their time?
- **1 Peter 3:15–16**—As I honor God in my heart, what will I also want to be ready to do and why?
Punctuality is showing high esteem for other people and their time.

Punctuality in the Lives of Five Wise Virgins

Read Matthew 25:1–13 as a family and answer the following questions:

1. How did the five foolish virgins demonstrate the lack of esteem [respect or concern] for others? “They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them” (Matthew 25:3). If you know that your family is going somewhere later in the day, what should you do so that you are ready to go when they are?

2. Why were the other five virgins considered wise? “But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Matthew 25:4). What might happen to cause delays? What can you do to prevent them?

3. The virgins had no idea when the call would come. When did it come? “While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (Matthew 25:5–6). How can being ready and punctual show you are esteeming someone else and his time?

4. Why was the foolish virgins’ request for oil a problem for the others? “But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves” (Matthew 25:9). How does your unpreparedness affect others?

5. What was the reward for the virgins who were prepared and punctual when the Bridegroom arrived? “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10). How can you be ready for a special event that you know is going to happen (maybe Mother’s Day or a sibling’s birthday)?

6. What were the consequences for the virgins who were unprepared and not punctual when the Bridegroom arrived? “Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not” (Matthew 25:11–12). When was a time you missed out on something meaningful because you were not ready? Would it have been right to demand to be included anyway?

7. What admonition does Jesus give to those who hear this parable of the ten virgins? “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13). We know Jesus is coming again, yet we do not know when. (See Acts 1:11 and Matthew 24:42.) How can we be preparing now to be ready when He comes?
Ready for the Return of the Bridegroom

“But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps... the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him... watch therefore, for ye know not the hour...”

—MATTHEW 25:4, 10
Memory Verse

ECCLESIASTES 3:1

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

Memory Verse Game: Hand Motions

Work with the children to think of hand motions to illustrate the meaning of the words and use them as they quote the verse several times. Here is a suggestion for Ecclesiastes 3:1:

- “To every thing”—Start with holding your hands in front of you palms up, then open them and move your arms out to your sides, as if “beholding” everything that is before you.
- “A season, and a time”—Tap your wrist where a watch usually is with your pointer finger.
- “To every purpose”—march in place.
- “Under the heaven”—Palms down, start with hands high and lower them.

Doers of the Word

Have the children write about a time they applied this verse in their lives. For example, “I really wanted to ride my bike outside but this verse reminded me that it was not the right time to be outside. The right time to play outside is after our schoolwork so I stayed inside and studied first.”
Craft Instructions

“Right Time” Clocks

Introduction

Read to the children: “This month we are asking the Lord to develop punctuality in our lives. What a privilege to respond to the work He is doing to change us into the image of His Son! Today we are going to make a clock and write what to do at the right time each day. Ask the Lord to develop punctuality in your life so you can complete the right things at the right time.”

Supplies

One paper plate and brad per child, construction paper, pens, scissors, tape.

Instructions

Instruct children to cut 12 rectangles out of construction paper. Fold rectangles in half to form a small card. On the front of each card write a number 1–12. Inside the card, write what you will do at that a.m. time on the top half of the card and write what you will do at that p.m. time on the bottom half of the card. Tape the back of the card to the paper plate to resemble the numbers on a clock.

Each child will then cut out a short and long hand for their clock. Push a brad through the clock hands and center of the paper plate to hold them in place.

Variation for younger children: Write the numbers 1–12 around the paper plate and add clock hands with a brad to make a clock as a reminder to honor others by being on time.
Prepare to be Punctual

The best way to avoid being late is to prepare beforehand so you are not rushed at the last minute. Rushing around often stresses relationships, causes accidents, and lowers the quality of your work. Match the goals below to a step of action that will avoid a last-minute rush.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>What I need to do in order to be punctual:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Be waiting in the car to leave for church at 9:00</td>
<td>• Practice a little each day</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Be in the living room ready for morning devotions</td>
<td>• Start studying for my school report at the beginning of the month</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Finish my school report by the end of the month</td>
<td>• Let those you are with know when you will have to leave to eat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Join family for a meal</td>
<td>• Help your mom clean up the house an hour before guests are due to arrive</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Memorize a song on my musical instrument</td>
<td>• Put on my shoes and coat and have my Bible by 8:45</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have the right clothes for the right occasion</td>
<td>• Get out of bed when my parents awaken me</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Be ready for company on time</td>
<td>• Keep dirty laundry in the hamper and promptly put away clean laundry</td>
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The timing of Christ's return is a mystery. The first century disciples believed Jesus would return in their lifetimes. (See James 5:7, 9 and I Peter 4:7.) The suspense has only grown with each successive generation. Robert J. Morgan in his book, All to Jesus, wrote, “Augustine expected the Lord to return around AD 1000. In the 1300s, John Wycliffe concluded that the end of the world and the second coming of Christ should be expected immediately. In the sixteenth century, John Calvin advised, ‘Hunger after Christ until the dawning of that great day when our Lord will fully manifest the glory of His kingdom.’ In the eighteenth century, John Wesley said, ‘The Spirit in the heart of the true believers says with earnest desire, ‘Come, Lord Jesus.’ In the twentieth century, evangelist Billy Graham said: ‘Many times when I go to bed at night I think to myself that before I awaken Christ may come.’” Even now, the signs of the times are so reflective of what we are to watch for before His return that we cannot help but expect His coming again to be very soon! What if it were today?

The awaited time of Christ’s glorious return is known only by God. “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36). This great mystery motivates us to prepare and be ready like the five wise virgins in Matthew 25:1–13. Maybe these were the passages of Scripture that inspired Leila Morris as she wrote the final verse of “What if it were Today?”

Faithful and true would He find us here
  If He should come today?
Watching in gladness and not in fear,
  If He should come today?

  Signs of His coming multiply,
  Morning light breaks in eastern sky,
Watch, for the time is drawing nigh,
  What if it were today?

Leila was born in Ohio on April 15, 1862. She helped out in her family’s hat shop, and in 1881, she married Charles H. Morris. She was a homemaker and actively involved in the work of the church. Many summer days were spent attending camp meetings. It was at one such camp meeting in Maryland that she met Dr. H. L. Gilmour, who encouraged her to use her musical talents for the Lord.

In her lifetime, Leila Morris wrote more than 1,000 hymns. Among them are, “Let Jesus Come Into Your Heart,” “Nearer, Still Nearer,” and “Sweeter As The Years Go By.” Her eyesight began to fail when she was in her early 50’s. Would she have to stop writing hymns? Her son saw the
problem and thought of a way to help! He built on a wall in her home a massive blackboard with a musical staff on it; it was large enough for his mother to see and work on. Massive it was—a 28-foot long blackboard! This tool was helpful until Leila’s sight was completely gone. Even then, her dedicated friends were there to assist her in her writing. She spent her last days in the home of her daughter and passed away in July of 1929.

What if Christ came back today? Have you repented of your sins? Are you living for Him? We need to be punctual, ready, and prepared to receive our Lord with joy, so that instead of hearing “I never knew you: depart from me . . .” (Matthew 7:23), we will hear Jesus say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21). Don’t put off until tomorrow what we know He wants us to do today—tomorrow may be too late! Indeed, what if it were today?
What If It Were Today?

Words and Music by Leila N. Morris (1862–1929)

1. Jesus is com-ing to earth a-gain, What if it were to-day?
2. Sa-tan's do-mi-nions will then be o'er, O that it were to-day!
3. Faithful and true would He find us here If He should come to-day?

Co-ming in po-wer and love to reign, What if it were to-day?
Sor-row and sighing shall be no more, O that it were to-day!
Watching in gladness and not in fear, If He should come to-day?

Co-ming to claim His cho-sen Bride, All the redeemed and pu-ri-fied,
Then shall the dead in Christ a-rise, Caught up to meet Him in the skies;
Signs of His co-ming mul-ti- ply, Morning light breaks in east-ern sky,

O-ver the whole earth scat-tered wide, What if it were to-day?
When shall these glo ries meet our eyes? What if it were to-day?
Watch, for the time is draw-ing nigh, What if it were to-day?
Glo-ry, glo-ry! Joy to my heart 'twill bring,
Joy to my heart will bring,

Glo-ry, glo-ry! When we shall crown Him King;
When we shall crown Him King;

Glo-ry, glo-ry! Haste to pre-pare the way;
Haste to pre-are the way;

Glo-ry, glo-ry! Je-sus will come some day.