



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# STEWARDED YOUR TIME



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# INTRODUCTION

I am beginning this field guide on stewarding and managing your time with what I regard as the single most important tip you will ever learn when it comes to mastering your time and deploying it for God's purposes. This may not be the tip you want, but I am certain that it's the tip you need. This may sound like exaggeration, but I assure you that it is reality. It's reality because this tip has the power to transform everything else you believe, know, or do about managing your time. It has done that for my life and the lives of many others.

Here it is: More important than any system of productivity or any system that helps you master your time, is establishing your motive.

The reason so many people fail in their attempts to build an enduring system of productivity, and never learn to steward their time faithfully, is that they focus on systems before they establish motives. Discouraged by the conviction that they are prone to waste time and alarmed by the regularity with which they miss appointments or fail to meet deadlines, they go looking for systems and techniques. That is an understandable response, but the problem with it is that they are addressing the symptoms to the neglect of the cause. They are looking for quick tips or easy fixes when the solution is actually much more complicated than that. They are mopping the water from the floor without patching the crack in the pipe — dealing with the manifestation of the issue but without tracing it to its source.

For that reason, this field guide to stewarding and managing your time must begin with the matter of motives — by addressing questions of *why* before it moves to matters of *how*. It is only when you have established the reason you ought to steward your time that you have prepared yourself to build a system that will allow you to do it with confidence and endurance.

A good bit into this field guide you'll find an entire section that lays out

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techniques for productivity and the plan to create an entire system. You may be tempted to scroll down to it right now, but I urge you to restrain yourself. I urge you to discipline yourself to engage in these preparatory matters, to consider what God himself says about stewarding and managing your time. I urge you to lay a solid foundation and only then to begin to construct a system on top of it. It will take more time and greater effort, but I assure you that it will also reap greater rewards.

### ***The Plan***

Let me tell you how this field guide will unfold.

First, I am going to take you to a passage in the Bible that will both challenge and motivate you. It will help you understand why it is so important that you express your commitment to the Lord through faithful time management. And it will also help you understand the aim in managing your time. Along the way we will pause to ensure you know what it means to be a steward and why the Bible so often relies on that concept.

Having done that, we will begin to discuss a method for productivity. That will involve completing a kind of self-audit in which you will determine what God means for you to steward and manage. And then it will lead to you build a simple system that you can implement in your life — a simple system that will bring some big gains in your personal organization and in your confidence that you are deliberately directing your life toward the best and highest priorities.

And then, as you reach the conclusion, you'll begin to live out that system with the joy of knowing that you are remembering what you need to remember, doing what you need to do, and giving attention to what is worthy of your attention (while confidently directing it away from what is unworthy of your attention). You will be successfully stewarding and managing the time God has given you to serve his purposes in this world.

### ***Work and Rest***

Few things in life are sweeter than capping a hard day's work with a good night's sleep. If you've ever spent a day outdoors doing tough physical labor — carrying heavy loads, swinging an axe, digging a ditch — you know the joy of collapsing into bed to rest. Few things in life are sweeter than a well-earned sleep.

But few things in life are more shameful than sleeping when you ought to be at work. When there are tasks to carry out and duties to fulfill, then you have no business sleeping and no business resting. Your calling is to

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rise, to serve and to bless, to love and to care. It's shameful to stay asleep when there is work to be done.

Rest and sleep, rising and working — these were on the mind of the Apostle Paul when he wrote his letter to the Romans. Let me explain.

Beginning in chapter 12, he begins to explain how Christians are to live before one another and how they are to live toward the world around them. The key is love. Christians are always to relate to other people in ways that express love.

Hence, he gives instructions like, “Let love be genuine” (v9) and “Love one another with brotherly affection” (v10). He says, “Live in harmony with one another” (v16) and “so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (v18). In chapter 13 he sums it all up by saying: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (v9). As a Christian, you are called to love others in the way Christ has loved you: humbly, selflessly, sacrificially, creatively, extravagantly.

And it's in this context of love for others that Paul suddenly holds up an alarm clock whose bell is ringing and clanging — the kind of alarm you can't ignore. It's in this context of love that Paul tells Christians, “It's time to wake up.” Look at what he says in 13:11–14:

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

I want you to hear this call to wake up. And I want you to obey it. I want you to wake up so you can carry out the duties God has assigned to you.

I have already expressed that a field guide is meant to be practical — to ultimately lead toward some kind of methodology. And I have already promised that we will get there. But before we can establish *how* to get things done we need to establish *what* needs to be done and before that, *why* what we do matters in the first place. Hence we are going to turn our attention to two calls to action from these words in Romans — calls to action that will teach us about the importance of faithfully stewarding and

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managing the time God has apportioned to us. It is only after we lay the appropriate foundation that we can build a method that will prove successful and long-lasting.

Through these verses, God calls us to wake up and to get to work. And to be faithful in stewarding and managing our time, we need to do exactly this — to wake from our slumber and diligently be who God calls us to be and to do what God calls us to do.

### **Stewardship**

Before we take a close look at Paul's instructions, we need to consider a key concept for the way we use our time and live our lives: *stewardship*. A steward is a manager or supervisor. Crucially, a steward is *not* an owner. A steward's task is to accept responsibility for what another person owns. Christians are familiar with stewardship when it comes to money — we understand that all money ultimately belongs to God and, therefore, we are not owners of our own money but stewards of God's money. Similarly, we are not owners of our gifts and talents, but stewards of the gifts and talents God has graciously given to us. And what is true of finances and attributes is also true of time. Time belongs to God as the one who apportions it to us and the one who will require a reckoning for the way we have used it.

Hence, in his letter to the church at Ephesus Paul can say, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15–16). We are not merely to make use of the time we are given, but to make the *best* use of it. More literally, we are to "redeem" the time, to "cash it in" to achieve the highest and best returns.

Similarly, Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). To number our days is to be conscious of their importance and committed to treating each one carefully. Our lives are brief, but each day is a gift from God that is meant to be taken hold of and maximized for his purposes.

Hence, we relate to time as we relate to money and talents and so much else — as people who have received a precious gift from God and who are called to manage it faithfully and well. The life that is well lived is the life of a steward.

With the understanding in place that we are stewards of time rather than owners, and knowing that we are responsible before God for the time he

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gives us, let's turn our attention to Paul's wakeup call.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Do you understand the biblical concept of stewardship and how it compares to ownership? And are you comfortable with the way stewardship places the onus on you to deploy your time to carry out God's purposes rather than to pursue your own purposes?
2. Do you think you are currently being a faithful steward of your time? If God were to remind you today of all the time he has given you since you became a Christian and then ask for an accounting of that time, how might you respond to him?
3. In what ways do you think you are currently stewarding your time well and in what ways are you aware of the need for growth?



# 1

## WAKE UP

It would be strange to tell someone to wake up when he is already awake. A teenager may ask mom or dad to wake him up the next morning so he can be certain that he will be on time for work. But if early the next morning his parents find him in the kitchen already dressed and eating breakfast, they will not start ringing a bell and shouting, “Time to wake up!” It’s clear he doesn’t need a wakeup call (it’s also clear they have witnessed a miracle!).

In that vein, it’s safe to say that God, through the Apostle Paul, would not be calling people to wake up if they were not asleep. He would not waste words telling them to do what they were already doing. This tells us that at least some of the people who were on his mind as he wrote his letter to the church in Rome must have been asleep. And if that was true of some of them, it’s possible that it’s true of you as well.

Of course, these people were not asleep literally. They were asleep metaphorically. God had assigned duties to them and they were failing to take those duties seriously. God had called them to be active, but they were being passive. God had called them to live seriously, but they were living flippantly. Paul’s urgency was linked directly to their apathy.

### ***Are You Asleep?***

Is it possible that you are asleep in the way that concerned Paul? How could you know? How could you know if *you* need this wake-up call?

The most obvious clues are going to be found in the immediate context, in what Paul has already taught and emphasized. So let’s briefly consider some of the marks of a Christian who is being lazy instead of active, a Christian who needs to wake up (which is simply another way of saying “a Christian who is not faithfully stewarding and managing his time”).

1. *First, you might be asleep if you are being conformed to the world instead of transformed to be like Christ.* In Romans 12:2 we are told, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Christians are to be markedly different from who they were before they pledged their lives to Christ and received his

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salvation. If you love worldly pleasures, if you pursue worldly ambitions, if you indulge in worldly entertainment, you're asleep to what God calls you to. Your mind needs to be renewed so your whole self can be renewed. If you have not been transformed to be like Christ, you haven't yet woken up.

2. *Second, you might be asleep if you are failing to identify and deploy the spiritual gifts God has given to you.* Romans 12:6 offers this command: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." The Holy Spirit gifts each of us in ways that allow us to bless, love, and serve one another. He calls us to diligently discover these gifts and deploy them. If you are not using your gifts to serve others, and especially other Christians within the context of the local church, you may well need to wake up.
3. *Third, you might be asleep if you are not actively expressing love to others.* Consider the words of Romans 12:9–10 and ask yourself: Does this describe me? "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." Could that be said of you? Is your whole self and your whole life marked by a commitment to loving others? Is that on your mind when you drive to church on Sunday, when you spend time with your small group, when you relate to friends? If you're not doing that, perhaps it's because you haven't woken up.
4. *Fourth, you might be asleep if you are not giving to everyone what you owe to them.* Romans 13:7 urges, "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." If you aren't submitting to the authorities God has placed in your life, if you're disrespecting those you ought to respect and dishonoring those you ought to honor, you're not loving your neighbor as yourself. You're asleep and need to wake up.

Would that describe your life? Is your life being transformed by God? Are you submitting to the authorities in your life and giving to everyone what is owed to them? Are you expressing your God-given giftedness in ways that serve others? And are you loving others, even far beyond the way you are being loved?

The fact is, a lot of Christians remain asleep. They have put their faith in Jesus, they have received his forgiveness, but they are not yet living in the ways God calls them to live. They're still asleep to God's great purpose for

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them. They're still not understanding how the gospel is meant to prompt and motivate a particular kind of life. The gospel of the first eleven chapters of Romans is meant to work itself out in the life described in the final five chapters. So if you love the doctrine of Romans, you need to ask whether you are living the life of Romans. And if you aren't living the life of Romans, you need to ask whether you truly understand the doctrine of Romans.

If you are not living that way, or if you are uncertain whether you are living that way, Paul tells you to wake up. He holds the alarm clock high in the air and wants you to hear it ringing and clanging. It is ringing and clanging to tell you to wake up.

### ***This Is the Time to Wake Up***

Because some of the Christians in Rome were asleep, and because it's possible that you too are asleep, you need to hear Paul's wake-up call. Here's what he says in verse 11: "You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand."

First he says "You know the time." He means that you know the season, you know the context, you know the reality we live in right now — the reality that we live between the time of Christ's ascension and return. We live in this time in which God has assigned to each of us sacred duties. He has a certain kind of life for us to live, a certain kind of testimony for us to display.

Then he says, "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." In other words, it's like he draws a big timeline with the day you came to Christ on one side and the day you go to be with Christ on the other side. You are meant to consider this: Where are you on that timeline? You don't actually know how close you are to the end, but what you do know is that time has passed since the beginning. You have this finite amount of time to serve God's purpose and a portion of it has already elapsed. You're closer to the end of your time today than you were yesterday, closer to the end this year than you were last year. And that leaves questions hanging: What have you done with the time that has passed? And what do you intend to do with the time that remains? That time is short.

How short? Verse 12 provides an answer: "The night is far gone; the day is at hand." Paul wants you to imagine that, right now, you are in the darkness just before dawn. Night is almost over and daytime is almost here. And, in his picture, Jesus Christ is going to return when the sun rises. That's the picture he's painting. And already the sky is getting a little bit

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brighter, already the first birds are beginning to sing, already the darkness is beginning to give way to dawn. You're on the cusp. You're on the edge. Time is short. The end is almost here.

There is an urgency to Paul's words. If Christ was returning at sunset, you'd have lots of time to dawdle. But in Paul's picture, Christ is returning at sunrise, which means the hour is short. The task is urgent. The time is now — the time for wakefulness and the time for action.

I said earlier that few things in life are more shameful than sleeping when you ought to be at work. When there are tasks to carry out and duties to fulfill, then you have no business sleeping and no business resting. It's shameful to stay asleep when there is work to be done. And Paul makes it clear that you have no business now being asleep and lazing around — you have a task to do.

Of course, questions remain: What is this task? What does it look like? How do you live as someone who is fully awake to God and his purposes? That brings us to our next heading: God has work for you to do.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Are there ways in which you remain asleep? Did any of the above material convict you?
2. When you read Proverbs 6:9–11 and other passages related to sloth, does it describe any present realities and habits in your life? How might you respond in repentance?

# 2

## GOD HAS WORK FOR YOU TO DO

What are the tasks to which God calls you to awaken? What tasks await you? What are you to do instead of resting and dozing? Said another way: What are you to steward and manage your time *toward*?

Paul has said, “The night is far gone; the day is at hand.” And then he adds the words, “*so then*.” These are words of purpose, words that move from waking up to getting active. They bridge from the wake-up call to the explanation of what Christians are to do once they have heeded the alarm: “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12).

### ***The Twin Tasks of Awakened People***

Paul loves this metaphor of taking off and putting on. He uses it in many of his letters to convey the idea that when you come to Christ, there is a twin task that awaits you. You must stop some things and begin other things. You must stop some behaviors and begin others. And he depicts this with clothing.

In this little illustration, a soldier has been asleep when suddenly the trumpet blows to warn that the enemy is attacking. He’s been in bed wearing his pajamas but the alarm sounds and he needs to spring out of bed and put on his uniform. And you need to do something like that when you come to Christ. Of course, it’s not clothes you need to take off and put on, but behavior, attitudes, desires, and everything else that is associated with the old self — the one that has been lazily asleep to God’s purpose. It all needs to be replaced with the new self.

Here Paul ramps it up a little by telling you not only to *take off* but to *cast off* the works of darkness. It’s not enough to dawdle and change slowly. That soldier needs to rip off his sleeping clothes, put on his fighting clothes, and make his way to the front lines. That soldier is now awake, out of bed, dressed for the task, and ready for action.

Are you? Are you awake to God’s great purpose and are you dressed in the appropriate actions and attitudes? In other words, are you diligently

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putting off the old and putting on the new? Christian growth is not merely a matter of actions but also of character — not just what you do but who you are. In fact, if you want to act more like Christ you need to become more like Christ. As important as it is to *do*, it is equally important to *become* because your actions will always follow your character.

As Paul extends his teaching, he explains what it means to take off those night clothes (or, by contrast, to keep them on). In verse 13 he says, “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”

To walk properly is to walk with decorum, to walk with dignity, to live in a way that is appropriate and fitting for one who has been saved by God and become part of his family. As a Christian, you are to walk decently instead of indecently, to walk nobly instead of ignobly.

Paul lists three pairs of words that each describe a form of indecent and inappropriate living for a Christian — actions or attitudes that are associated with the old way of living rather than the new. It’s not an exhaustive list, but it is representative.

1. First he mentions “orgies and drunkenness.” I understand that if you’re the kind of person who reads a couple thousand words into a field guide, you’re probably not the kind of person who gets blind drunk or participates in orgies (which in the Bible tends to refer to drinking parties rather than explicitly sexual occasions). But we should consider what lies behind the words. While they overtly refer to a life of partying and carousing, a life of drinking and addiction, they represent a life of escapism, an unserious life spent avoiding the duties God has assigned. And that may be something you can identify with more than outright drunkenness.
2. Next is “sexual immorality and sensuality.” Those refer to sins of the body, sins of sexuality. This is using other people for your own pleasure and misusing God’s good gifts for selfish purposes instead of God’s purposes. Few factors in society today have made a deeper impact on stewarding and managing time than becoming engaged in sexual immorality, most notably through pornography.
3. Then comes “quarreling and jealousy.” These are social sins that affect your relationship with other people. You may be far too upright to drink yourself drunk, you may be far too noble to sleep with someone who isn’t your spouse, but if you are quarrelsome, if you like to pick a fight, if you are petty and jealous, if you are discontent with what God has given you and

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envious of what he has given others, you're living in a way that dishonors him. You're still asleep, still acting like someone who is slumbering through the night instead of waking up to serve the Lord throughout the day. You might be missing opportunities to steward your time toward the highest of purposes because you're giving it to the lowest of purposes.

What are you called to do instead of frittering away your life in escapism and indulgence, in sexual immorality and senseless bickering? We are accustomed to being told to imitate Christ or be like Christ. Here Paul expresses it a little differently. He says, in verse 14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." As you put off those ugly behaviors, you are to put on Christ. In other words, you are to wear Christ as your clothing or as your armor. That's a picture of being fully reliant on him, fully devoted to him, fully submitted to him, and doing your utmost to imitate him in every way.

Paul wraps up the verse by insisting you are to "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." That means not even considering how to feed the flesh or how to indulge its evil desires. It means not longing for sin or fantasizing about committing it and it means refusing to dwell on the gratification that comes with sin instead of the gratification that comes with obeying God and carrying out his will. It calls you to ensure you are not allowing your mind to dwell on sin when it should be dwelling on Christ and that you aren't spending your time planning how to sin when you should be planning how to serve the Lord. In other words, it calls you to steward your time toward what delights God and away from whatever offends him.

### ***What Binds the Sins Together***

Now we get to the key. What binds together all of these sins is this: *they are a failure to love*. This matters because the great implication of the gospel that Paul has so wonderfully outlined in chapters 1 through 11 of Romans is love! To fail to love is to fail to understand and apply the gospel. If you believe the doctrine of Romans 1–11 you need to live out the life of Romans 12–16. And that's a life wholly committed to love.

The gospel calls you to love in the way you have been loved. It calls you to clothe yourself in Christ who is the very embodiment of love. Your duty, your calling, your responsibility, your privilege is to live your life in love — loving others as a display of God's love for you and your love for him.

What this means is that your productivity is far bigger than yourself. Your task in life is not to invent some personalized purpose and live toward it, not to examine the depths of your own heart and fabricate some sense of inner meaning. Your task is to love, to steward and manage your time

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toward love. The best reason to be productive is so you can express your love and gratitude to God in love and service to others. This is the life God calls you to. This is your management and stewardship.

### ***Love Your Neighbor***

Every Christian should have a deep longing to be productive. You should have a deep longing to be productive — to devote the best of your time to the best of all purposes, to faithfully and deliberately manage your time in such a way that you are carrying out God’s will for you. Productivity, as I have defined it elsewhere, is “effectively stewarding your gifts, talents, time, energy, and enthusiasm for the good of others and the glory of God.”

Productivity is deploying your gifts (the spiritual gifts God gives you primarily to serve other Christians), your talents (those innate abilities he has given you), time (the number of days and years he has allocated to you), energy (the ebb and flow of your abilities through the day, week, and even the course of life), and enthusiasm (those matters for which he has given you an especially pronounced passion) — and all of this to glorify his name by doing good to others. It is taking all you are and all you have and turning it outward in service to other people. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). As you faithfully steward and manage your time to glorify God by serving others, you are walking in the footsteps of our Savior who so faithfully stewarded his time to glorify God by serving you.

And this is what I want you to take away from this field guide more than anything — you are called to direct your life toward love. You are called to relentlessly direct your life to this best and highest of all purposes.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. In absolute honesty, are you in bondage to any of the sins that Paul outlines? If you are, can you understand how that will impact your ability to faithfully steward and manage your time? What might God be calling you to do about those sins?
2. Why is a life stewarded toward expressing your love for God by loving other people such a fulfilling life? Why is it more fulfilling than living toward a sense of inner purpose? 3.
3. Consider Jesus and how he stewarded his time. What can you learn from his example?
4. What specific actions might God be calling you to take so you replace selfish living with selfless living and self-indulgence with expressing love to others?



# 3

## A METHOD FOR STEWARDSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

This brings us at last to methodology. And methodology matters because your calling is so important and your task is so urgent. There are people to love. There are opportunities to serve. There are blessings to bestow. And by implementing some methods, you can grow in your ability to take advantage of each one.

Hence, I would like to help you build a method — a set of habits and commitments — that will enable you to manage your time. This is not the only method, and neither is it a perfect method. But it is a method that has proven effective for me and many others in the many years I have been teaching it. It is a very good place to begin and, as you grow, you can adapt it to fit your life, your circumstances, and your personality. There are six steps.

### ***Step One: Inventory Your Responsibilities***

The first step is to inventory the responsibilities God has assigned to you. You have a finite amount of time given to you and an infinite number of potential opportunities to commit to. A financial manager needs to determine not only what to invest in, but also what *not* to invest in. And the same is true for a manager of time. You need to consider what is a responsible use of your time and what would be an irresponsible use of your time. Use the Productivity Worksheet for this step and the ones that follow.

What I would like you to do, then, is to take some time to consider your areas of responsibility. An area of responsibility is a role that God has assigned to you or a function he has given you. Some of those are innate to your humanity and some are dependent upon your circumstances.

One area of responsibility that is common to all of us is ourselves. We can label it “Personal.” We have to care for our own bodies, souls, and minds — to expose them to what is beneficial and to protect them from what is harmful.

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Another universal area of responsibility is “Family,” for we are all members of a family unit and have obligations toward some combination of parents, children, siblings, and possibly other relatives. Because we are Christians, we also have a “Church” area of responsibility, for God has called us to live out our faith within a worshipping and serving community. Almost all of us will have a “Job” or “Vocation” area of responsibility that describes the main position that tends to fill our time, whether that’s working in an office, studying at school, or caring for children. Others might include “Social,” “Friends,” “Hobby,” or “Neighbors.” They will vary as much as our lives.

Spend a few minutes pondering such areas and creating a list of them. Try to make the categories broad enough that everything for which you are responsible in life is encompassed by one of them, yet narrow enough that you have no more than five or six. Speaking personally, I have the following five in my own life: Personal, Family, Social, Church, Business. By design, there is nothing I need to do in life and nothing I am responsible for in life that does not fall under one of those categories.

Once you have established these major categories, return to them to consider each in more detail. Under those areas of responsibility, begin to list the different tasks, roles, or functions that go with them. To do that, consider a question like this: What specific tasks, roles, projects, or responsibilities have been assigned to you in each area of responsibility? Or perhaps like this one: When the day comes when God requires an account, what will you have had to faithfully steward?

Under “Personal” you might list something like this:

- Physical health (exercise)
- Spiritual health (Scripture, prayer, Christian books)
- Personal growth (learning, memorizing, reading for growth)

Or under “Family”:

- Spiritual care and leadership (wife, children, family devotions)
- Home (repairs, maintenance)
- Financial care (budget, bills, financial planning)
- Family growth (vacations, fun)

Continue to do that for each area of responsibility until you have a number of roles or tasks listed under each.

At this point you should have a good sense of what makes up your life. By completing this audit, you have gained an understanding of what God has made you responsible for and an understanding of the criteria he may use

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to assess your success in each. You are well on your way!

### ***Step Two: Define Your Mission***

The second step is optional but helpful. Now that you have wrapped your mind around your life, it may be worth considering this: What does success look like? How can you know if you are succeeding? Or what kind of prompt will you need a few weeks or months from now to propel yourself forward in each of these areas of responsibility?

I suggest you craft a mission statement. There are two options here: You can create a single mission statement that encompasses your entire life, or you can create a series of mission statements, one for each area of your life. A mission statement is simply a statement of purpose that can serve as a measure or standard. As you consider the week that has passed, you can read your mission statement and ask yourself: “Did I fulfill this?” As you consider the week ahead, you can read your mission statement and ask yourself: “How will I fulfill this?”

Here is a mission statement that I use for my “Church” area of responsibility: “Teach, train, and administer so the members of the church will mature and multiply.” This calls me to specific actions (teach, train, administer) that are meant to foster a specific goal (the members of the church maturing in the faith and sharing the gospel). It is both a goal and a form of accountability since it allows me to ask: “Did I do this?” and “How will I do this?”

With that in mind, I would like you to consider either creating one mission statement that will encompass all of your areas of responsibility, or creating one mission statement for each of your areas of responsibility. It can be difficult to create such statements, but why not give it a try and keep modifying and perfecting them in the weeks and months to come. They can change as the circumstances of your life change. Remember that the controlling principle is love, that in one way or another each of these missions should relate to living out that purpose.

Part of the beauty of establishing your mission is that it helps you answer questions about the way you will use your time. It will give you more confidence in saying “yes” or “no” to the various opportunities that will come your way. You will learn to say “yes” to opportunities that are consistent with your mission and “no” to opportunities that may disrupt or contradict it.

### ***Step Three: Select Your Tools***

So far you have carried out an audit on your life and defined your mission. The third step is to choose your tools.

## STEWARDING YOUR TIME

Tools are essential to getting things done. *Good* tools are essential to getting things done well and efficiently. Thus, it makes sense to invest some effort in choosing the right tool for the job. There are three tools that are essential to an efficient and trustworthy system of productivity. The three are distinct, yet complementary. It is in the interplay of the three that you amplify your power.

*Information tool.* An information tool allows you to collect, organize, store, and access information. The classic version of this tool is a filing cabinet. A filing cabinet has several drawers for different categories of documents, it has tabs to subdivide the drawers into smaller units, and it has folders to hold individual photographs or documents. It was, and still is, an intuitive and effective system. Today, though, much more information is digital than physical, so most people prefer an app on their device over a cabinet in their office. Excellent options include Dropbox, Apple Notes, Microsoft OneNote, Notion, and Evernote.

*Scheduling tool.* A scheduling tool allows you to visualize time, organize it, and receive reminders about what is approaching and what is urgent. It is, in other words, a calendar. Where this used to be a paper calendar hanging on your fridge or wall, most people have now migrated to an app-based calendar on their phone. Every app-maker and operating system includes one and they tend to be comparable to one another in features and power. Apple Calendar, Google Calendar, Outlook Calendar — it is hard to go wrong.

*Task tool.* A task tool allows you to collect and organize your to-do items, then to be reminded of them as their deadlines approach. This tool is newer than information tools and scheduling tools, but no less important. Crucially, it adds the third and finishing component to an effective system of productivity. As with calendars, almost every app-maker and operating system now includes one. Apple Reminders, Google Tasks, and Microsoft To Do are all comparable and sufficient.

For each of these tools I would suggest beginning with a simple option like the one that comes with your phone and only adding features and complexity if you find that you need it. For most people in most circumstances, the basic options will be sufficient.

So put some time into considering the options and choosing the ones you will use. Choose an information tool, a scheduling tool, and a task tool and spend a few minutes learning how each one works.

### **Step Four: Build a System**

The fourth step is to build a system, which is a set of repeated and coordi-

## FIELD GUIDE

nated methods, procedures, and routines. A system will use your tools to help you ensure you are doing what you ought to do, remembering what you ought to remember, and giving attention to what is of the highest importance.

Crucially, you need to build a system that you come to trust. You want a system that is so trustworthy that you trust it to store the information you will need in the future and retrieve it when you need it, to remember the tasks you need to complete and steer you toward completing them on time, and to know where you need to be and ensure you are there when you need to be. You will entrust all of this information to your tools and trust your system to bring it to you.

Your information tool is for storing information. Use it to capture files, documents, and other little pieces of information like meeting notes or ideas that suddenly flit into your mind. When you encounter any piece of information you may need to access in the future, save it to your information tool.

Your scheduling tool is where you can visualize the amount of time available to you and decide what to fit into that time. It is the place to store meetings and appointments and other events that need to happen in a particular place and at a particular time. When you establish a meeting or commit to an event, add it to your scheduling tool.

The task tool is where you will record the tasks you intend to complete and assign them a due date. Usually these will be granular tasks rather than entire projects. It may not be helpful to create a task that is “Write a Book” because it’s too big, too daunting, and takes months to complete. More helpful is to break that one big task into a series of smaller tasks that can be completed progressively: “Create outline,” “Research titles,” “Write the introduction,” and so on. I suggest beginning each task with a verb (i.e. action word) so it is clear what actually needs to be done to complete that task.

A well-established organizing principle is “a home for everything and like goes with like.” That means that your tasks, your events, and your information all have a home and each should go in its proper place. Not only that, but within a tool like your information tool, related pieces of information should somehow be tied together, so all of your tax documents are in one place and all of your family pictures are in another.

So when you receive an email containing an important document in PDF format, save it to your information tool. When your boss tells you to meet him in his office at 3PM next Tuesday, add an appointment to your sched-

## STEWARDING YOUR TIME

uling tool. When your spouse asks you to stop by the store on the way home, add a task to your task tool. Use each tool to do the task for which it was designed and do your best to maintain distinction between them.

### ***Step Five: Establish a Review***

The fifth step is one that will happen on a regular basis — daily for some, weekly for others, and only monthly for the rest. In this step you will review your system and tools to ensure everything is as it should be. Every system tends toward chaos rather than order and every person tends toward apathy rather than effort. For that reason any system relies upon a degree of care and maintenance.

I suggest taking a few moments at the beginning of each day, or every workday at least, to ensure that you have looked at your task tool to see what tasks are due that day and in the several days to come. Also look at your scheduling tool to see what appointments and meetings have been scheduled in the days to come. This will help you understand how much time you have available to dedicate to completing tasks. Take a look and then choose which tasks you can complete or at least move toward completion in the available time. Your scheduling tool tells you what time is available and your task tool tells you what tasks can be set into that time.

The second regular review is done weekly or monthly. In this review you will look at your areas of responsibility along with your mission statements to consider whether you are living the kind of life to which God has called you. Essentially you will ask whether you are expressing love for God and your fellow man in each of your areas of responsibility. Not only that, but you will ask what steps you might take to do so in the weeks or months to come. This is an ideal review to schedule for every Friday afternoon or perhaps one Friday afternoon per month.

These two reviews will help care for your system and maintain it well. It is through reviews like these that you really begin to live within the system and ensure that it is functioning well and proving reliable.

### ***Step Six: Get Things Done***

The sixth and final step is to get things done! It is to steward and manage your time. And you do that by following your system and using your tools. Use your tools day by day, complete your regular reviews, and allow the system to gain your confidence. Build the system until you trust it to remember whatever needs to be remembered, to tell you to be wherever you need to be whenever you need to be there, and to direct you toward the tasks that most fulfill the purpose God has given you. Build the sys-

## FIELD GUIDE

tem, use the system, maintain the system, and be willing to adapt it to the changing circumstances of your life.

### ***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. Which of these steps do you already have in place, whether in the way described here or otherwise? Which will be new for you? Do any strike you as particularly challenging?
2. Who is a mentor or trusted friend you could ask to help keep you accountable as you build out a system for productivity?



## CONCLUSION

I began this field guide by insisting that, more important than any system of productivity or any system that helps you master your time, is establishing your motive. I trust you have learned that motives matter and that the best stewardship follows from the best motives. I trust you have learned that the best motive of all for stewarding and managing your time is the motive of love—to display your love for God and your awe at what he has done for you by deliberately and delightfully directing your life toward the noble purpose of loving others. There is no greater motive, no greater purpose, and no greater satisfaction than this. For this is why God made us and why God saved us.





# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. *Do More Better: A Practical Guide to Productivity* by Tim Challies
2. *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* by Matt Perman
3. *Redeeming Productivity: Getting More Done for the Glory of God* by Reagan Rose

All three of these books express a distinctly Christian view of productivity and time management and all three will guide you to further resources that can prove helpful as you grow in both knowledge and implementation.

# PRODUCTIVITY WORKSHEET

## DEFINE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

What are your areas of responsibility? Who or what has God made you responsible for? Where will God require an accounting from you?

Personal   Family   \_\_\_\_\_

## LIST YOUR ROLES, TASKS, AND PROJECTS

What roles, tasks, or projects fall under each of your areas of responsibility?

Personal   Family   \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual health   Spiritual growth   \_\_\_\_\_

Physical health   Finance   \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## FIELD GUIDE

### STATE YOUR MISSION

What does success look like in each of your areas of responsibility?  
What is the call to action or call to mission in each of them? Prepare  
your mission statements.

#### *Personal:*

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#### *Family:*

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### SELECT YOUR TOOLS

#### *Scheduling Tool*

(Google Calendar, Apple Calendar, Cozi)

#### *Information Tool*

(Evernote, OneNote, SimpleNote, Google Keep)

#### *Task Tool*

(Todoist, Wunderlist, Things, OmniFocus)



THE  
**MENTORING**  
PROJECT

**TIM CHALLIES** is a pastor, noted speaker, author, and a pioneer in the Christian blogosphere. Tens of thousands of people visit Challies.com each day, making it one of the most widely read and recognized Christian blogs in the world. Tim is the author of several books, including *Visual Theology*, *Epic: An Around-the-World Journey through Christian History*, and *Seasons of Sorrow: The Pain of Loss and the Comfort of God*. He and his family reside near Toronto, Ontario.

