

CO-MISSION: PLANTING

Organisation and time management

Titus

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. – *the purpose of the Cross*

⁸ insist on these things [the gospel], so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

¹⁴ And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful. – *it is a skill to be learnt and a passion to cultivate*

Implementation – no point having a plan if we don't implement it – time management is about getting stuff done – 'fruitfulness' (Titus 3:14)

Freedom and Stewardship – the particular issue for pastors and perhaps even more for planters is that you really do have a lot of freedom about how you use your time – far more than most people – don't have someone telling you exactly what to do and when to do it, there are few fixed points, little accountability – you decide what you do and so the issue is stewardship – how will we use the time we've been given well

Our surrounding culture – working hours in London are above the national average, pushing 40 hours for the average full-time worker – and a lot of people are doing 50, 60 or 70 regularly – and average commute time is 40 minutes each way – for a lot of people it's an hour. We feel the pressure of that – and we should. On the one hand we don't want to present a picture of the Christian life that is full of stress ("Why would I want to become a Christian when you look more harassed than me?") but on the other hand we don't want to present as slackers living in a fantasy world.

Am I heading for burn out? – Maybe we've seen others crash and burn. Maybe you've had times yourself where you feel on the verge of panic or depression or exhaustion.¹ But maybe you also ask yourself:

Am I a sluggard? I've been reading through Proverbs with my family and I find the stuff on the sluggard convicting:

Prov. 15:19 The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns... – *procrastination leads to build up until it's actually very hard to make progress – see it particularly in an email inbox*

Prov. 26:13 A sluggard says, "There's a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!" – *can think of a lot of reasons not to do things, retreat-anxiety cycle*

¹⁴ As a door turns on its hinges,

so a sluggard turns on his bed. – *lot of movement but no progress*

¹⁵ A sluggard buries his hand in the dish;

he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. – *starting but never finishing – why? apathy*

¹⁶ A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes

than seven people who answer discreetly. – *self deceived, armchair critic with bag of chips, actually believes wise*

What are your issues?

How do you want to grow?

¹ See Christopher Ash, *Zeal without Burn Out*.

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I'm very aware we'll all be in different places on the whole issue of time management. We have different family cultures, national cultures. I was personally deeply challenged in Kenya by the hard work of most Kenyans – up early, long hours, night classes, hospitality.

Rather than give you lots of time management hacks² I'm going to try to get a bit deeper and suggest six mental shifts of perspective:

6 Shifts:

1. Time management → Self management

As Danny Rurlander and other have pointed out,³ there is really no such thing as time management (unless you are God). We can't add a minute to our day. We can't win ourselves more time. What we can manage (more than anyone or anything else) is ourselves.

What makes a good boss?

- Clear on vision
- Clear on expectations
- Encouraging rather than negative and perfectionist
- Enable you to play to your strengths
- Concerned about goals and also concerned about you as a person
- Stretching without overstretching – reasonable workload
- Accountable to a higher boss

You need to be your own boss. A business podcast pointed this out to me recently – it sounds great to work for yourself, but then you realise you need to be the boss as well as the employee. The question is: Will you be a good boss to you?

2. Doing more → Doing the best

As Matt Perman says in *What's Best Next?* the key thing in productivity is not getting more done, it is getting the *right* things done.

Titus – 'good works' - The big questions is:

- What is the good?
- What is the best?
- What is the most valuable thing I can do today?
- What is the most significant contribution I can make?
- Even if I lose all my lists: *What's Best Next?*

3. Lists → Plan + Responsibilities + Diary

Easy for your inbox to become the driver

The 'best thing' to do is not likely to be in your inbox – it needs to be determined by your vision and responsibilities

² Hacks can be helpful but there's plenty of that online – [this](#) is a particularly good and comprehensive list – but they don't fully answer our problems. We can do a lot of hacks and still have some serious problems.

³ <https://ninethirtyeight.org/resources/blog/post/self-management-and-productivity>.

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Vision and plan really helps – stick to your priorities

Given your plan, what are going to be the essential activities?

Use a [weekly plan](#) to block in the essentials – e.g. sermon prep, meeting with people, evangelism – and be realistic about how much time is needed.

Your Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships

Christian	Family	Work	Society
<i>Child of God</i>	<i>Husband</i>	<i>Employee</i>	<i>Neighbour</i>
<i>Church member</i>	<i>Parent</i>	<i>Planter</i>	<i>Tax payer</i>
<i>Prayer partner</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>Manager</i>	<i>Driver</i>
<i>Small group leader</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Trainer</i>	<i>Voter/citizen</i>
<i>Giver</i>		<i>Pastor/elder</i>	<i>Sports club member</i>
<i>Friend</i>			
<i>Witness</i>			

Take some time to fill in the chart as much as you can with all the roles and responsibilities that God has given you. The idea is that this creates a dashboard that you can look at regularly (e.g. once a week) to remind yourself of all the things that you need to be, all the relationships you need to maintain and responsibilities you need to fulfil. Clearly these responsibilities are not all equal. Some will need more time and investment than others. But the thing is that you cannot drop any of these balls. A quick look at a chart like this reminds you – Ah yes, I’m a tax payer and I need to do my tax return; Ah yes, I’m a son and I haven’t called my mum for two weeks.

Diary

- Is going to be a source of stuff to do – look ahead and anticipate the prep you need to do
- But also a way of making things happen – as much as possible use the diary rather than lists – schedule when you need to do the prep and make the calls

4. Urgent → Important

Easy to get into fire-fighting mode, responsive, bouncing from one urgent thing to the next.
Panic doesn’t produce good work or thinking – the bell shaped stress/performance curve

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Slow down⁴

Deep work

- Slow your mind down by reading, exercise, reducing caffeine
- Focus for one hour

The Eisenhower Matrix

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Do it now	Diarise
Not important	Delegate?	Delete

Eisenhower actually said he only faced things which were Urgent and not important or Important but not urgent.

Some companies have decided to ignore the urgent because a) it's often unimportant and b) attending to the urgent usually produces more urgent things. In ministry this may often not be possible but it is a warning to

- slow down and check that the urgent really is urgent
- check whether it is important or not
- reduce distraction – e.g. alerts/notifications

Connected to this issue of urgency – Craig Hamilton has some very helpful material on decision-making:

Timing in decision making

- The superficial urgency should not be the key factor – urgent requester doesn't want you to consult
- Key factor: how much time do I have to make this decision?
- Make quicker decisions – genuine urgency, danger of paralysis and cowardice, when options will close down or the decision will be made for you
- Make slower decisions – “never make a decision today that can be reasonably put off until tomorrow” – options may open up, may resolve, time to consult

Opportunity decisions [to speak or receive a speaker, a venue, partnerships, mission trips, conferences to go to or promote]

- Need to have the vision/goal really clear
- Don't be swayed by the urgency – the opportunity will often come with a small time window and it's easy to feel the pressure of that – what advertisers always do: ‘This week only offer!’
 - o think of the opportunity cost as well as benefit
 - o think what an outsider would do
 - o what would make me change my mind?

Saying No

This can be a way to avoid sacrifice but not necessarily.

- a) With a purpose – it can be a way to not only keep yourself from burn out but also a discipleship opportunity where you can explain your priorities and cast the vision⁵
- b) Loving people not needing people – I don't need you to love me, I don't need to please people
- c) Compassion-driven neglect – there are things we are not doing to do so that we can concentrate on the best thing

⁴ “The first need is not to speed up... but to slow down... to achieve such a pace of mind... as a cow chewing cud.” (George Watson, Writing a thesis, p. 8-9).

⁵ <https://iserveafrica.org/2017/02/01/the-art-of-saying-no/>.

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Sometimes we avoid the important because it is simply harder than the urgent
Rank your to-do list and eat the frog⁶

5. Random → Rhythm

Our work intensity will fluctuate – but is that fluctuation just driven by the workload and a overwork-crash cycle or is there a more healthy rhythm?

This is about respecting our createdness and trusting that God is giving us the right number of hours in the day

- a) Sleep – do we have good routines of shutting off screens and social media and email an hour before bed time? Is our workplace outside our sleeping space? Are late nights and sleepless nights and all-nighters the exception or the rule?
- b) Rest day – turn off the email/data/phone
- c) Seasons
 - a. In life – e.g. small children, aging parents
 - b. In church planting – there is a somewhat undefinable period at the beginning where you need to push hard for a sustained period to get momentum⁷
Prov. 10:5 He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.
The point is that it is a season not constant

Watch the common traps

- a) TV – steals sleep, conversation time; can be useful to wind down but can easily be a false economy when it means I'm not in bed till late
- b) Notifications – use flight mode!
- c) News – the world probably hasn't radically changed since I last checked – why do I keep checking? I need to be more excited about God's news, about his epic mastery of history, his rule, the coming cataclysm of Christ's return, his glory⁸

6. Solo → Relying on others

So easily time management is sold as a solo sport. And the problem is that increases our sense of isolation and stress which doesn't help. God has not designed us to be doing life solo.

Rely on the Lord – involve him in all your work, pray over every email and meeting

Rely on others

Matt Perman points out that one of the reasons why God gives you more than you can handle is so that you *have* to rely on others.

- a) Stewardship delegation – results / guidelines / resources / review. Mark Fossey: “work out who you are and give away what you're not good at”
- b) Collaboration – team mindset
- c) Be a trainer – raise up the others
- d) Get the help of others who are better at personal organisation than others – get a mentor in that area of your life

⁶ <https://www.briantracy.com/blog/time-management/the-truth-about-frogs/>.

⁷ Cf. story of a guy pulling a van - <https://fiec.org.uk/news/london-church-planting-academy>.

⁸ This book is extremely helpful - <https://www.desiringgod.org/books/12-ways-your-phone-is-changing-you>.

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Maximise people time

- a) Having people around – include people in your (family) life, take people with you when you're going somewhere / doing ministry
- b) Walking the beat – e.g. Sam round Vauxhall Gardens
- c) Sermon prep with others – this is a way to do two things at once but also something that improves your preaching – why not read 1-to-1 the same passage you're going to preach, get the input of others, even non-Christians ("What questions does this raise in your mind?")
- d) Plan to be flexible, schedule the spontaneous
 - a) You can flex from a plan
 - b) With those who are not willing to be pinned down to a particular meeting time then work out when they are likely to be free and then just happen to be in the area and give them a call then (e.g. Alex trying to meet with a Colombian)

Questions to keep asking yourself as a planter

1. *Am I reading the Bible and praying?* – meeting Christ, getting my attitude right
2. *Am I casting vision and going on about the main thing?* – D. A. Carson: "If I have learned anything in 35 or 40 years of teaching, it is that students don't learn everything I teach them. What they learn is what I am excited about, the kinds of things I emphasize again and again and again and again. That had better be the gospel."
3. *Am I meeting new people?* – how many in the last month? Our key job is gathering
4. *Am I training people?* – this is the important-but-not-urgent task that planters tend to forget – we have to be developing people

Resources

- Matt Fuller, *Time for Everything?*
- Matt Perman, *What's Best Next?* [<https://www.whatsbestnext.com>] and *Unstuck*
- Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership*
- Peter Brain, *Going the Distance*
- <https://www.challies.com/articles/20-quick-tips-to-improve-your-productivity/>
- <https://www.challies.com/articles/8-email-mistakes-you-make/>
- <https://www.whatsbestnext.com/2016/06/get-email-inbox-zero-every-day-updated/>
- Tools and Apps
 - Diary – esp. with time slots (see [below](#))
 - Watch – so you see time go and so you don't check your phone!
 - Pomodoro – 25 min bursts, can block notifications
 - <https://www.prayermate.net/> – capture prayer requests & insights
 - <https://evernote.com/> - get things out of your head, journal, checklists
 - <https://todoist.com/>
 - <https://wunderlist.com>
 - <https://toggl.com> (android) or <https://www.hourstimetracking.com/> (iPhone) – track hours, track balance of time spend on different areas
 - <https://www.officetimeline.com/make-gantt-chart/google-docs>
 - <https://kanban.ist/>

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Your Weekly Schedule

	Pre-breakfast 0600-0800	AM till coffee 0900-1100	AM after coffee 1100-1300	Lunch 1300- 1400	PM till tea 1400- 1600	PM after tea 1630-1800	Supper 1800- 2000	Evening 2000- 2200
Monday								
Tuesday								
Wednesday								
Thursday								
Friday								
Saturday								
Sunday								

A couple of extras:

1. Giving the right amount of time to sermon preparation. The 'right amount of time' is affected by a number of things:
 - a) Tendency – know yourself – do you tend to love study or struggle to sit still?
 - b) Context – in a cross-cultural context you may need to spend more time in preparation (esp. on how to communicate it effectively) but also you'll need to spend more time out of the study understanding people and forming relationships; in a middle class context your ability to preach very well is key but in a council estate context you will not attract people to your church through good preaching so much as through relationships⁹
 - c) Competence/experience – it will take less time as we get more experienced; but at the same time we need to keep investing in our preaching and not get stuck in a rut
 - d) Season – in life and planting there are some times when you need to be out there doing a lot of evangelism and times when you can or must put more time into your preaching
 - e) "Trust that the difference between an excellent sermon¹⁰ that you should preach and the best sermon that you could preach is the space that a lot of ministry needs to exist in" (Mark Dever)

Remember to give 50% of the time to working really hard on the passage and getting clear on how it works, and then 50% to thinking through how exactly the message cuts into your context and speaks to the hearts of you and your hearers and how you can communicate as effectively as possible.

⁹ <https://www.acts29.com/struggles-of-a-middle-class-pastor-on-a-council-estate/>.

¹⁰ That is a sermon which is Careful, Christ-exalting, Clear, Cutting, Compassionate.

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2. Tame the inbox

- 1) Don't look at an email twice.
- 2) Delete if possible
- 3) Archive if might need the info one day but needs no response
- 4) Read and reply straight away if you can do that in 2 minutes
- 5) If it needs longer then schedule in diary or system/list with alert