

MY VIRTUAL MENTOR



GET A GRIP ON YOUR HECTIC SCHEDULE

10 Steps to Create Margin for What Matters Most

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OVERVIEW



The question for busy men juggling bills & babies, marriage & a mortgage is NOT will my calendar be full? The better question is who or what will fill my calendar? Men today are in a battle against “Weapons of Mass Distraction.”

In this article, I will try to help you reframe your thinking about managing time & energy to not just get more done, but to get the right things done.



IS MORE BETTER?

Time is like money; most people think they would be happier if they had more. Interestingly, more time and money would only lead to wanting even more of both. Human nature is what it is. Briefly and biblically, I want to outline ten steps to

- get more done in less time;
- work smarter, not harder;
- and, live a prioritized life at the pace of grace.

ARE YOU SPENDING OR INVESTING TIME?

In an average life span (72 years), we spend:

- 21 years sleeping
- 14 years working

- seven years in bathroom basics
- six years eating
- six years traveling
- five years waiting in lines
- four years learning
- three years in meetings
- two years returning calls
- one year searching for lost things
- 22 months in worship
- six months waiting on red lights
- 22 hours a week watching television
- 30 seconds per day spent with the kids





DO YOU HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS OF MISMANAGING YOUR TIME?

1. **Procrastination** – “I’ll get to it when I get to it.”
2. **Frustration** – “That drives me crazy!”
3. **Excessive stress** – “No matter what I do, it’s never enough.”
4. **Low productivity** – “I don’t have much to show for all my hard work.”
5. **Feeling overwhelmed** – “Too much to do, too little time.”
6. **Burnout** – “I don’t know how much longer I can take this.”



THROW YOUR NET ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BOAT!

Let me quickly walk you through a story from the Gospel of John, in which Jesus helps His disciples do a different thing to get a different result.

JOHN 21:3 (NIV)

"'I'm going out to fish,' Simon Peter told them, and they said, 'We'll go with you.' So, they went out and got into the boat, but that night, they caught nothing."

Fished all night and caught nothing. Bummer! This story represents the insane approach of doing things the way we have always done them and expecting different results.

These guys worked hard, and so do you. The issue here is not our laziness or passivity, but accurately discerning the voice of the Lord and being obedient.

JOHN 21:4

"Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus."

Sometimes we can get so caught up in our routines - our habitual rituals - in our fast-paced, jam-packed lifestyles that we find it difficult to see God in the midst.

JOHN 21:5

"He called out to them, 'Friends, haven't you any fish?' 'No,' they answered. He said, 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some....'"

Now here is where the disciples could have easily been offended.

They may have mumbled to one another (or at least thought): "What do you mean to throw the net on the right side of the boat?" Maybe the disciples were used to fishing off the left side of the boat.



They might object, "Daddy always fished off the left side of the boat. Grandpa always fished off the left side of the boat. We've always fished off the left side of the boat!"

Regardless, we are quick to defend our behaviors, even if they are not working.

JOHN 21:6

"...When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish."

A miracle catch! The key to increased productivity is hearing and obeying the directives that God gives, even when it does not make sense.

JOHN 21:7

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,

"It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

When we begin to see the tide turn, circumstances change, our productivity increases as we ask for wisdom (James 1:5), and then act on this godly intel, we can quickly connect the dots and awaken to the realization: "It is the Lord!"

JOHN 21:8-11

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to

them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn."

The net was full of large fish - not small fish - 153 large fish. God is the God of more than enough. The Lord even prevented their nets from breaking! Brothers, doing things God's way will not only bring superior results, but it won't wear you out in the process.

Flowing with the Holy Ghost versus doing it in the strength of your own flesh is like the difference between sailing across the lake using wind power versus you rowing across under your own power.

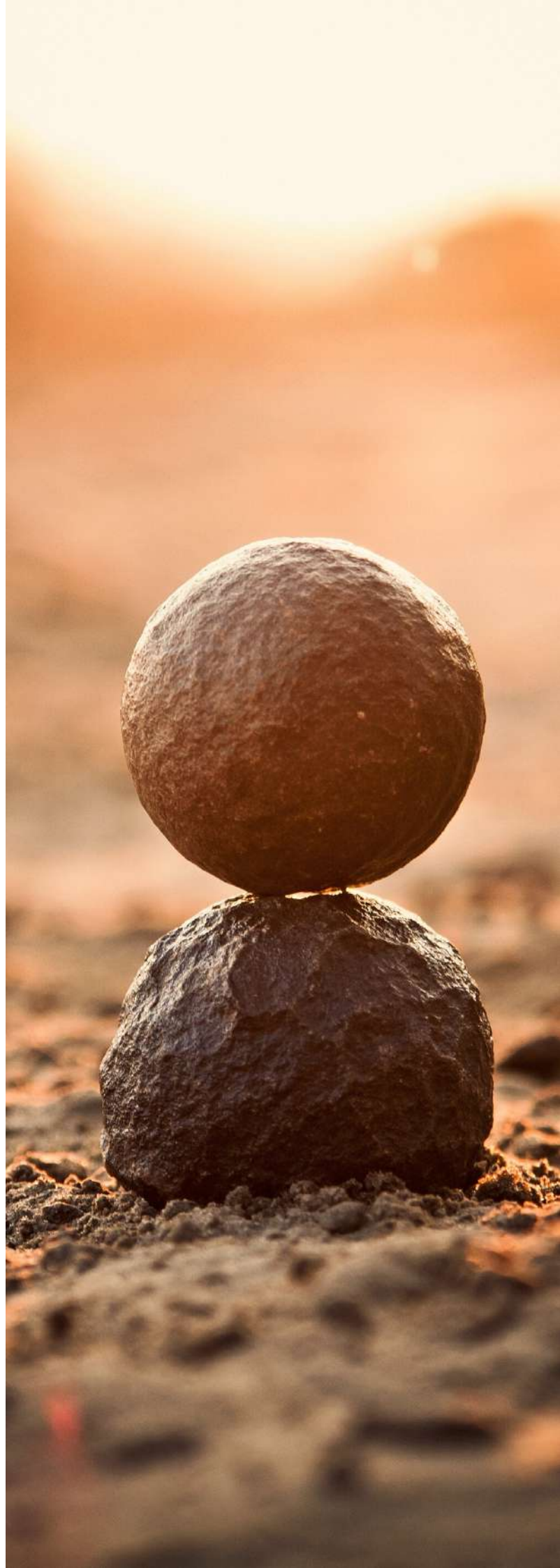
BALANCE IS A BIG DEAL

One classic lesson I learned in my life as a Christ-follower is that Satan wants to get you and me out of balance. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Have you ever watched a television show documenting a predator chasing its prey in slow motion? The lioness is in high pursuit of the gazelle, and with precise skill "flicks" one of the back legs of the fleeing prey with its paw. Why? Instinctively the big cat knows if it can get its prey out of balance, it will fall. And if it falls, it's over.

That is not unlike us as men. Our enemy, the devil, wants you and me out of balance: to live our lives in the extremes, to be so extremely busy that we cannot be profitable for the kingdom. If the devil cannot make you sin, at least he can keep you busy.

Remember, where focus goes, power flows. A balanced life is a blessed life. A blessed life is a balanced life.



10 STEPS TO CREATE MARGIN FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST



STEP 1 PRAY THINGS THROUGH

There has never been a more critical time to “inquire of the Lord” (see Joshua 9:14). We need to make God our first stop, not our last resort, before we launch out in anything major in our lives. We need to go directly to the Source and ask the Holy Spirit what He thinks about the issue we’re facing.

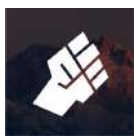
- Should I change jobs?
- Should I pursue this relationship?
- Should we make this major purchase?

“Praying things through” can be as simple as asking God about something and then waiting long enough for a response. No answer doesn’t necessarily mean “no” as an answer. A pause in a response just might be a timing issue. Here’s what I know: sometimes we don’t pray because we’re afraid we won’t get the answer we want. In my own experience with prayer over the last four decades of my walk with Christ,

I’ve observed that God answers prayer in at least one of four ways:

- **Yes** – God responds to believing prayer
- **No** – Father knows best sometimes, so set your default to “trust”
- **Later** – A delay doesn’t always mean a denial
- **I will if you will** – Scripture teaches some promises of God are conditional (2 Chronicles 7:14; 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 1:19).

If we pray things through, and train ourselves to go to God first, we can alleviate, avoid and prevent a lot of heartaches, frustration, and wasted time (and money). Poor decision making skills is an expensive habit. Happily, if we are teachable, trainable, moldable, and shapeable, then with the help of strategic mentors, we can learn good decision making skills. How about we determine to skip wasteful detours, rabbit trails, and dead ends by checking in with God on the front end?



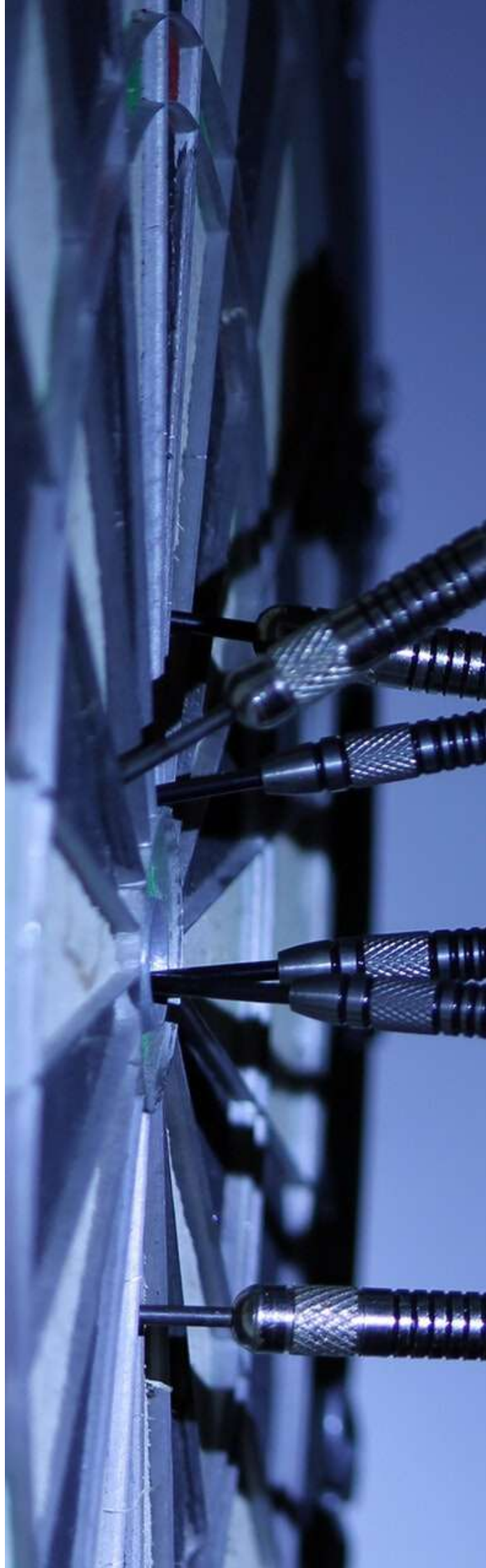
STEP 2

DO THE RIGHT THINGS

This speaks of priorities. Jesus, who was never early or late a day in His life, taught in Matthew 6:33: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” His advice is clear. First things first. Steven Covey famously said: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Bottom line: we need to live life in the right order. The “right order,” at least for the man who purports to be a follower of Jesus, might look something like this:

- My relationship with God
- My relationship with my wife
- My relationship with my children
- My relationship with myself
- My relationship with my job
- My relationship with my ministry

We need to desire to be in “the right place at the right time with the right people doing the right things.” I would add to do right things, with a right attitude, and trust God that everything will work out alright in His time. To me, this summarizes living a balanced, blessed life. Here’s the deal: people matter most. It’s all about relationships. Information doesn’t build the kingdom of God, relationships do. Nobody on their death bed ever said: “Gee, I wish I’d spent more time at work.”





STEP 3

DO THINGS RIGHT

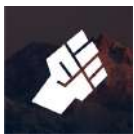
When I was growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, my dad taught me, “Son, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.” And in the years that followed, he modeled that in front of me. He demonstrated to me that if you do things right the first time, then chances are good that you won’t have to do it again. In other words, have a simple plan, work the plan, and the plan should work.

I wished I learned that lesson the easy way. As I grew up and got into the job market, working for an employer and not my father, I often didn’t do things right. Are you like me? Did you have to do stuff over (and over) again because, like me, you were too lazy to get your ducks in a row before charging into the project? If we call it for what it is, that’s immaturity. I’ve been guilty as sin of that in the past, but I’ve failed forward.

These days, before doing something, I try to get clear directions. If I’m working on a team, it doesn’t hurt to actively listen and repeat back the project objectives. How many times have you done a project at work only to have your boss say, “that’s not what I wanted!” I wince when I write that because that’s been true of me more than once on the job.



Here's a thought: read the manual first. Look up a "how-to video" on YouTube. Ask an experienced buddy how they got it done. One caution: don't wait until conditions are perfect to get started. Many men I know get stuck at the starting line because they are fixing to commence to begin to start a task or project. Scratch that! Just do your homework, get a clear understanding, and then get to work.



STEP 4 **ORGANIZE OR AGONIZE**

Ok, if somehow as you read this you could Facetime me and show me the orderliness of your workstation, your filing system, your closet, your car – would that be a good thing? Can you put your fingers on your tax return from three years ago? Be honest. Do you run down to Home Depot to buy an inexpensive tool only because it's quicker than digging it out of the garage? Oh yeah, the garage. If you're the average guy (and I'm not saying you are but if the shoe fits...), you probably still have unpacked boxes in there from the move months or years ago which, by the way, is the reason you are still parking car(s) in the driveway because there's no room in the garage. I know, I know – I've gone from teaching to meddling!



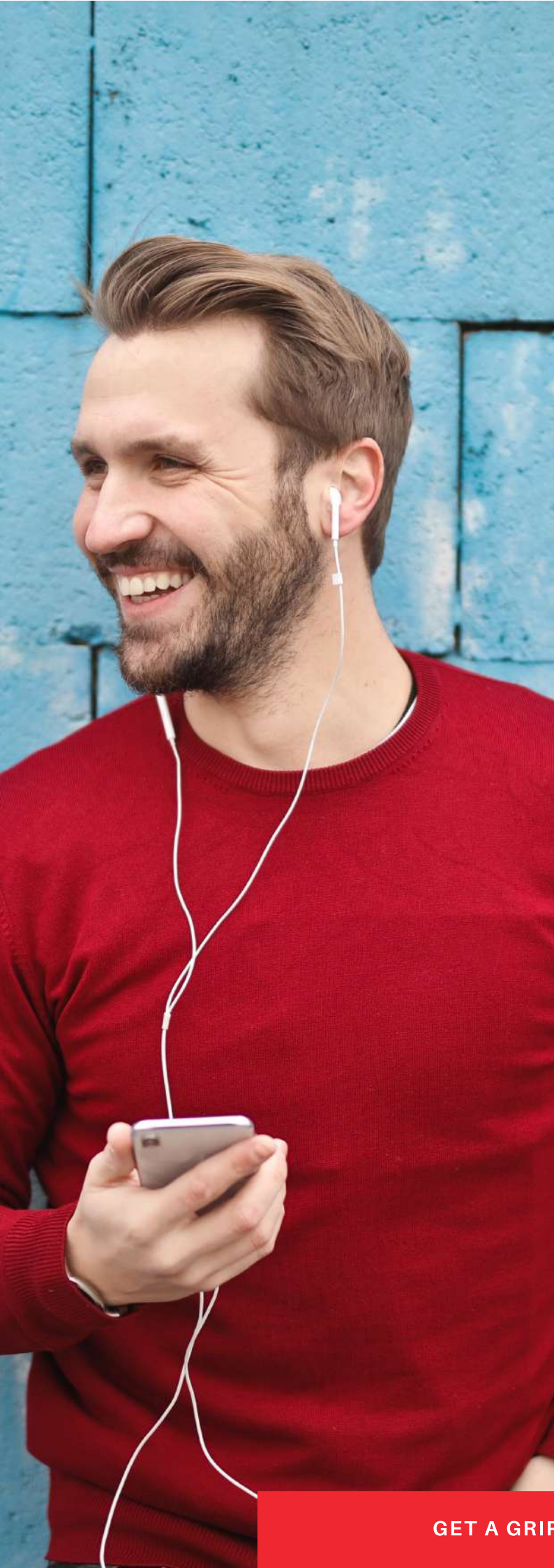
All I'm saying is we must organize or we will most assuredly agonize! According to author and speaker John Maxwell, the #1 time waster for men is "looking for lost stuff." No surprise there. You may need to get the "urge to purge" and roll up your sleeves, bite the bullet, and clean up your act. Set up a filing system that really works. Clean off your PC or Mac desktop. Get your digital assets in order and backed up on the Web. Make "instant information access" your goal – the ability to get what you need when you need it. If you don't have a "system" to keep your calendar, tasks, and contacts organized on your smart device, get one. These days, it's all at your fingertips so there's really no excuse. If you need help, ask a kid. Remember, the problem with us men is NOT that we don't know what to do. Our problem is WHEN will we do WHAT we know to do? If you're not organized, you won't have to tell other people. They'll know.



STEP 5

COMEBINE TASKS WHEN POSSIBLE

"Multi-tasking" has come under legitimate scrutiny in recent years, so let's not trip over terminology. What I'm suggesting in this point is the attempt to, whenever possible, combine tasks to get further, faster. An example of this is planning which calls to make on the commute home from work. You can batch them and with today's technology you can do it all hands-free using verbal commands to execute the calls. Bingo – two things get done without losing focus.



Another example is on every occasion to the gym, I listen to podcasts while I'm working out. I listen to Craig Groeschel of Life Church on Mondays, Andy Stanley's weekly message on Wednesdays, and Steven Furtick's sermon each Friday. The only reason I don't do podcasts on Tuesdays and Thursdays is because I swim laps for an hour. By the way, I have several other podcasts to grow myself as a leader (the "Andy Stanley Leadership Podcast" and the "Craig Groeschel Leadership Podcast"), keep up with current events through a Christian worldview ("The World and Everything in It"), and one or two just for fun ("The Way I Heard It" by Mike Rowe, and "Jay Leno's Garage," to name a few.) I read 19 books last year, most of which were audio books using Audible.com.

Some of you eat lunch at your desk while working – this is another prime example of what I'm talking about. This is not rocket science. I like what John Maxwell teaches leaders to do to have a maximum impact life. He says, "You don't always have to work, but always have work with you." This way you can redeem some of that five years of waiting in line or seven years spent in the bathroom!



With today's iPhones and Android phones and tablets, the options are virtually endless of tasks you can combine anytime anywhere. All I'm saying is to think **AHEAD** about how to redeem time that is normally wasted because of poor planning. If you can sneak in four 15-minute planned, or even impromptu, opportunities to do something while you're doing something else, then hey, that's one hour you've chipped off a big task or project. Remember, inch by inch it's a cinch, yard by yard it's hard.



STEP 6

DISCOVER THE DELIGHT OF DELEGATION

If someone else can do it, let them! Men, we need to learn "let it go." Let what go? Anything that someone else can do! Strive to structure your role to only do what only you can do. Certainly, that's a tall order but think of its implications. You empower others and free up your time to do what matters most. Your organization gets the most bang for the buck out of your skillset when you are freed up from other tasks that can and should be done by someone else. This is not always possible in certain work environments, but whenever you can train, equip, and empower others. Releasing others into tasks or roles that grow them and the organization is good leadership. Delegation does not mean you're lazy. It is a way of working smarter. As a matter of fact, success without a successor is not success!

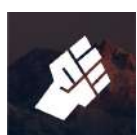


Let me give you an example. I used to work at a church where every Monday I would take 30 minutes to restock the tithing envelopes in the pews. Was that a job that somebody else could have been trained to do? Of course! Was putting out tithing envelopes the best use of my time and skills? Of course not! So, I found a volunteer, showed them what to do, and never stuffed tithing envelopes in the pews again. That bought me back 25 hours a year. There's a couple of problems we face as men with delegation:

(1) Some men, perhaps even you, are too insecure to let somebody else do their task because they're afraid the other guy will do it better than them. My advice for that is: GET OVER IT!

(2) Many guys won't take the time and effort it takes to train somebody else. They rationalize it's quicker and easier to do it themselves. Yes, but that's short-term thinking. In the long-run, there is no future in you doing what others can (and probably should) do.

Make time to make leaders out of people and move on to bigger and better things! Every time we invest time in others and delegate responsibility to them we add value to their lives. Building others up is one of the best things we can do for them. By getting others involved, every single thing they do that you don't have to wins you back all the time that it would have taken for you to do the task! So, discover the delegation!



STEP 7

MAKE APPOINTMENTS, EVEN WITH YOURSELF

One of the best ways I've found to get stuff done is to set aside a guarded, dedicated time to do it. We make appointments all the time. No revelation there. But to get a grip on your hectic schedule, begin making appointments with yourself and those that matter most. First, schedule a one-on-one with you and the Lord each day. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33? "Seek first the kingdom of God..." Your daily appointment with God should be non-negotiable. One pastor I know put it this way: "When I spent one hour with God in the morning, I can make eight good decisions in an hour. When I miss my daily hour with God, it takes me eight hours to make one good decision."

Whether you're an early bird or a night owl, the best time to meet up with God is when you're at your best. Be sure to include a daily Bible reading plan, prayer, a bit of worship, and maybe a devotional or two. Start with 15 minutes or so and incrementally build on that time to 30- or 45, or even 60-minutes as a goal. Next, we need to make appointments with our wives and children. Reserve a spot on your Google or Outlook calendar and mark them as high priority. When friends or business associates press you for a time slot that encroaches on family time, just look at your calendar and say, "Oh sorry, that time won't work. I have a previous appointment at that time."



How about...?" Believe me, they'll understand. That previous appointment could be your son's baseball game. It could be a lunch date with your wife. Wives and children aren't dumb – they know whether they are a priority or not. Your calendar will tell the story. A prayer that I have prayed is for the Lord to give me a sense of urgency in raising my daughter. As I write this, she is a smart, articulate, and an opinionated twenty-seven-year old adult. My window of time with her as a baby, toddler, elementary, middle, and high school student is over.

Big idea: schedule adequate time for people and projects based on priorities and deadlines. And don't forget to block off time for devotions with the Lord, quality time with your spouse, playing with your kids, and exercising your body.



STEP 8

BE WILLING TO CHANGE

A survey was taken at a retirement home where they asked the old folks: “if you could do it all over again, what would you do different?”

One of the most reported answers among the older men was, “I would take more risks.” If we’re going to manage our time and our lives well, we’ve got to be prepared to change with the times, roll with punches, adapt to the circumstances, and yes, have courage to take more risks. Life is a lot like duck hunting. You’ve got to aim ahead of the target to hit it. Just like Jesus challenged His disciples in John 21 to “throw your nets on the right side of the boat,” so we need to resist fear of change. Let’s be bold and break the cycle of mediocrity in our lives! This point really is a big deal because we are so darn resistant to change. We like things the way we like things.

Typically, we sit in the same section of the church every week, order the same meal at our favorite restaurant, and watch the same TV series every week. No question, we are creatures of habit. Let’s make this natural proclivity work in our favor. Remember, to get what you’ve never got, you may need to do what you’ve never done.



STEP 9

LIVE AND LEAD AT THE PACE OF GRACE

God doesn't get any glory out of you burning out because you lacked the self-discipline to rest, consider this:

- You'll never get a grip on your hectic schedule unless you pace yourself
- It almost too cliché to even say it; but your life, your leadership, your legacy is a marathon, not a sprint
- You must resist overcommitting
- You must learn to confidently say no
- You must be secure enough to not be a people pleaser
- You must avoid setting unrealistic expectations of yourself or those you lead

Great husbands, fathers, and leaders live and lead at the pace of grace. Let me share one insightful passage of scripture with you on this crucial point:



GENESIS 33:12-14

Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you." But Jacob said to him [Esau], "My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."



We need to discipline ourselves to lead by example by not being workaholics. For me, the indicator that I need to slow down is my attitude. When I find that my attitude – how shall I say this? – well, I'll just say it –when my attitude sucks, I need to throttle back, take a break, walk away from the PC, and don't schedule any more meetings for a day or two. Following are three words and three scriptures that might help dial in this point.

■ **REST // MATTHEW 11:28-29**

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

■ **RELAX // EPHESIANS 6:13**

When you have done all then stand.

■ **LAUGH // PROVERBS 17:22**

A merry heart does good like a medicine. Please don't miss this, to live and lead at the pace of grace we've got to rest, relax, and laugh easily, especially at ourselves.



STEP 10

DO YOUR BEST, THEN LEAVE THE RESULTS WITH GOD

Let me focus on two words in our last step: best and results. First, “do your best.” I’m not sure I claim that I always do my best on tasks and projects. Even when I’m working for the church as a pastor. I want to. I need to. But my best, my very best? Honestly, sometimes I save that for special occasions. I need to apply these steps to my own life to create adequate margin to manage my life and schedule beyond “getting by” or even “getting it done” but reach for “getting it done on time with excellence consistently.”

Finally, as we close, let’s consider the word results. Sometimes outcomes are beyond our control. We must come to terms with that. Sometimes our efforts in multiple areas are like planting a seed, and then patiently waiting for a harvest. Let nature take its course and let God be God. King Solomon wrote in Psalm 127:1: Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.”

Let’s determine to submit our hectic schedule to the Lord, invite the Holy Spirit to give discernment to make good choices, and leave the results in God’s hands.

REVIEW: THE 10 STEPS

1. Pray things through.
2. Do the right things.
3. Do things right.
4. Organize or agonize.
5. Combine tasks when possible.
6. Discover the delight of delegation.
7. Make appointments – even with yourself.
8. Be willing to change.
9. Live and lead at the pace of grace.
10. Do your best, then, leave the results with God.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Robertson is the founder of My Virtual Mentor, an online platform leading man to go further faster in their faith. David has over thirty years of Christian ministry experience and is a triathlete. He and his wife Monica live in Middle Tennessee, and together they have one adult daughter, Abigail Grace. To explore a map to your best spiritual growth year ever, visit www.myvirtualmentor.org.