

How to Plan Neglect: Saying No to Good Things So We Can Say Yes to the Best

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There are times when I'm overwhelmed with seemingly endless opportunities to do good things.

I have to weigh what I can or should say yes to against *what I need to say no to*.

Seems like every year of my life I have to say no to more good things. (Young mothers and fathers may relate to this, as those children need a lot of attention, and so does your marriage, and there's no end to the things, both bad and good, that could distract you from either or both.)

I take my commitments very seriously, but on a few occasions I've had to back out of things I'd said a year ago I could do, back before I knew I would be physically exhausted and ill and my wife would be scheduled for a knee surgery.

I hate to disappoint people, but in those times it becomes clear that I have to be carve out time to fulfill my most basic commitments and do what I believe God wants me to (e.g. be with my wife when she needs me).

I have to make sure I am living to please God, not everyone else.

We shouldn't say yes to something just because it's a good thing or even a great thing.

When saying no to good things, I always remind myself what Nanci and I have learned over many years:

I must say no to people concerning the vast majority of good things they *invite* me to, in order to be available to say *yes* to God concerning that small number of things He has *truly called* me to.

Sometimes we tend to say yes to too many of the good things, leaving us exhausted and unable to bring our best to those relatively few God-things.

There are only 168 hours in the week no matter what we do (and during a third of those we should be sleeping!)

If we have X number of people to make time for, they have to come out of the same small pie of available time, and pretty soon the slices of the pie get smaller and smaller. *You end up having dear friends who no longer get a sliver, because it's been divided so many times.*

As with people, so it is with causes.

Rather than a large number of causes that we have tiny little investments in, better to have a much smaller number that you're wholeheartedly engaged in, giving your very best.

Ask God for wisdom as to which these should be, and God will give it (James 1:3).

But *NEVER* say yes without asking whether this is one of those exceptional things God really wants you to do. Tell Him that unless He smacks you in the side of the head and makes it clear, you will assume He *DOESN'T* want you to do it.

This is planned neglect.

We need to neglect doing the things that countless people want us to do, so that we will be available to do what *God* wants.

And sometimes He speaks in a still small voice, while people speak in a big *LOUD* voice. We have to make sure we're listening. To do that, we need to put our ear to His Word and pray and seek His face.

I want to be available to listen to God and follow Him when He gives me those totally unexpected divine appointments.

But if I'm booked so tight there's no room in my schedule for unanticipated God moments, I'll miss them, and thereby miss some of life's greatest joys and opportunities and occasions for *gratitude*.

If you don't give yourself room to *breathe*, you won't give God room to *move*.

Instead of exhausting ourselves doing many secondary things, may we do a few *primary* things well.

And that begins with our daily time with God.

When Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet soaking Him in, and Martha was mad because Mary wasn't doing what she wanted, Jesus said to Martha, "**only a few things are necessary, really only one; Mary has chosen the better portion, which shall not be taken from her**" (Luke 10:42).

So, decide what you are going to *neglect* this week in order to *pay attention* to God.

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)