Balancing a Busy Life

S. Joseph Kidder
Andrews University, kiddersj@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs

Part of the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/55
Balancing a busy life

Most pastors spend an average of 50 hours a week working, not including the main weekly church service. Even though we are putting in the time, we may not be very focused or productive. We spend much time in meetings, visitations, and sermon preparation. But few pastors are intentional about discipling, vision casting, and creative thinking. One of the ways to find balance is through effective time management. Pastors do not find it easy to balance a busy life to fit everything in that we love and what we have to do, but here are some tips to help facilitate the process.

Tips for finding balance

1. Meet God every morning. Allow at least an hour first thing in the morning for your own devotional and quiet time with God. Sermon preparation does not have the same rejuvenation properties as devotional time. To keep balance in your life, you need to keep a strong connection to Christ. Larry Moyer notes that “preachers who have fallen away from the Lord have commented to me that where they made their mistake was neglecting their quiet time with Him.”

In my experience, I have found that waking up an hour early to spend time in reading the Bible, singing, praying, and reading other devotional books sets the tone for the rest of my day. Additionally, during prayer walks in the day, I share with God the issues on my heart and take time to listen to what He has to share with me.

2. Take time to dream. Picture your ideal life. Consider the following: (1) What is important to you? A relationship with God, a healthy family dynamic, sharing the message of the kingdom? (2) What are your values? (3) How do you want to spend your time? Preaching, discipling, communing with God? (4) How do you want to feel? (5) With whom do you want to interact? Church members, youth, the lost? (6) What is your passion? (7) What is your philosophy of ministry?

Write it all down. Be specific. What barriers are keeping you from fulfilling your dream? The more clearly you see your dream and are aware of the steps necessary to achieve it, the easier it will be to see yourself achieving your dream. It will help you realize what you need to do in your life, or cut out of your life, in order to bring your dream into reality. Be intentional every day about working toward your dream.

The same is true for your churches. If you do not have a dream for your church, it will stagnate. You need to see your dream clearly enough to be able to share it with the church, foster enthusiasm for the direction in which you see your church headed, and nurture participation in fulfilling the dream.

3. Take stock of your current reality. Make a list of your present tasks, what is needed to complete them, and the amount of time needed. Be intentional about keeping your church moving forward. Be honest about how long each item on your list will take.

Underestimating the time needed to complete a task will only cause you to be rushed or late for the next task. Remember, it takes much more effort to execute a task than it does to just think about it. Putting everything down on paper can help you get a better perspective of what you are trying to accomplish.

One of the best things in my ministry was when I took time to make a list of my strengths and weaknesses to share with my church board. Like most boards, they were already aware of where I was lacking, because of either limited time or limited ability. We found leaders willing to step in and take on some of the responsibilities for me. For example, an elder who worked in finance offered to go to all of the finance committees and report back to me with a summary. We hired a church secretary to help me get more organized and deal with some of the office work.

4. Prioritize and make productive choices. Develop a priority list of what you really want to do. Pray that God will show you what the best use of your time is and how to unclutter your life. Focus on those elements that are important before they become urgent. By taking care of your most unpleasant tasks, you will not spend the rest of your day dreading them and will keep them from turning into urgent items. Once you make these choices, let go of what you cannot or choose not to do. If you have prioritized your list, it will be easier to know when you need to say...
No. There may be certain tasks that, while a priority, will be better served if another leader is included. Do not be afraid to delegate. You do not have to be in every committee meeting or a part of every ministry in your church. Even Moses had to be reminded to delegate and not try to do everything himself (see Exod. 18:13–22).

When it comes to programming and ministry, keep in mind that if something is not contributing to the vision of the church, it does not necessarily need to continue. Just because you have always done something in the past does not mean that this is still productive for you or the church to do.

5. Focus on building resources. By the training necessary for people to be confident and prepared for ministry and evangelism.

To avoid getting sidetracked, make sure there are people who will support you and push you forward. Have a friend or community pastor group to go to for advice and nurturing. After seminary, a group of three of us committed to meet four times a year. We discussed how to bring our dreams into reality by sharing our experiences, challenges, resources, creative ministry ideas, and critiques of each other’s preaching. This was an opportunity for us to pray together and provided much needed support while we encouraged each other to pursue our dreams.

6. Slow down to get ahead. Runners perform better, run faster, and have fewer injuries when they take regular walk breaks before they get tired. The same is true for pastors. Seek rest before you reach burnout. Whenever possible, limit yourself to an eight- or nine-hour workday, and leave your work behind when you go home. Spend quality time daily with your family. Play with your kids. Go on a date with your spouse. Take vacations. “Rest and watch your passion come back to life.”

Another way to avoid burnout is to include regular exercise in your schedule. “A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe.” Exercise will help you deal with the demands of a busy schedule. “Both job performance and satisfaction are heightened when the body is strong and capable.” Taking short five-to ten-minute walks every two to three hours gives me energy, a sense of well-being, and the ability to concentrate better.

7. Take time for critical thinking. Just as you need to reevaluate your personal budget at regular intervals, you also need to make regular check-ups on how you are spending your time. Activities creep into our schedules that we really do not need or want to do. Some tasks start taking up more time than you have budgeted for, while others take less. If you regularly set aside time to look at how you spend your time, you will be better able to eliminate those unwanted activities.

I often ask myself: What am I doing that does not need to be done by me? What am I doing that is not working? How can I better do what I am doing? What is not being done that should be? What is being done that should not be?

Use critical thinking to help with problem solving. Brainstorm with other people to learn from their experiences and tap into their creativity. Read books on various subjects to glean insights and find better ways to interact with and inspire your members.

**Allocating your time**

Spending your whole week on sermon preparation, visitation, or committee meetings will not work. If you do this, you will have no time to meet the physical and emotional needs of your congregation. You will, in effect, be neglecting your church. The goal is to find balance in your schedule. Below is one example of a balanced pastoral work-week of 45 hours. This does not include the time spent participating in the worship service or after church activities (conversations with church members, potluck, and so forth). Remember that you also
need to make time for your personal devotions and family outside of work.

1. Praying for the church: 5–7 hours a week. Spend at least an hour a day in prayer on behalf of the church. At times you may choose to spend a whole day in prayer and perhaps have periodic fasting days. Get as many people as possible to join with you in prayer and fasting for your members and community. At one time I set aside all day Monday and an hour each day the rest of the week to pray for the church and community I was serving. During these all-day prayer sessions, I would take the membership list and pray over each name individually, calling those I could to let them know I was praying for them and ask whether there was a special need in their lives. Not long after this experience, the weekly attendance of the church grew from 40 to 500. Prayer does work wonders.

2. Preaching/teaching preparation: 12–15 hours a week. Budget at least ten hours a week for preparation of the upcoming week’s sermon. Spend an additional three hours in reading and study for future sermons. Set aside an hour each week for Sabbath School preparation and another hour for your weekly prayer meeting or small group lesson planning.

3. Discipleship formation: 5–10 hours a week. Be intentional about spending time in vision casting and training people each week—not just periodically. Take an hour each week to have lunch or a church meeting with new or potential leaders to discuss vision casting for the church and where they fit in. Another two hours will likely be spent with current leaders and members for visioning, getting feedback, and training. Plan three hours each week for on-the-job training with your leaders, taking them with you on visitations and Bible study. Every visitation and Bible study should include intentional discipling that will benefit all involved. The remaining two hours of this time will be used for your small group, which allows for modeling, training, and spiritual growth.

4. Leadership/administration: 10–15 hours a week. Focus on leadership by spending at least two hours each week on creative thinking in order to constantly improve on ministry, worship, and evangelism. Spend another hour sending out encouraging notes to members and leaders. Remind them of their valuable contribution to the church. Anticipate how much time you will need for office hours, allowing a cushion for dealing with all of the little unexpected items that come up. General office work—filling out reports, filing, signing documents—might average an hour a week. Returning emails and making phone calls could take about two hours. Another two hours will go to planning the worship service and bulletins. Then there are all of the meetings: staff meetings, elders’ meetings, church board, school board, and so forth. The goal should be to keep these meetings from going too long; plan for two hours a week to be spent in meetings and the same amount of time for meeting preparation. Careful planning and preparation will help to keep your meetings on task. Every agenda should include prayer, ministry, and vision casting to maintain focus and ensure God’s presence.

5. Miscellaneous: approximately 5 hours a week. There will always be miscellaneous things that take up your time. Try to make sure that they do not become “time robbers.” A phone call or an unscheduled office visit that you think is going to take ten minutes might turn into an hour if the person you are talking to gets off on a tangent. On occasion, that “tangent” may be a cry for help, and no time limit can be placed on such meetings, but it is important to distinguish between a person’s genuine need and the tendency to just keep “talking.” There are times when I go on social media or the Internet to check one thing and look up to see that 50 minutes have passed.

Additionally, there will occasionally be special needs requiring much time and energy that will not always be a part of your regular schedule. Some of these are church socials, weddings, funerals, and various crises.

Conclusion

The above categories and time utilization plans are only a guide. In reality, a pastor is on call 24/7. But one still needs to be intentional with time management. You will find that the specific hours you commit to each category matters as much as the ability to find balance between them. Time management should be based on priorities rather than a specific number of hours. Remember, implementing a new strategy is a process. You will make some blunders and occasionally waste time. Keep your sense of humor, and learn from your mistakes.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.