

# TIME MANAGEMENT

## Time Management and Ministry

It is important that the Christian worker understand and implement time management principles and practices.

The paid worker soon discovers that much of what they do in their day is not directly supervised, while the volunteer must learn to balance ministry responsibilities with full time work or study. Both need also to achieve balance in their personal and ministry responsibilities

The nature of ministry means that it involves a combination of regular weekly commitments alongside long range tasks. This combination of urgent and important tasks requires some skill in managing to ensure that they are all accomplished on time.

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"If nobody asks me what time is, I know; if I want to explain it to anyone who asks me, I am at a loss."  
- *St Augustine*

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## A Biblical Perspective of Time and Work

### 1. God and Time

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<sup>9</sup> We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.  
- Proverbs 16:9

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#### a. God Created Time

<sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that it was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light "day" and the darkness "night." Together these made up one day.  
- Genesis 1:3-5

God created time as well as matter. He ordained both day and night and ordered their duration.

#### b. God Is Not Limited By Time

<sup>8</sup> But you must not forget, dear friends, that a day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day.  
- 2 Peter 3:8

While man is constrained by time, God lives outside of time. He sees the future as clearly as the past and does not change. "Eternity" in God's eyes is not an endless succession of days, but freedom from time.

#### c. God Allots a Portion of Time to Each of Us

<sup>13</sup> Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." <sup>14</sup> How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. <sup>15</sup> What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."  
- James 4:13-15

God gives to each of us a certain number of days - none of us know how many. Any plans we make for our days are always subject to His will.

## 2. God and Work

### a. God Has Established Work As Part of Man's Existence

<sup>5</sup> *There were no plants or grain growing on the earth, for the LORD God had not sent any rain. And no one was there to cultivate the soil.*

<sup>15</sup> *The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it.*

- Genesis 2:5,15

Even in the idyllic surroundings of the Garden of Eden, God had work for man to do! It was not until after the Fall that the ground was cursed and Man's work became difficult (Genesis 3:17-19).

### b. God's Work for Us is Finite

<sup>4</sup> *I brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you told me to do.*

<sup>5</sup> *And now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.*

- John 17:4-5

These words of Jesus showed that He had work to do while here on earth and accomplished it all, even though we see Him resting at times (Mark 6:31,32). The concept that work is endless is not Scriptural.

### c. God's Desire that We Rest

<sup>2</sup> *On the seventh day, having finished his task, God rested from all his work.* <sup>3</sup> *And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from his work of creation.*

-Genesis 2:2-3

God rested from His work on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but as an example to man that one day in seven was set aside as a holy day of rest (Exodus 20:9). Subsequently man turned this into a harsh day, filled with detailed laws about what constituted work and what didn't. Jesus, however, was to put things back in perspective with His declaration that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27). Thus even the work of ministry can and should be set aside at least one day a week both to allow for refreshment and as a way of honouring God.

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"Most of the evils in this life arise from not being able to sit still in a room."

- Blaise Pascal

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### 3. Man's Attitude to Work

#### a. We Must Make Each Day Count

*<sup>12</sup> Teach us to make the most of our time,  
so that we may grow in wisdom.*

- Psalm 90:12

While rest and relaxation are important, time is not something to be wasted. Our time on earth is finite and we should make the most of each day.

#### b. We Must Work Hard

*<sup>6</sup> Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and be wise! <sup>7</sup> Even though they have no prince, governor, or ruler to make them work, <sup>8</sup> they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. <sup>9</sup> But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? I want you to learn this lesson: <sup>10</sup> A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—<sup>11</sup> and poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber.*

- Proverbs 6:6-11

The Bible extols the virtue of hard work and condemns laziness. The Christian leader in particular has no excuse for a casual attitude to work.

#### c. We Must Work Well

*<sup>10</sup> Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom.*

- Ecclesiastes 9:10

Not only must we work hard, but we must do our very best in our work. There is nothing wrong with striving for excellence providing it is done to glorify God, and not out of a compulsive need to bolster self worth.

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*"Far and away the  
best prize that life  
offers is the chance  
to work hard at work  
worth doing."*

- Theodore Roosevelt

## Enemies of Effective Time Management

### 1. Poor Planning

#### a. Unclear Purposes

In this instance, the leader is unclear of what they are trying to achieve. They lack firm objectives and goals that they can aim at, and survive from week to week. As a leader they need to take time to evaluate their ministry and decide what its basic purposes are. Time spent with God, rather than wasting time, helps the leader to work more efficiently as they gain a clear understanding of what they are to achieve. Time spent setting goals and devising strategies results in time saved; and the process of evaluation, while time consuming, produces long term gains.

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You cannot know how to plan if you don't know what to plan.

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#### b. Unclear priorities

A leader must be clear as to the relevant urgency of each task or they will spend time on long term projects when short term deadlines are looming. Or they may invest large amounts of time engaged in aspects of their role which they enjoy but bring very little return to their ministry. All of us face the dilemma of balancing the urgent (tasks that must be accomplished now) and the important (tasks required for long term effectiveness). The leader with unclear priorities consistently makes wrong choices in this balancing act.

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Doing your tasks is not the same as doing your job.

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#### c. Unclear procedures

The leader must discover the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing tasks. Some businesses employ specialists to do time and motion studies, sometimes analysing procedures down to the second in order to discover more efficient ways of operating. A wise leader will take the time to analyse how they accomplish their responsibilities and will look for shortcuts that save time without sacrificing quality. They will have a good grasp of what tasks they need to tackle themselves and which can be delegated.

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The leader who doesn't know their job, ensures that nobody else knows theirs.

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## 2. Poor Management

### a. Over Commitment

The over-committed leader does not have an accurate understanding of the time involved in various tasks. They take on responsibility, believing they have the time to accomplish everything, but in the end find that they have over committed themselves. Over commitment is a particular problem for those new to a ministry task. They are wise to commence slowly with few responsibilities and gradually add to them if time permits. It is also a problem for those who find it hard to say “no.” Usually this comes from a desire to please others and the leader must identify where this drive comes from, and work to resolve it so that it does not rule their agendas.

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It is easier to be busy than to get things done.

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### b. Disorganisation

The disorganised leader has poor procedures in place for managing their time. They miss appointments, or at best are late, due to poor use of a diary. They misplace important documents due to the lack of an effective filing system. They fail to return phone calls or are slow in responding to correspondence. They do not think of all contingencies and get caught out when things don't go as expected.

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If you cannot manage yourself, you cannot manage anyone.

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### c. Interruptions

If the leader is to remain accessible to their people, interruptions can never be completely avoided. Nor should they, for at times our interruptions can in fact be God's agenda. Yet many of our interruptions are unimportant distractions, which the leader needs to guard against. Time spent objectively examining the workplace environment and workplace procedures may reveal ways in which the leader can accomplish their work more efficiently without unnecessary interruptions.

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Our interruption may be God's divine appointment.

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### 3. Poor Personal Habits

#### a. Procrastination

Procrastination is the tendency to put off decision making for as long as possible - perhaps until it's too late. Procrastinators often have an inordinate fear of failure and are reluctant to make any decisions that leave them vulnerable. Their procrastination is symptomatic of a lack of faith, vision and self belief. Alternatively some procrastinate simply because they dislike unpleasant tasks. They put off these tasks as long as possible hoping that perhaps someone will rescue them, or the need for the task will diminish.

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"Procrastination is the thief of time."

- Edward Young

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#### b. Health

Poor health is another time waster. The various parts of our being are interrelated. Not only does lack of physical fitness affects the leader's capacity for hard work, their emotional well being and spiritual vitality can also suffer. The leader who does not care for their health will find that small health problems persist, and even get worse, leading to time off. Poor diet is another factor that will affect the capacity of the leader for hard work, robbing the leader of essential vitamins and minerals necessary for working at full capacity. Tiredness through lack of sleep will also affect the leader's output. They need to establish disciplined habits of sleep and rest.

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"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

- Constitution.  
The World Health  
Organization.

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#### c. Self Discipline

A lack of self discipline is one of the leader's greatest threats to efficient use of time. An undisciplined leader will likely find themselves struggling against all the other enemies of efficient time management. They will waste time through being easily distracted from the task. The enjoyable responsibilities will get done, but it is the less interesting yet important tasks that are left unattended to.

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"He who cannot obey himself will be commanded. That is the nature of living creatures."

- Friedrich Nietzsche

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Assess your ability to overcome the enemies of time management. Respond to the statements below by placing an "x" on the line. Make notes underneath each item in order to clarify your own thinking:

*"I have a clear sense of what I am trying to achieve in my work."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I consider the priority of tasks, working first on the urgent."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I am always looking for more efficient ways of getting all my work done."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I have a good grasp on how long tasks take and can say, 'no' when necessary."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I am well organised with good diary habits and an efficient filing system."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I work at ways of minimising interruptions and distractions."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I tend to tackle difficult decisions and dull tasks as soon as possible."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I exercise regularly, eat healthily and get sufficient sleep."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

*"I am disciplined in my use of time and in my work habits."*      NO \_\_\_\_\_ YES

The area I most want to work on is:

# Strategies for Efficient Time Management

## 1. Understand the Big Picture

### a. The Five Year Plan

A Five Year Plan gives a person a snapshot of where they want to be in five years time. Your plan may be to graduate with some qualification, to be involved in some form of full time ministry, or to have your ministry reach a certain stage of development. The real benefit of a Five Year Plan is that it provides a focus for all we do and keeps disappointments and distractions in perspective.

In establishing your plan, bear in mind the following:

- i. Any such plan must always be subject to God’s will (James 4:13-15). It is not that we are being presumptuous by telling God what we will do. Instead we are endeavouring to discern His will and then setting a target with the aim of doing what He wants.
- ii. Five year plans change - knowing this should neither discourage us from setting them, nor tempt us to be too rigid in hanging on to them. They present a target to aim for but often circumstances change and our perception of the target shifts. Altering our aim is easier than starting with no aim at all.
- iii. While five year plans do not get bogged down with details, they do contain specific steps that will be undertaken in order to accomplish what you are setting out to do.

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If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time.

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<sup>13</sup>Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; <sup>14</sup>whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup>But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.  
- James 4:13-15


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| <b>MY FIVE YEAR PLAN</b>   |
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| <p>In five years time, I aim to:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>by:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> |

### b. The One Year Plan

The One Year Plan is again brief yet it provides a sharper focus than the Five Year Plan. It is less likely to be altered through changing circumstances, yet it provides the same focus and perspective.

"As if you could kill time without injuring eternity."  
-Henry David Thoreau


|  MY ONE YEAR PLAN                            |
|---|
| <p>This year, I aim to:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>by:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> |

The Church leader should think a year ahead in their planning. Before the end of each year it is recommended that they purchase a Wall Planner for the New Year and immediately begin to record fixed events and activities. Teaching themes and special programmes can be recorded as they are planned.

"We must use time as a tool, not as a couch."  
- John F. Kennedy

### c. The One Term Plan

The four term year provides a convenient way of dividing up the year for more effective planning. The leader sets out with goals to be achieved each term and a strategy for each one. Programmes should be planned at least a term ahead so that they can be adequately prepared for and publicised.

|  MY TERM PLAN      |
|---|
| <p>Next term, I aim to:</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>by</p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> |

## 2. Attend to the Small Picture

A week planner is an indispensable aid to the person who wants to use their time efficiently.

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"Work expands to fill the time available for its completion."

- C. Northcote  
Parkinson

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The leader's first task of each week should be to establish a timetable of tasks for the week. They do this as follows:

### a. Compile a "To Do" List


The first step is to write down tasks remaining from the previous week's list. Write down an estimated duration time next to each task (remembering that most of us underestimate how long a task will take, not allowing for interruptions), and a deadline time at which the task must be completed.

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"I have no time to be in a hurry."

- John Wesley

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 Compile your "To Do" list now for the next week using the table below:


|   | Task | Duration | Deadline |
|---|------|----------|----------|
| 1 |      |          |          |
| 2 |      |          |          |
| 3 |      |          |          |
| 4 |      |          |          |
| 5 |      |          |          |
| 6 |      |          |          |
| 7 |      |          |          |
| 8 |      |          |          |

Use this list to assign a priority to each task, based on "duration" and "deadline" calculations. As the week progresses, add new items and re-prioritise if necessary. Once a task is completed, cross it off the list, and treat yourself to a reward!

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The 80/20 principle states that 20% of the tasks will produce 80% of the results.

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 Refer back to the list above and assign priority to each item.

**b. Draw up a Weekly Time Schedule**

A Weekly Time Schedule is a tool for planning when each task will be tackled. It is a single page with days of the week along the top and time of day along the side.

Who kills time,  
murders opportunity.

The first step is to record fixed appointments, meetings, and time off. (This includes time set aside for yourself or your family.)

Once this is done tasks can be fitted into the gaps in such a way as to ensure deadlines will be met.

 Complete the schedule below, filling in fixed commitments and tasks in order of priority:

|      | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| 8am  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 9am  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 10am |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 11am |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 12pm |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 1pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 2pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 3pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 4pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 5pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 6pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |

### 3. Work Smart

When the Big Picture and the Small Picture are in hand, there are a number of other suggestions that will help you to work smarter:

- a. Begin each work day with a moment of prayer, committing your tasks for the day to the Lord. This will ensure you commence your day with your thoughts fixed on God and with increased sensitivity to His voice.
- b. Organise a filing system and keep your desk tidy. Only those papers you are currently working on should be on your desk.
- c. Answer letters and emails immediately unless your answer requires some thought, in which case it goes on your "To Do" list. Handle paper only once.
- d. Practise saying "No, I'm sorry but I'm unable to do that."
- e. If you find it hard to make decisions, set a deadline at which time you must decide. If no new information is likely to come to hand, decide now!
- f. Use time twice - listen to tapes while driving the car or doing routine work.
- g. Schedule tough jobs at the time of day when you are most alert and able to work efficiently.
- h. Use the phone or email instead of letter, especially when you expect a reply - help other people save time too!
- i. If you work in a church and have a secretary, tell them when you don't want to be interrupted. Around 30% more productivity is gained by having a period without interruptions.
- j. Where possible, delegate tasks to people who will find them interesting and fulfilling. Teaching them will in fact take more time - be patient, the payback in time saved will come later.
- k. Have a pad handy to jot down ideas relating to other tasks as they come to mind. Don't leave your current task and begin to work on another one.
- l. Divide a large task into smaller steps and put each of them on your "To Do" list.

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"I recommend to you to take care of the minutes; for hours will take care of themselves."  
- Lord Chesterfield

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- m. Take the initiative in ending conversations with people who drop by unexpectedly. Try saying, “Well thanks for calling in...” (and hope they take the hint).
- n. Limit unnecessary meetings. If possible go to only that part of the meeting that concerns you.
- o. Receive training or help in how to accomplish tasks more efficiently.
- p. Do not over schedule. Anticipate some interruptions.
- q. Take lunch breaks and get away from your workplace.
- r. Find a diary that works for you! There are different styles available and sometimes trial and error is the best way to discover what is helpful. Find one with plenty of space for making important notes, rather than using pieces of paper that are easily lost.
- s. Have a light lunch so as to avoid the “sleepy afternoon” syndrome.
- t. Carry reading material with you and use “waiting time” to read.
- u. If instructions are not clear, ASK! It will save time later.
- v. Be satisfied with your best. Do not do tasks over and over again, striving for perfection. Just resolve to do better next time.
- w. Don’t get discouraged if it takes a while to integrate these habits into your life. Keep practising and in time they will become second nature.



Read through the above list again making notes in the margin next to those that are particularly relevant to you. List below three ideas you will implement straight away:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## **For Further Thought...**

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Reflect on your ability to overcome the enemies of time management.  
Which strategies will you adopt in order to overcome these enemies?





