



Taking Control of Your Time

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LEADERS & STAFF



Taking Control of Your Time

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Journal, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed to be easy to use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

Pastors and church leaders will find this theme useful in understanding how to balance a busy schedule, making time for rest while ensuring that everything that needs to get done gets done. In ministry there is always more to do, but when leaders neglect their souls in order to "get things done," everyone suffers.

This theme recognizes that time is valuable, and God has given it to us to do important work, so learning to steward it well is essential to healthy ministry. We hope you find this material helpful as you learn to take control of your time and help others to do the same.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.
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Stop to Breathe

Leadership demands we make a commitment to rest.

Matthew 11:28

Busy leader, do yourself a favor. Stop to breathe.

Before reading past this paragraph, take three slow, deep breaths. Notice the sensation in your body each time you inhale, then exhale. Notice what happens in your inner being as you pause to take those breaths. Now...breathe.

Busy leader, did something within you resist stopping to breathe? Even if you did it, did something in you fight against it? Did something insist, "I don't have time"?

Value

In our culture, busyness is considered a status symbol, a mark of a true leader. We highly value it.

We do not value rest. We treat "downtime" as a necessary evil. If we absolutely cannot go a step further, we "crash" for a few moments—and feel guilty for the duration. To our way of thinking, rest equals laziness. In our psyche, rest is sin.

Yet it's hard to dismiss the compelling testimony within us: Nonstop busyness kills. It reduces our minds to mush. It opens our bodies to disease. It replaces vitality with stupor and a crazed, mechanical running to keep up.

It's harder still to dismiss the testimony of the God who created us and breathed life into us. He established rest as a blessing and a sign of right relationship with him. He named it Sabbath (see Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12,20; Isaiah 56:2; 58:13). From the beginning, he designated significantly more time for work than for Sabbath rest. Ah, but he taught rest first.

Creating people on the sixth day, the Lord God gave man and woman a huge, seemingly impossible assignment: "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it" (Genesis 1:28).

Then "on the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work" (Genesis 2:2). He stopped and breathed. He inaugurated and modeled Sabbath.

You think you have way too much to do to take time out? Adam and Eve had an entire world to subdue. The God who gave them the assignment knew it would seem they'd have to work till they dropped to make any progress at all. So from the start, he showed them the rhythm they would need to establish in order to do the task, a rhythm of work punctuated by pauses to stop and breathe. He created Adam and Eve one day, taught them rest the next day—and then set them to work.

Centuries later, God included the charge to keep Sabbath when he gave the Ten Commandments—words that he declared "are your life" (Deuteronomy 32:47).

Lest we think Sabbath strictly an Old Testament proposition, Hebrews 4:9, 11 declares, "There still remains for God's people a rest like God's resting on the seventh day... Let us, then, do our best to receive that rest" (GNT).

Under the Old Covenant, people entered Sabbath rest by heeding God's command for everyone to stop and breathe on the same day each week. Under the New Covenant, we keep Sabbath as we enter and live from the place of rest Jesus purchased for us with his own blood. Positionally, we enter rest by refusing to work for salvation but rather trusting in the finished work of Christ's death and resurrection. Experientially, we enjoy the rhythm of rest God has established for us as we heed the voice of the Spirit of Christ within: "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

Reorient

In a culture that values busyness so highly, actively seeking rest hinges on our embracing two verses of Scripture—one we often misunderstand and one we don't believe.

The verse we don't believe is Matthew 11:28: "Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'"

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We'd say we believe these words. Yet we're not experiencing what Jesus promised. As Christian leaders, we try to model the act and practice of coming to Jesus. Yet we're not rested at all.

Something's very wrong. But what?

If what you're getting isn't rest, where you're going isn't to Jesus.

If in seeking to serve Christ, you're exhausted and overloaded, dare to ask him what it is you're confusing with coming to him. Give him permission and time to show you. Respond with a contrite heart when he does.

The verse we misunderstand is Ephesians 5:16, which urges us to make "the most of your time" (NAS). How many of us take such an admonition to mean "Do the most things in the least time"?

It's what our culture urges. It's what our time-management courses teach. It's what we've been told brings promotion and success.

But *kairos*, the Greek word translated "opportunity" or "time" in Ephesians 5:16, means "the appointed time." God says: "Do the right thing at the right time." Any moment we're not doing what our Lord appointed to be done in that moment, we're not making the most of our time.

In particular, it's crucial to honor and delight in the moments God has appointed for you to rest, for his Word promises: "Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor" (Isaiah 58:13-14).

How do you recognize those moments? How do you know what to do in them? How do you delight in rest?

Ah, busy leader, you come to Jesus. As you keep coming to him, Spirit-to-spirit, he teaches you to stop and breathe.

Trust

If that sounds easy, it's not. Entering rest requires pressing in to go where you haven't believed it possible to go. By grace, you learn to reject the lie "I just can't stop." Intentionally, regularly, you punctuate periods of purposeful labor with a short pause, an interval of silence, a real rest.

If that sounds counterproductive, it's not. Sabbath rest is crucial for health, for stamina, for sanity and clarity, for overcoming setbacks, for relating deeply and well and for fully living life.

For us who follow Christ, Sabbath rest is crucial for another reason. It declares to a frantic, exhausted world that the Lord we serve is a God of love, who has our best interests at heart. It attests to our confidence that his ways truly are the ways of life. Far more loudly than words, keeping Sabbath reveals our faith in him.

Recognizing our human frailty and limitations, we know the tasks God has given us are way too big for us. Tuning out the clamor of urgency, we hear God's voice when he says to pause. Trusting our Lord to accomplish in our behalf while we rest in him, we stop to breathe.

—DEBORAH BRUNT is author of *The Esther Blessing* (Key Truths, 2014); adapted from our sister publication *Gifted for Leadership*, © 2014 Christianity Today/*Gifted for Leadership*.

Discuss

1. How does our church culture show that we value rest? How does it show that we value busyness? Is this a healthy balance?
2. What could we do to increase our value on rest?
3. What does it look like to do "the right thing at the right time"? How do we discern this? How can we help others discern this?

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Finding Rest in a Busy World*An interview with Brady Boyd.*

Genesis 1:28

*For insights on dealing with busyness, creating margin, and finding rest, read Daniel Darling's interview with Brady Boyd, the senior pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado and author of the book Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul.***I think most people who are too busy realize this, but wonder if there is a way out of it, given the crushing demands of life. What do you say to them?**

I certainly understand that most people have a tremendous amount of stress because of seemingly unending responsibilities. The truth is, though, we all have wasted space in our lives. At some point, we have to stop and evaluate what is really important and make hard choices to stop things that are simply not fruitful. Even the healthiest, holiest people have some rhythms that don't serve them well.

Maybe you need to be needed and chronically sign up for more than what your soul's capacity will allow. Maybe you consistently neglect to carve out time to spend with God each day, or you "come down" from a work week in a less-than-stellar way. Think about your own life—your own daily ebbs and flows. What rhythms aren't serving you well? Which could stand to be adjusted or altogether removed? On a sheet of paper or in your journal, jot down the unhealthy rhythms that come to mind.

Next, beside each rhythm you've noted, record the toll each one is taking on your life. For example, if you don't spend daily time reading the Scriptures or praying, you may feel your days lack purpose or that a pervasive spirit of anxiety hovers over you like a cloud. Or, if you tend to relax after a long work week by drinking too much or neglecting quality time with your family, you may feel disconnected from those you love most. If you struggle to count the cost for each unhealthy rhythm you jotted down, try asking the question, "What would be working better in my life if I could shift this rhythm from unhealthy to healthy?" The answer to that question just might reveal to you what it is you presently lack.

Does the lack of self-care for pastors, the inability to create margin, create fertile soil for sin?

Every problem I see in every person I know ultimately is a problem of moving too fast for too long in too many aspects of life. And I see a lot of problems.

Sex and money problems in marriage come back to the issue of speed. (How eager for intimacy are you, when you're exhausted at the end of yet another grueling work day?) Negligence in business practices comes back to the issue of speed.

Friendships that aren't quite clicking can usually point to the culprit of speed.

Speed is the single greatest threat to a healthy life, and it is also our greatest defense. We think if we can keep going, keep moving, keep plowing ahead, our conscience won't have time to catch us because—ha, ha!—we'll already be long gone.

And the reality is, this approach actually works. But only for a time. We must be able to live in an easy rhythm between give and take. If we cannot learn to live and breathe in this rhythm, we will place ourselves in grave danger. Maybe even the literal grave.

Sometimes the problem with busyness isn't so much an unwillingness on the part of a pastor or church leader but the people he serves who won't allow him to find rest and peace. What do you recommend to this kind of leader?

Sabbaticals are different than vacations. I believe vacations are for fun, retreats are for reflection, Sabbath days are for rest, but sabbaticals are for renewal.

Rest has to be a part of the culture of any healthy congregation. As I am writing this, I just completed a 3-month sabbatical that my elders gave me and my family after seven years of service to the church. Every full-

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time employee at New Life gets a sabbatical of varying lengths, depending on their scope of responsibility, every seven years. There were some elders who have never been a pastor who scoffed at this idea in the beginning, because they felt the church was already generous with vacation time to its employees. Sabbaticals are different than vacations. I believe vacations are for fun, retreats are for reflection, Sabbath days are for rest, but sabbaticals are for renewal.

Today, our elders have seen the fruit of giving this added time to our team. We have high morale at New Life, very little turnover, and a high level of healthy innovation and creativity. I would suggest pastors get a copy of *Addicted to Busy* for every member of their boards and let this book start some healthy dialogue about the culture of rhythm and rest at their church. We believe each of our staff should have the resources and training to fulfill their job descriptions in less than 50 hours per week and not be away from home and their families more than three nights a week, on average. This is a healthy rhythm that starts from the senior pastor and is affirmed by the church leadership.

Vocational ministry is unique in its demands because we are on the spiritual front lines for the souls of people. That is gloriously difficult work that requires seasons of rest.

If the current leadership does not understand or is not supportive, I can predict what is next—frustration, burnout, and ultimately a new pastor and staff every 3-5 years. Vocational ministry is unique in its demands because we are on the spiritual front lines for the souls of people. That is gloriously difficult work that requires seasons of rest.

—DANIEL DARLING is vice-president of communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Activist Faith*; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2014 Christianity Today/*Leadership Journal*.

Discuss

1. Where is the “wasted space” in your life? If you aren’t sure, make a list of the rhythms of your day, then go back and identify the fruit of each task. Which tasks produced little or no fruit?
2. How can you monitor and manage your rhythms? What does a healthy rhythm look like? How do you know it is healthy?
3. What would improve in your life if you turned your unhealthy rhythms into healthy rhythms?

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The Gift of Sabbath*Surrender to God's desire to shape your soul.*

Psalm 127:2

The Internet is saturated with information for self-improvement and practical tools and techniques to become a better you. The business sections of bookstores include titles which inform leaders and executives about management skills, vision casting, and team development. Christian markets normally offer the same counsel sprinkled with a few heartfelt stories and accommodating Scriptures. As I grow as a leader, I am convinced that we do not need more tools and techniques about leadership. What we actually need is to humbly, lovingly, consistently, and intentionally engage the hearts and souls of those God has called to leadership.

We need to regularly gift our leaders with the time and space that is needed to pause, rest, reflect, and be present with the Lord without distraction. For to lead well requires regular submission and a humble surrender to God. In his book *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*, Reggie McNeal writes, “The first order of responsibility for spiritual leaders [is] to reflect the heart of God to the people around them. . . Leaders whose hearts and lives turn out as divine masterpieces help those who are in their sphere of influence become more aware of who God is, understand his engagement with the world, and know how they can participate more fully in his mission of building the kingdom.” Leaders who desire to influence others with integrity over an extended period of time regularly practice surrendering their hearts to God by resting to contemplate long enough to allow themselves to be changed by him. In the quiet moments, God shapes every aspect of our existence as his servants.

He does this by reminding us of his power, while strengthening and using us even in our weaknesses. Because of his supreme power, and not the strength of our efforts, efficiency, giftedness, talents, or those of our team, we can take rest. In the beginning when God spoke his masterpiece into existence, he looked around at the end of the sixth day and acknowledged its perfection. He essentially said, “I have done a great work.” On the seventh day, God finished the work and he rested. From the beginning of time, God himself modeled for us the rhythm of work, appreciating and gaining pleasure from our work, and then resting regularly so that we can go out and work again. For the nature of work—the ability to create, cultivate, grow, and lead—is a part of our divine calling. Just as we are called to work, we are also called to a weekly day’s rest, or Sabbath keeping, acknowledging our human limitations so as not to burn ourselves out, hinder our earthly relationships, or make shameful attempts to usurp God’s authority.

In addition to weekly Sabbath keeping, God has given us the gift of sleep. Physical sleep is definitely something to value, and our souls also long for spiritual rest. The Psalmist wrote, “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he [that is, God] grants sleep to those he loves (Psalm 127:2 (NIV)).” As leaders, there are times when we are under intense stress and the weight of our responsibility seems unbearable. It is during those times when we are tempted to work harder, rise earlier, or stay up later even after we have put in an honest day’s work. This passage reminds us that these actions are inappropriate—and in some cases sinful—responses, for our moments of greatest need give us opportunities to trust God all the more and must therefore become our moments of greatest surrender.

God has given us Sabbath just as he has given us sleep. Yet sometimes we go to bed and then awake only to find that our souls are still weary. A weary soul is an indicator that we have a poor view of God, our love for him has grown cold, we have an inaccurate or inflated view of ourselves, or we have brokenness and unconfessed sin in our relationships. Either way, we are called to confront these issues and come to God with our restlessness. “Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).” In addition to physical rest for our bodies, God himself provides rest for our souls.

If we believe that God cares about our whole person, and that he is concerned about our physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational well-being, then why do we so often forgo the opportunities we have to take Sabbaths and sleep, or to rest and retreat? As least part of the reason we do not pause to take breaks is fear and a false sense of control.

Most of the time there is a general understanding, though not an acceptance, that we cannot do everything that we want done in a given day, at least not to our standard of perfection. We defeat ourselves while pondering questions like, *Will they think that I am unprofessional if I take sick days from the office and don't check email on the days I am actually sick? What if I am not "on" 24 hours at home? Will my husband look for satisfaction*

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someplace else? What will happen to my kids if I am not with them? Does it make me a poor mother if I verbalize that I actually need a break? Is taking time for myself a selfish act? Is taking a retreat a luxury? What would other people think if...? What if I am not in charge?

Pride is at the root of each of these questions. Proverbs 16:18 reads, “Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.” It is the pride of life that makes us physically sick, weary, and worn.

In this world we carry too much weight on our shoulders, and its weight that God has promised to carry for us if we allow him. True freedom comes from total surrender, embracing all of who God is and all of who we are in him. Peter Scazzero wrote, “The essence of being in God’s image is our ability, like God, to stop. We imitate God by stopping our work and resting.” So don’t worry. “My soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him (Psalm 62:5, NIV).”

—NATASHA SISTRUNK ROBINSON is a writer, inspirational speaker, leadership and mentoring trainer, and human trafficking advocate; adapted from our sister publication *Gifted for Leadership*, © 2014 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gifted-for-leadership/>.

Discuss

1. How often do we “gift our leaders with the time and space that is needed to pause, rest, reflect, and be present with the Lord without distraction”?
2. What might this look like?
3. If the questions we spend our time worrying about represent our own pride, what types of questions should we be asking as we manage our time?

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Learning to Say No

It's not selfish; it's necessary if we want to bless and continue to bless.

The church I lead has a café. We renovated our fellowship hall 11 years ago to welcome and bless our neighbors. And we have undoubtedly done that. But two years ago we closed the café for Christmas and had serious doubts about whether it would ever open again. Some difficult and extreme measures had to be taken if we wanted this treasured place to continue. And after two hard years, we are thrilled to find our café thriving. More than ever before.

From the beginning, the café was to be different from businesses whose main goal is to grow themselves. We wanted to be generous in all we did. Which almost ran us into the ground. Generosity is undoubtedly a goal we still have but we have come to define it in new ways, ways that I have found helpful for ministry, on both an organizational and a personal level.

The purpose of a business is to earn more than you spend. To provide for the business's needs. To continue. It reinvests in itself for the purpose of sustaining itself and growing itself. It makes choices that will keep itself alive. This is good and normal for a business. But it can seem self-centered and inward-focused compared to ministry.

Because a ministry exists to bless, to give, to serve others. And so in everything we do in ministry, we empty ourselves, give away more than we receive. Serve much and ask little in return. Which looks very outward-focused, very selfless. And it is. Until we run ourselves out of business. And then what help are we to anyone?

If we believe it is good for us to be here, doing what we're doing (whether we're a Christian café, a church or an individual who serves somehow), isn't it an important part of our call not only to bless but to continue to bless? And so we're learning, in our decision making processes, to bring this dual calling into play. We're learning to ask: What will help us to not only bless, but to continue to bless?

“What did this actually mean? It meant that we had to say “no” to anything that limited our ability to bless and continue to bless. Which meant that anything that kept people from feeling welcome we had to resist, including behaviors of other guests. Some regulars felt so welcome in the café that it felt like home, and for some that meant bringing their dogs inside and for another that meant clipping his toenails in the café! This meant that those few people were so comfortable that it made many others uncomfortable. It threatened both our ability to welcome everyone and our ability to keep welcoming everyone (if we lost too many customers it would begin to affect our financial sustainability).

So we had to say, “You are welcome. And your dog is welcome ... on the porch” and “You are welcome. But your toenail clippers are not.”

So it's a balance. We make sure we are blessing people now, and not just accumulating resources for later. And in our ministry plans, rather than storing away resources to only protect our continuation or giving resources to only empty ourselves, we ask how can we bless in a way that allows us to continue to bless, year after year? In our use of our personal time and energy, rather than keeping ourselves to ourselves to protect our personal continuation or giving ourselves to the point of exhaustion, how can we bless in a way that allows us to continue to bless, year after year?

A while back, a few members of our community raised the idea of starting a ministry to host a regular meal for homeless people in our neighborhood. As a church and café that is all about hospitality, it seemed like a natural fit. It's a meaningful cause, there is certainly a need, and we have some resources to offer.

But as we explored the health and safety issues, and the time and energy of our staff, we had to say it wasn't possible for us. It felt wrong to say no to a ministry to the homeless, but had to see that, if we were committed to our existing café ministry, to continue to bless in that way meant we couldn't ask our café staff to both run a café and manage the ongoing demands of a weekly meal ministry.

We had to determine what our capacities could absorb and what would push us into unsustainable overload.

This divide sometimes seems to provide a choice of selfishness vs. selflessness. But that's a false choice. Instead, when we understand that the best way to bless is to be here to bless long-term, these issues are not “our needs vs. their needs” issues. Instead, if our ability to continue to be here means continuing to bless, even as we sustain ourselves as ministries, organizations, and ministers, we are doing so for the sake of others.

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—MANDY SMITH is lead pastor of University Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2015 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net.

Discuss

1. Why is it hard to say no? When, or in what areas of your life or ministry, do you struggle with it most?
2. How can this criteria for when to say no impact your own time management? How would it shape the tasks and ministries you spend time on?
3. What will help us, as individuals and as a ministry, to not only bless, but to continue to bless?

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Overcoming Overload

Develop a practical time-management strategy.

Exodus 20:8-10

Every leader must learn the art of juggling. By grouping all my activities into four major categories and setting aside time for each one, I keep my work balanced with my family time and my spiritual life. Fewer things get dropped.

My four *R*'s for overcoming overload are *rest time*, *results time*, *response time*, and *refocus time*.

When a juggler gets into a rhythm, he stays with it for awhile, concentrating on his routine. He would never think of taking a phone call or checking his email while flipping knives. Similarly, I focus on one objective at a time, allowing enough time to do it well. I plan my week in large chunks of time—full-day or half-day units—each devoted to one of the four *R*'s. When I try to do more than one *R* in a block of time, I get frustrated. My stress level goes up, and my productivity goes down.

So when I rest, I truly rest. When I'm in results time, I don't let distractions intrude. When I'm in response time, I give myself away as a humble servant. And when I refocus, I take time to listen to God, reflect, and rethink plans for the future.

The key is to separate the four categories, and then keep them separate.

Rest Time

In rest time, I focus on my health, especially in my spiritual life, marriage, and family. God built into creation a universal need for rest, and he commands us to set aside one day a week for it. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:8-10). God designed all creation around the principle of Sabbath rest. We are healthier and more productive when we don't work 24-7.

During rest time, I do absolutely nothing related to the job. No phone calls, no email, no job-related reading, no quick stops at the church "just to check on one thing."

The congregations I have served have ranged in size from a 28-member church plant to my current church of more than 5,000. In each setting, one of my best disciplines was taking Mondays as a Sabbath rest for my wife and me. That has kept me sane and happy under the pressures of ministry. I dedicate one day a week to refreshing my soul and my marriage, and I've never regretted the investment.

Results Time

Results time is dedicated to doing "main things." Priorities may change as a church grows, job descriptions change, or God begins new things, but whatever the main things are at a given time, they are defined by three characteristics:

1. *They are mission critical.* A main task is essential to the health and growth of the ministry. It must be done well if the mission is to move forward.
2. *They have top priority.* Though a church's focus will change over time, its leaders must prayerfully set priorities and have them approved.
3. *They grow out of unique abilities.* Over time, I have reduced the scope of my responsibilities to reflect my unique abilities. Where God-given gifts, passions, and experiences converge, a leader finds his or her unique ability zone.

When we structure our schedule around main things and give them our best effort, we produce our best work. Apart from an occasional crisis, we have no excuse for pushing main things into our least-productive times. For me, sermon preparation is a main thing, so I take most of Wednesday, Thursday morning, and Friday morning for prayer, study, and preparation time. Sermon preparation is blocked out on my schedule every week for now and forevermore, amen.

Dedicating large chunks of time to this main thing allows me to be more productive during other times of the week. I don't stress out about my sermon on Tuesday when I'm busy with meetings and administrative details because I know that Wednesday is coming.

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Response Time

Response time is for cleanup and follow-up. These things are important, but not critical to the church's mission. As a servant leader, I realize that the people I serve have their own agendas and their own needs. I want to be responsive to them, but I must also protect my rest and results times.

In ministry, unexpected things happen. We may be tempted to pick up little bits of debris here and there, but if we sweep everything together into larger piles and deal with them in good-size blocks of response time, we'll knock out the work more efficiently. I set aside three afternoons per week for responding to email, voice mail, staff issues, counseling, and other work that flows from the well of ministry.

Serving the needs of others is important. Meeting those needs, however, is not a leader's main thing. It is important that we not allow the needs of others to control our times of rest, results, and refocusing. If we first set aside blocks of uninterrupted time for rest and results, we can respond joyfully to other people's needs.

Refocusing Time

In refocusing, we take time to assess, adjust, and plan for the future. Life and leadership are constantly changing. Even if our organizations appear stable, the world around us is in flux. When our priorities shift, we learn to refine our unique abilities. If we experience a tough month, we must refocus our plans for rest, results, and response.

Refocusing does not mean completely changing direction. It means taking the opportunity to make the fine adjustments needed to keep life in balance. It asks, "Am I getting the rest and results time I need for personal health and the advance of the mission? If not, what changes should I make?"

When I break from my routine to reflect on my ministry, I get fresh insight for maintaining the elusive equilibrium of servant leadership. To provide adequate time and prayer for the small and the sweeping changes that God wants me to make, I find it necessary to refocus on different segments of my life at different times. I use three types of refocus time:

1. *Weekly refocus time.* Refocusing should be done at the beginning or end of each week. Even a few hours of refocus time per week vastly improve the future. We need to ask ourselves honestly, "So, how is it going, really?" We must also review the other R's, asking, "Am I resting as I should? Am I maintaining my marriage and family to the glory of God? Am I providing prime time for my main thing? Am I responding with a servant's heart to those who need me?"
2. *Monthly refocus time.* Our staff members take a half day every month to get away from the office. They can go to the beach or the park with a lawn chair, a yellow tablet, and their ministry plan. "Reflect, dream, listen to God, and refocus," I tell them. "Come back with some fresh goals and adjustments to your priorities." It really works!
3. *Yearly refocus time.* Some pastors schedule an annual retreat for sermon planning or spiritual refreshment. I recommend dividing such retreats into three parts: (1) working on main things, (2) personal growth and enrichment, and (3) refreshing your relationship with your spouse.

—DALE BURKE is pastor of Seacoast Community Church in Encinitas, California; adapted from *The Church Leader's Answer Book* (Tyndale House), © 2006 Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Is this a practical template for your time management? How can you incorporate these principles into your current schedule?
2. Which of these four R's comes most naturally to you? Which is most difficult? How can you work to improve those that do not come naturally?
3. How can you help those you lead to better manage their time? How might this template help?

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR TIME

Interruption or Divine Appointment?

How to discern the difference.

Proverbs 4:23

It feels like it happens every week, doesn't it? You start the week with great ambitions. This week will be twice as productive as the last, you tell yourself. Study blocks won't get cheated. Your sermon will be finished early. You will be prepared for this week's staff meeting. That special project will finally get your needed attention.

Then the week starts. And your well-laid plans fly off the desk, as if a strong wind just blew through the office. It did. These sudden, powerful, and schedule-destroying windstorms are called "interruptions."

Someone shows up at the office with an emergency. And they must talk to you. Only you. Staff members keep knocking on the door for your input. An upcoming event is not ready and requires all hands on deck.

Quarrelling leaders drag you into their conflict. A longtime member is hospitalized. A beloved member passes on. Some seemingly random but pressing need is dropped in your lap.

You have goals to reach. The schedule is set. But your dream of a balanced life and organized ministry never happens. You almost can't get out of bed without stumbling over the day's clutter.

How can you distinguish between unnecessary interruptions and divine appointments?

Pastors have important work to do every week. We also have urgent matters that arise unexpectedly that we need to address. The challenge is, not all things are both important and urgent. It requires wisdom and practice to determine what is important or urgent—and what can be safely ignored.

But I believe there's something deeper we need to do, something both simple and profound. It is the key to being marked present when and where the Lord wants you. Do this, and you will have a compass to guide you through busy days, weeks, and months of pastoral work.

The key is to guard your daily devotional time.

We know a healthy quiet time is essential to communion with God and spiritual growth. And we press the importance of the spiritual disciplines on our congregation members. We readily tell our members they should spend time with God before they spend time with other people. But we don't always practice it. As a result, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by hurry, noise, crowds, deadlines, and interruptions. Nothing can lift this burden and simplify our lives like guarding and growing our time with God.

There are times when ministry is an unspeakable joy. Other times, not so much. Some days, I can't wait to get to work. Other days, I can't wait for my next vacation. I lay down some nights feeling like I have made a difference. Then there are sleepless nights, when I cannot stop my mind from downloading more work to do.

The interesting thing is that these conflicting moods rarely have anything to do with my schedule. It has everything to do with the attitude of my heart. You cannot guard your schedule if you do not guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23).

A quarterback is still working, even when the defense is on the field. He doesn't just chill out and rehydrate. He talks to the coaches in the press box. He reviews pictures of the previous set of downs. He receives instruction on how to attack the defensive schemes. The unnoticed "devotional" work on the sidelines enables the quarterback to perform better on the field. The same goes for pastors. Check in with the Coach in the press box before you lead the team on the field. Doing so will make all the difference when you're deciding which play to run.

—H.B. CHARLES is pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Church, Jacksonville, Florida; adapted from our sister publication *Leadership Journal*, © 2015 Christianity Today/*Leadership Journal*.

Discuss

1. Think through your past few weeks. What has derailed you in your life and ministry? How could these have been prevented?
2. How does regular quiet time with God help you discern what is important and what is not? When have you seen this in your life and ministry?
3. How could you shape your regular devotion time to better help prepare you to make these calls?

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR TIME

Time-Management Strategies

8 keys to getting it all done.

1. **Determine your peak production time, and use that time for the tough jobs.** “Larks” work best in the early morning hours; those who are most effective at night are called “owls.” Decide whether you are a lark or an owl, and plan your work accordingly.
2. **Don’t try to accomplish difficult tasks in one sitting.** A succession of mini work sessions will probably be more productive than working late into the night on an involved project.
3. **Conduct hundred-dollar meetings.** A church member told his committee chairman, “I can make at least a hundred dollars any evening I’m working. I’ll be a responsible committee member, but I want you to know that every time I attend a meeting, it costs me a hundred dollars.” Acknowledging that everyone’s time is valuable, the committee chairman decided never to hold a meeting worth less than a hundred dollars. With planning and organization, a meeting can be efficient and effective.
4. **Use a wastebasket file.** You can add valuable time to your day by throwing junk mail away without opening and reading it. That’s right—you can trash many things before they cross your desk.
5. **Ask, “What will happen if I don’t do this right now?”** If the answer is nothing, consider whether the job needs to be done at all. Often we spend time on relatively unimportant tasks that only matter to us.
6. **Use only one calendar.** A busy schedule necessitates a planning calendar, but only one. One calendar on the desk at work, another on the wall at home, and a third one in your briefcase will guarantee trouble. It’s too hard to maintain current information on all three calendars. Use a digital calendar that syncs between your computers and phone.
7. **Consolidate tasks.** Planning often prevents poor performance. Try to return all phone calls at a particular time in the day. Write all your letters in one sitting. Check email only twice a day.
8. **Visit on the other person’s turf.** This helps to control the length of meetings because it’s easier to end a session when you’re in another person’s office or home than when the other person is visiting you.

—JIM DANIELSON; adapted from *The Church Leader’s Answer Book* (Tyndale House), © 2006 Christianity Today.

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR TIME

Further Exploration

Resources for time management.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.

- “Time Management” Assessment Pack
- “To Delegate or Not to Delegate?” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Organization and Time Management” Women Leaders

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Addicted to Busy: Recovery for the Rushed Soul by *Brady Boyd*. We are all spread too thin, taking on more than we can handle, trying to do so much—almost as if we are afraid that if we were to take a moment of rest, we might discover that all our busyness is covering up an essential lack in our lives. But God never meant for us to be so busy. God desires for us to have rest and peace. Brady Boyd shows you how to live a life that embraces stillness and solitude, so you can find the peace that God wants for you. (David C. Cook, 2014; ISBN: 9780781410342)

Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul by *Bill Hybels*. Offering practical tips and spiritual insights to help you declutter your soul, Bill Hybels encourages you to stop doing what doesn't matter and create a God-first schedule so you can experience purpose, fulfillment, connectedness, and joyful productivity. (Tyndale House, 2014; ISBN: 9781414391229)

Rest: Living in Sabbath Simplicity by *Keri Wyatt Kent*. Inviting you to find a balance between work and refreshment, Kent explores six aspects of this Christian spiritual practice—resting, reconnecting, revising, pausing, playing, and praying—to help you experience renewed energy, grace, and joy. (Zondervan, 2008; ISBN: 9780310285977)

A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders by *Reggie McNeal*. Reggie McNeal helps leaders reflect on the ways in which God is shaping them by letting us see God at work in the lives of four quintessential biblical leaders: Moses, David, Jesus, and Paul. McNeal identifies the formative influences upon these leaders, which he sees as God's ways of working in their lives: the same influences at work today forming leaders for ministry in our times. He explores the shaping influence of culture, call, community, conflict, and the commonplace. (Jossey-Bass, 2011; ISBN: 9781118103180)