



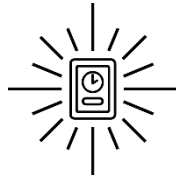
THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

LIVING WITH PURPOSE: USING TIME AND TECHNOLOGY TO THE GLORY OF GOD



DANIEL S. DUMAS

**LIVING WITH
PURPOSE:
USING TIME AND
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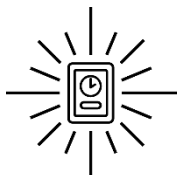


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INTRODUCTION: CONSIDER THE ANT

Call me crazy, but I want you to consider an ant as you process this category of stewardship in your life. This tiny creature can have a big impact on our stewardship of time and technology. The Proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 6:6– 11) point us to the microscopic ant to learn from her intentionality, industry, plotting, planning, and diligence. You probably haven't considered an ant for such a gigantic area in your life, but today is your lucky day.

The Scriptures combat lack of productivity, procrastination, and leaving your life to chance by pointing us to an ant. Pretty amazing stuff considering all the analogies God could have used. The reality is that we are not to waste this life nor are we to go through life without a plan. The Scriptures command us to plan. We make our plans, and God sovereignly directs our steps — Christian doctrine holds that every molecule in the universe is under his sovereign direction and care. Or said differently, our plans are written in pencil, God's are in permanent ink. James picks up on this in the first century and reminds us that we are to make our plans without being presumptuous in our planning. Meaning we submit our plans to God's master plan (James 5:13–17). Submissive planning is the prescribed method of the Scriptures. Where we spend our time really does reveal what we value. Like our use of money, our use of time demonstrates what we care about the most.

Time is the great equalizer for humanity, because we all get the same amount of time in a day. The President of the United States, with all the

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responsibilities on his shoulders, has no more time in a day than the rest of us. Some leaders have more ability, money, and capacity, but no one has more time.

What we don't know is how many days we have on this planet. "Time is the stuff life is made of," said the diligent inventor Benjamin Franklin. The length of our lives is determined solely by a holy, sovereign, and just God.

The Scriptures are replete with admonishment to use our time carefully. For example, Moses writes in the Psalter, "teach us O Lord to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Likewise, the Apostle Paul said to "Look carefully how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15–16).

Leaving our lives and days to chance is neither smart nor wise. The reality is this: if you are not a good steward of your time and technology, somebody will gladly do it for you. There is an old pamphlet entitled "The Tyranny of the Urgent." The premise was simple and profound, that the urgent things, if left unchecked, will ultimately rule us and crowd out what is good, right, and beautiful. Sadly, so much of our time is dictated by things we did not choose rather than by a well-thought plan of action. There are so many things vying for our time in this fast-paced world. Often we're faced with choosing between what is good and what is best for us. Today that stops, and I pray this field guide will aid you in taking back control of both your time and technology.

Remember, not all time is equal. We have the ability to squander our time, lose time, mis-prioritize our time, procrastinate with our time, waste time, and even redeem time. Faithful time use begins with acknowledging that our time is limited in this life. God is infinite and we are finite (Ps. 90:1–3). You get one life to live, and you can't buy one more minute. That means time is a finite entity and the most valuable asset you own. We should all be motivated to heed the call of John Piper, "Don't waste your life!"

Most of our struggles with time come from not having enough of it, but in the spirit of being balanced (I think an additional uninspired beatitude in Matthew 5 should be "blessed are the balanced"), I would be unfaithful to you if I did not remind you that it is possible to have too much time on your

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hands. During different seasons of our lives, we'll have excess time on our hands. which can become dangerous for us and our spiritual formation. For example, too much time on the hands of a younger person can turn into the devil's playground — a bored teenager can turn into a dangerous teenager. The same can be true for any of us who have a large block of time without intentionality tethered to it. I am not saying you can't rest and have fun, but my observation is that a lot of time is wasted on video games, TV, social media, and the like. All good usage of time needs structure, including our leisure. Technology has made it easier to waste time.

What follows are ten principles that will, Lord willing, help you navigate your time and technology to the glory of God. The temptation to misuse our time and become enslaved to technology ought to sober us all. Let these principles guide you into a life of faithfulness and fruitfulness.

1

LIVE BY A COMPASS

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind

Matthew 22:37

I prefer to live by a compass and not a clock. Knowing your true north sets you on a healthy course for Living with purpose as a highly intentional person and leader. Most are driven by the tyranny of the clock and not their own predetermined priorities. Those people can never find enough time in the day! They are continually exasperated and frustrated at the end of a long day. I don't find time in a day for what I value, I make the time. I rue the day where I freestyle my way through the hours, days, or week. I don't want to be like a ship without a rudder — being haphazard is not a virtue.

You have to make wise choices in this life, especially when it comes to time. So what are your priorities? What do you value? The best place to start is to identify your various roles and responsibilities. Structure your life and days around those various roles: a Christian, professional, executive, author, craftsman, pastor, church leader, mother, wife, husband, father, author, brother, sister, whatever they may be. Identify and write down your specific roles and responsibilities. No two people are the same, so there is no wrong answer. Next, allocate your time to those roles.

I will say this again later, but most people are living for people who will not even show up at their funeral. No professional ever says on their deathbed, "I wish I spent more time at the office." And I'll bet you have never seen a hearse pulling a moving truck full of toys and trinkets from this life. I will go one step further, if you are going to cheat, cheat the office and not your home. Again, live for those who will actually show up at your funeral. Most of the people we are trying to impress won't even attend (they might send some daisies). At the risk of being harsh (for the record, I am harder on

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myself than on you), if you succeed at work and fail at home, guess what? You failed. Family is always more important than career. After your personal relationship with Jesus, family is your priority.

Biblical planning involves intentionally organizing your time and priorities around what truly matters — relationships, responsibilities, and faith. It's not about being busy, but about being purposeful in all you do. In this world, we are bombarded with distractions, including the constant pull of Christian social media that often pulls our attention away from what truly matters. Be mindful of your time online. Use it for edification and connection, but do not let it replace the real, in-person relationships that God calls us to nurture. Living with purpose means recognizing the importance of balance, especially in how we spend our time and energy in this modern age.

Now that we have set aside the clock and identified our priorities, let's jump in with both feet and start by doing some time management work.

Know Thyself

Do you know why you are here? I am not asking, “do you know why we are here?” That is clearly determined by Scripture as you live out a Christian worldview. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) asks the question, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is succinct and helpful: “Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” That is crucial for us to grasp, but not what I am driving at. My question for you is more specific, why are you here?

In the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, Olympic runner Eric Liddell remarked when interviewed, “when I run, I feel his pleasure.” It may not be running for you, so what is it that you do that gives you confidence to say, “when I do X, I feel the Lord's pleasure.” This is where Living with purpose becomes deeply practical — knowing the unique calling that aligns your gifts with God's pleasure. I would encourage you to write yourself clear with a single sentence. This could take you a number of weeks and even months because it is such a significant sentence to craft. It should not be broad or lack specificity. Run it by some friends and family, take your time to dial it in. This single sentence will be a manifesto and serve you all the days of your life. Furthermore, it will serve as a necessary guardrail as you make

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both small and major decisions in this life. Exercises like this anchor Biblical planning, helping you build your life with intentionality rather than impulse. I have encouraged countless people in this simple exercise and I promise it will yield much fruit on the decision making tree. Here is mine: “To be a disruptive leader and inspiring teacher of gospel organizations that change the world.” Every single word matters in this simple sentence. Now you give it a try.

Let me also push you to “reverse engineer your life.” Michael Hyatt, in his book *Living Forward*, introduced me to this concept. In this exercise, you fast forward your life and think through your death. What do you want on your tombstone? This is not suggesting you become morbid, but you should think through your epitaph. There are some funny epitaphs that have appeared on grave stones over the centuries:

- “I told you I was sick.” Mark Jones
- “Second fastest draw in New Austin.” Byron Vicker
- “He loved bacon.” Jim Hawkins
- “Sorry, hanged by mistake.” George Johnson

So let me ask you, how do you want to be remembered? What does a well-lived life look like to you? Getting a mental picture and then writing it down will help. Next, with the end in mind, work backwards to today. Are you on track to meet your goals (more on this later)? How are you doing with your plan? Are you on the right path? Living with purpose is not accidental; it requires alignment with Biblical leadership principles, clarity of calling, and the courage to evaluate your life honestly. How do you want to be remembered? Socrates said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” I think it helps a ton to reverse engineer your life to ensure you are intentional with your whole life, not just with this year — especially in an age where social media and Christianity often collide, and public noise can easily drown out your true God-given direction.

As a teenager, Jonathan Edwards was deadly serious about following Jesus. He crafted seventy resolutions for himself so that he would live a God-centered life. Many were about the proper use of time. For example, number five was a resolution “never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.” Number six: “To live

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with all my might, while I do live.” Number seven: “Never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do if it were the last day of my life.” I told you he was serious! His resolutions are potent stuff. Maybe you should look them up and do likewise. His approach captures the heart of Living with purpose, refusing to waste the days God gives.

Make a Plan

Having no plan is actually a passive plan. It has been aptly said, “aim at nothing and you will be sure to hit it every time.” The Scriptures command us to plan (Prov. 16:1–4). However, we make our plans in pencil with the awareness that God knows us best and is committed to making us more like Jesus (Phil. 1:6). So God is the eraser attached to our #2 pencil of planning. We plan, but we do not do it apart from God’s sovereign will, nor should we do it presumptuously. Presumptuous planning assumes we know the future, when the truth is that it rests solely in the providential hand of God (James 4:13–17). Biblical planning submits plans to the lordship of Christ. So resist making predictions, make your plans in pencil, and don’t boast about what you plan to do in the future. These are the biblical guardrails for planning.

With that as our basis, you need a plan. I find a 3–5 year plan is both manageable and doable. Anything beyond five years becomes a crystal ball and hard to predict. You should think deeply as you plan and write it down. There is the “masterplan” and then there is a daily plan. The format or the tool is for you to choose. Do what works for you, but make it accessible and attainable. So much of our plan comes down to sheer discipline, good rhythms of life, and clarity of direction. Here are a few things I have adopted along the way that might help you get started:

- **FIRST**, go deeper, not wider. I have this gnawing regret that I have been far too transactional and not as transformational in my work and relationships. Sure, I can be known for getting things done and making things happen, but there is more to life than being good at execution. Those who leave a legacy are those who prioritized deep relationships.
- **SECOND**, nothing should replace or supplant your personal time with God. Daily time in the Scriptures and prayer (and deploying all other

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personal spiritual disciplines) is essential to be effective. To maximize our stewardship of time, you must set aside time with God. That is the most important relationship you have. Do not neglect what is supposed to be central to your Christian life. It was the Apostle Paul's singular fear that he would be "led away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). The spiritual disciplines of reading and prayer are life-giving and life-altering. Spending time with Jesus is not elective. This is where work and worship intertwine, shaping the whole of your daily rhythms.

- **THIRD**, build your life plan around your various roles. A husband, a dad, a professional, an athlete, an author, a mom, an executive, a fireman, etc. You get the point. Your roles should determine your values and priorities.
- **FOURTH**, create margin in your schedule. Every minute of every day cannot be accounted for. If they are, you will not be a healthy leader. We all need rest — even God rested on the seventh day. Plus, you do not want people to perceive you as too busy (as if that is a virtue) and not approach you for wisdom. I order my day so that I have margin for others and divine interruptions.
- **FIFTH**, slow the digital noise in your life. I am equally tempted to waste time on my iPhone, iPad, or computer. More on this later, but the devil distracts us with our devices. When you are present, be present and not lost online.
- **SIXTH**, do your pain first. I'm now talking about the daily rhythms of life and work, but you have to get into a good rhythm. I strive to do the hardest things first on any given day. I despise thinking about having a hard conversation all day and it turns over and over in my stomach until I get it done. That anxiety is not good for the body or soul. Philippians 4:6 states that we are not to be anxious about anything. This one discipline of doing the hard things first has been a huge success in slaying my unhelpful and distracting stressors. Practicing this consistently becomes part of Biblical time management — stewarding each day with faithfulness rather than fear.
- **ONE FINAL THING**. There is a two-letter word you have to deploy to have an effective plan. That word is "no." You just can't say "yes" to everything as much as you want. You will end up doing a lot of okay

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things and the occasional good things. But are you doing the best things? Are you working on your plan? Are you living for relationships that really matter to you? I want you to live a life of no regrets, and if you are going to attain this you need to be attentive to your plan and keep Living with purpose at the center.

If you don't attack life, life will attack you. As a general rule, I try to play offense and not defense when it comes to my life plan. I spend up to one hour a day reviewing the plan, one day a month resetting my priorities, and one weekend a year to get away and think deeply about the direction of my life. Let me give you a spiritual shove as you seek to reverse-engineer your life and live on mission by having a well-thought-out plan. As J.C. Ryle put it, "tomorrow is the devil's day, today is God's." Make your plan today, take dominion over your life, and you will not regret the time and effort it will take. This is at the heart of Living with purpose, being intentional with every moment and decision.

Avoid Toxic People

Relationships make up a huge part of our lives. An important piece of Time stewardship is knowing how to steward our relationships. Some important biblical relational wisdom includes:

You can't please everyone (1 Thess. 2:4).

We can't take everything too personally (Prov. 4:23).

Envy is the art of counting someone else's blessings instead of your own (Prov. 14:30).

The fear of man is a snare (Prov. 29:25).

There have been seasons in my life when I intentionally stepped back from a relationship. Why? Because life's too short to spend time with toxic people. Did you know that an abundance of friends is cautioned in Scripture? Proverbs 18:24 says that, "A man or woman of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." We boast about how many "friends" we have on our social media channels, but are they true friends? Consider yourself fortunate if you have five lifelong and loyal friends — not fair-weather friends, but foul-weather friends. Friends that run into the mess of your life when everyone runs out.

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Friends that will run the rapids with you and not pull out at the first sign of difficulty.

We become who we spend time with. This is why Solomon said, “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man” (Prov. 22:24). I’ve told my boys to choose their friends carefully because bad company corrupts good morals (1 Cor 15:33). You just cannot and should not spend copious amounts of time with people who will bring you down. Its impact on you will be detrimental. You have to decide to put aside these types of toxic relationships for the purpose of good stewardship of your time and for your own spiritual health. True friends sharpen us rather than make us dull (Prov. 27:17). You don’t have to directly tell someone you are moving away from them, just intentionally and slowly stop moving toward them. Absence from toxic people will open up your calendar and improve your life in amazing ways.

Time management in the Bible teaches us to wisely use our time, honoring God with both the people we spend time with and how we spend it. Avoiding distractions and focusing on relationships that matter is a key part of Biblical planning.

Use Technology Wisely

Our time is being eaten up by our technology. There is a tidal wave of content pouring into our lives and homes. Did you know that there are over 100 billion emails sent each day? That’s more than ten times the global population. Texting is off the charts — this year the number of text messages will exceed six trillion. Information overload is a real thing. According to Stephen Davey, “If you happen to read the New York Times newspaper for one week, you will be exposed to more information than the average person, living in the 1800s, came across in their entire lifetime.” Did you know that 88% of all teenagers own a cell phone? What is more staggering is that 48% of preteens own cell phones. Even worse, children are spending five hours on a variety of electronic devices every day!

If we’re not careful, we’ll drown in this tidal wave of information. High impact people know how to use their technology with intentionality. We all have the same twenty-four hours in a day to steward, so we have to be

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astute and recognize what is distracting us from our primary roles and goals. Living with purpose means recognizing what truly matters and resisting the distractions that threaten to derail us. Like me, you might also struggle because it's so hard to say "no." I confess there are too many cool things to learn, watch, and listen to. So much of it is good, but our roles and priorities can help us discern between what things are good and things that are best. Deciding between what is good and best is a serious discipline. It takes daily evaluation and thoughtfulness. It's also an art to navigate the wave of information at our fingertips.

When it comes to discipline and practices around the usage of our technology, here are a few things I have learned (albeit imperfectly) over the years:

- We have to put structured limits on our screen time. And that goes for everyone in your home, not just the kids. For example, Andy Crouch, in his book *The Tech-Wise Family*, states "that our phones go to bed before we do and they wake up later than we do." He also recommends that you not look at your phone until the morning hour reaches doubledigits on the clock. I love my Garmin Fenix7. It prompts me to turn off technology and my consumption of entertainment one hour before my predetermined scheduled bedtime. This nudge is so helpful and is a constant reminder to bring my technology usage under dominion. Making time for God means setting boundaries that allow us to focus on Him, even in our technological age. Getting into a daily rhythm with your technology goes a long way in controlling it rather than it controlling you.
- My general daily schedule is pretty simple: mornings are for God, afternoons are for people and work, and evenings for my family. That means I have to stubbornly resist the temptation to wake up, roll over in bed and check my email. One of my pet peeves is when people check their phone every time it dings, vibrates, or lights up. Do you really think you're that important? Occasionally I am waiting for a text, call, or email but I let the person know in advance that it is coming: "Pardon my interruption in a few minutes, but this is an emergency." All other digital noise is silenced. Furthermore, it's not a pattern of mine to look at my phone during meetings. Turn your phone over

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and ignore it. Be present, not constantly looking down at your phone or doing a Google search. People's time is valuable so honor them with your undivided attention. Other times we should be present are at the dinner table (4 out of 10 parents say electronic devices are a significant disruption to family meals), driving and dropping your kids off at school, at a movie, sporting events, a play, etc. You get the drift.

- When it comes to teenagers, if you let them experience technology, please make sure all the technology goes to a central location at bedtime, never behind closed doors, always in view, always total access by mom or dad, no unknown passwords, and don't allow the use of private mode (this ensures there is no history to your search activity) to search the internet. Trouble is on the horizon if you're sloppy or lenient with your technology expectations as parents. I don't care if every kid in school is doing it, it doesn't make it right. One shocking statistic is that 62% of teenagers say they received a nude image on their phones and 40% say they had sent one (*The Porn Phenomenon* by the Barna Group). I strongly recommend you start strict with your parameters — it's easier to loosen your expectations than to tighten them.
- Email can be a virtue or a vice. Email was designed by the military to be terse and to the point. It's better to send short form emails that are to the point than long and verbose. I never use email for hard conversations because you cannot read someone's body language and it's easy to misread an email. I also never send a nasty email or snarky email. Furthermore, they can easily be passed on and become a permanent record.
- Speaking of email, clean out your inbox. Your inbox is not designed to be a task list. I am regularly coming in contact with people who have 100,000+ emails (most are spam). That is mind-boggling and distracting to your stewardship of time.
- One final thing, I never use the bcc option (blind carbon copy), because that is including people in the conversation without other parties knowing. The Scriptures teach that if you have a problem with someone then you go to them (Matt. 18). You don't hide behind

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anonymity. The Lord would never lead you to criticize or confront without stating who you are talking to. Even in snail mail, if the letter is not signed, it goes in the waste bin. Be up front, open, and honest or don't send the email.

Regarding your social media, similar principles apply. Don't be snarky and mean online. Don't be inappropriate. Don't be over-the-top. Our social media channels are permanent records. As a matter of fact, the first place I go when I am doing a job interview is to the social media feeds of the one I'm interviewing. What are they talking about? What is their worldview? What are they photographing? Don't be sloppy with your social media. Better yet, use it to honor and glorify God. Borrow the wisdom of James and be slow to speak. God has given us two ears and one mouth to remind us about censoring our speech online. Also, don't be deceived by the social media use of others. Most people post only that which is awesome and positive. Sometimes I fall under low-grade self-condemnation, thinking my kids or days are not as awesome as everyone else's. Nobody is posting the bad news, pictures of being overweight, and how they failed big time. Social media can be a distortion field or a bit of rose-colored glasses. Follower beware!

Living with purpose also includes being intentional with how we use our social media. If we take it seriously, we can use it as a platform to share the good news and build up others.

2

ATTACK LIFE OR LIFE WILL ATTACK YOU

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat.

Proverbs 13:4

You probably picked up on the fact that I resist leaving things to chance. We are to be intentional with all of our lives, not just our time and technology. If you choose to float through this one life, you will inevitably waste it. I think this is one of Satan's primary strategies to distort and neutralize us. He supports, "push it off until tomorrow." We don't realize that complacency wreaks havoc in the undisciplined life.

The Apostle Paul told his young lieutenant Timothy to "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching" (1 Tim. 4:16). This is a rare occasion in Scripture where we are told to pay attention to ourselves. Most of Scripture encourages us not to pay attention to ourselves, but to die to ourselves. Time stewardship and Christian priorities are areas where we must watch ourselves closely. Satan rejoices when we are sloppy with our time. Solomon gives us a strong warning against this kind of sloppiness:

"How long will you lie there, O sluggard?

When will you arise from your sleep?

A little sleep, a little slumber,

a little folding of the hands to rest,

and poverty will come upon you like a robber,

and want like an armed man."

(Prov. 6:9–11)

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Diligence is the biblical expectation. You attack life or life will attack you. How does one attack life and make sure it is not unintentional but instead effective? A few ideas:

First, always do your pain first. I mentioned this above, but state it again here because of how important it is. I have encouraged a thousand people with this simple principle. When you make your daily list of things to get done on a 3x5 card, sticky note, Notes app, or in a Google Doc, you then have to prioritize your day. I always do the hardest things first. That could be a hard conversation, a broken toilet, digging a large hole for a new tree, or cleaning out your garage. Whatever the task, do your hardest one first. If not, you will spend mental energy all day thinking about doing it, processing how to do it, and then punt it to tomorrow because you “ran out of time.” If you knock it out first thing it will feel momentous, even if it proved not that big a deal.

Just this week, I changed out a flush valve on one of our toilets. That thing was intimidating because the last time I attempted such a feat I ended up having to call a plumber and replace the whole toilet. It looked like a bomb went off in our bathroom. The whole DIY movement scares those of us who had a mechanical bypass. However, sometimes I muster up enough courage, like last week, and tackle the problem. It ran nonstop for more than ten days as I put off this daunting challenge. It was like the scene in the movie *Castaway* when Tom Hanks finally made fire and was running around the fire pit screaming “I made fire!” Instead, I strutted around the house saying, “I fixed the toilet!” I share this to my own hurt, but it’s what we do with painful and stubborn problems. We let them intimidate us and get ourselves worked up and our stomach tied in knots for no reason. Start your day with the painful things and then as you tire throughout the course of a day, the day will get easier and procrastination will dissolve in your life.

Another discipline to help you attack life is to set aside sufficient time to do what Cal Newport calls “deep work.” Everyone needs to set aside blocks of time to think deeply about their goals, productivity, life, and future. Living with purpose means carving out time for these moments of deep reflection. Undistracted time is where you can work on your life and not just live it. Newport contends that this kind of focus is like a mental

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muscle: through deliberate time and training, you can strengthen your focus and expand your mental capacity. It is the discipline of rising above the noise and looking at your life from a different vantage point. For me, that discipline is invaluable. These times require intense concentration and are for the express purpose of self-examination. I have practiced this for years and could not recommend a more helpful tool to add to your stewarding toolbox. These times are designed for you to check in and be brutally honest with how you are doing. All of us can get stuck in the trees and we end up missing the forest. During these moments I am asking myself three key questions:

“What do I need to stop doing?”

“What do I need to start doing?”

“What do I need to continue doing?”

I have found these diagnostic questions helpful in trying to be honest about where I am at that moment. I wish we all could have accountability partners who would ask us the hard questions, but these three will do the trick for now.

One final thought on this principle. I have been living the adventurous Christian life for thirty-eight years, and if I have one encouragement to share with you, it would be to continue to grow in grace. Christian leadership principles include leading with humility and a desire to continually grow. You have the Holy Spirit in you. You are not stuck. You do not need to continue to walk in the flesh. You can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, make the necessary changes in your life and rhythms. Too many people look into the proverbial mirror and walk away hopeless. You have one life to live, so live it to its fullest. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). You are not stuck. If you feel stuck, work your way out by confessing your procrastination and changing your ways. I love that the Apostle Paul, at the end of his life, was still growing and hungry. He told the Philippian church that his desire was “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10–11). You can turn around today.

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Play Offense Not Defense

It really doesn't matter how long you live, it matters how you live. It's what you do with your time that counts. William James was right, "the great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." You need to make a choice because time can be wasted but it cannot be stored; it has no shelf life. If you want to leave a powerful legacy, you have to determine how you will live. Living with purpose requires us to play offense, not defense.

Jesus was immensely busy. The first chapter of Mark's Gospel captures a day in the life of Christ. He walked miles, called his disciples, healed many, missed a meal, wrestled with a demon spirit, combatted the religious elite, visited the synagogue to teach, and then at night the whole city came out and he healed people and cast out demons. Then we read how he began his next day: "rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35).

Jesus knew the power of prayer, so he didn't find time to pray. He made time to pray. He got up while everyone else was sleeping and got the job done. How much more do we need to engage in prayer and submit our calendars to the Lord in prayer? Martin Luther, when faced with a daunting schedule, quipped, "I have so much to do today that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer." Beware of the man who does not pray, but attempts to march in his own strength. Prayerlessness is playing defense, not offense.

Bake in Some Margin

While I'm writing this section, a young man called me to get some advice (it's good to have multiple mentors you can call in a moment's notice) and the first words out of his mouth were, "I'm sorry to bother you, I know you're really busy." Actually, I'm not that busy. Not because I don't have many things on my plate, but because I order my day and am intentional with my time. That includes making sure I have enough margin built into my life and schedule. I am a strong believer (though an imperfect practitioner) in the rest and war rhythm found in the Scriptures. There are times we go to war and times we need rest. There is a time for everything (Ecc. 3:1–11). You need to discern the times and not get them backwards.

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David got himself in deep sin because he should have gone out to war, but instead, he stayed back in Jerusalem to rest (2 Sam. 11:1–18). Samuel says that it was the season for kings to go out to war, and David is relaxing in the palace. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As you resist the tyranny of the urgent and define your priorities, you will also be able to place some margin in your schedule. Everything, including rest, is on my calendar. I can then tell people who inquire about a time slot that I already have an appointment. Everything, including margin, is on the calendar.

Another benefit of allowing for margin in your schedule is that it keeps you open to divine interruptions. Hebrews 13:2 says that there are times when we are showing hospitality to “angels unawares.” What if God wants you to share the gospel with a stranger, neighbor, or coworker? Are you really going to say you don’t have time? The Apostle Paul asked for prayer “that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). He concludes that section with the exhortation to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time” (Col. 4:5).

I never like my days so tight that I might miss a divine interruption. Remember, play offense, not defense. You are not to put yourself in the position where your schedule dictates your day and priorities. Christian life purpose means ordering our days according to God’s will, ensuring that we are ready to respond to the opportunities He gives. We order our days by what we value. You have to say “no” to some good things in order to say “yes” to the right things. Daily ask yourself the question, “Should I be doing this right now?” The Apostle Paul said on one occasion, “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly” (1 Cor. 9:25–26). We are to run as the winners run. Focused, lean, and unrelenting.

**LIVING WITH PURPOSE:
USING TIME AND TECHNOLOGY TO THE GLORY OF GOD**

3

GET STUFF DONE

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”

Ecclesiastes 9:10

I resonate with Peter’s challenge, “to gird up our minds for action.” That’s what our lives call for: action. Proverbs says, “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense” (Prov. 12:11). I tell my boys regularly to make a plan, prioritize your day, and get stuff done! You’ve likely heard the saying that there’s only one way to eat an elephant _ one bite at a time. There are no tricks, just discipline. “Rise and grind” is a common mantra in our home. But included in that is the calling to work smart, not just hard. Use your mind for the glory of God. It’s a reminder not to waste valuable time but instead be productive — like the ants, remember?

There is an expectation for all of us to be faithful. Paul says that “it is required of stewards that they be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2). Some have only the virtue of faithfulness in view and only fulfill one half of the equation. You see, there is also the expectation to be fruitful. We’re also told in the Scriptures to bear much fruit. Faithful and fruitful are two sides of the same coin. And two mandates for all Christians who believe Jesus could come back any day. We live in light of his promise and soon return.

This is why Christian goal setting is a significant practice for good stewardship of time. Both long-term, short-term, and daily goals should be on our radar. By long-term, I mean three-to-five years. After five years, you put them on the lifetime bucket list and chip away at them as you have time. Again, I do think it is good to think big (I do this regularly) and to think far off in the distance, but it’s challenging to have itemized and attainable goals for those thoughts. You want your goals to stretch you but never break you.

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Short-term goals are six months to one year out. You can wrap your mind around these. They are realistic, measurable, achievable, and specific. You want gospel and life goals that stretch you, they make you think outside the box and take you places you would never go if left to yourself. Living with purpose means setting goals that help you grow in your relationship with God, and intentionally prioritizing time for both work and worship. Plan your work, then work your plan. Write your goals down. Itemize them. Easy and simple access to these goals is important. Share them with your mentor or accountability partners.

Tracking your goals is critical for productivity. We are all plagued with forgetfulness, it's part of the depravity impact. But goals will give us valuable focus: "The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied" (Prov. 13:4). If you fail at planning, you're planning to fail from the outset. I need to know what I must get done each day, week, and month. I thoroughly enjoy reviewing my progress at the end of each day, then I repeat the practice and make a new list to be ready to go the next day.

One tip I would suggest is to prioritize each day what you must get done versus what you wish to get done. I use the Franklin Covey method of placing an A1 or A2 in the column of my list. "A1" items are a must, and "A2" items are a strong desire. This way, I can prioritize my day. It might sound like a lot but it really is simple and rewarding. There are days that I complete and think, "this was my day and I got stuff done." And then there are other days when my list proved impossible. That's okay and will happen to all of us. Don't get discouraged. Productive people keep moving forward. If you get knocked off your horse, saddle up and get back on. Never forget, keep the first things first.

Lastly, try not to make a list for Sundays. This is a day set aside for worship and rest — doing stuff that you don't normally do on the other six days. Christians and social media can also benefit from setting boundaries, ensuring that time spent online doesn't interfere with worship and rest. Make time for God, whether it's through rest, worship, or being present with others.

LIVING WITH PURPOSE: USING TIME AND TECHNOLOGY TO THE GLORY OF GOD

Choose Healthy Habits

We have covered a lot of territory together. I have sought to be immensely practical in our ten concepts and principles. Now it's time for you to choose wisely. Discipline in your stewardship of time and technology should not scar you. As a matter of fact, it will most likely bring a strong measure of freedom. Living with purpose is about making intentional choices that align with God's priorities, rather than letting life happen to you.

Don't feel overwhelmed, but instead choose to deal with each one of these ten over the next thirty days. Don't throw your hands up, get your pencil out and a pad of paper and start listing your priorities. Build a Google Doc as your master list so you can frequent it, share it, and amend it. Talk to other highly productive people you admire and learn from their life experience and life hacks. That is exactly what mentoring is, so don't overthink it. It is simply going to someone who has more wisdom and life skills and who is perhaps further down the trail of productivity than you and then asking them for help. As a matter of fact, you should have as many mentors as you have roles and dimensions in your life. There is great wisdom in a multitude of counselors throughout your life. Humility admits where you need help and then pursues a solution. So seek out productive people and spend time with them.

One last thing, there is no wrong way in how you build or structure your plan. You are free to do it how you wish. The only wrong thing is not having a plan. What the Bible says about time management is that we are to be wise stewards of the time God gives us, making the most of every opportunity (Eph. 5:16). This can be challenging in today's world, but with intentionality and prayer, we can manage our time effectively.

As you set out to steward your time and technology faithfully and fruitfully, I want to leave you with one of my favorite quotes. This inspiring and sobering word comes from Oswald Chambers:

The man of leadership caliber will work while others waste time, study while others sleep, pray while others play. There will be no place for loose or slothful habits in word or thought, deed or dress. He will observe a soldierly discipline in diet and deportment, so that he might wage a good warfare. He will without reluctance undertake the unpleasant task that others avoid or the hidden duty that others

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evade because it evokes no applause or wins no appreciation. A Spirit-filled leader will not shrink from facing up to difficult situations or persons, or from grasping the nettle when that is necessary. He will kindly and courageously administer rebuke when that is called for; or he will exercise necessary discipline when the interests of the Lord's work demand it. He will not procrastinate in writing the difficult letter. His letter bin will not conceal evidence of his failure to grapple with urgent problems.

This is Christian time management: working diligently in the areas that matter most, using time wisely for God's kingdom, and being faithful in the small and large tasks. Onward.

Onward.



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