

It's Self-Management, Not Time Management

by Michael Essenburg



I don't try to manage certain things. I don't try to manage gravity. I don't try to manage the revolution of the planets around the sun or the rotation of the earth on its axis. And I don't try to manage sunrise or sunset.

Actually, I am utterly incapable of managing any of these. The good news is that God, who does manage these, doesn't ask me to.

I don't try to manage the entirety of God's creation, and I've stopped trying to manage a certain part of God's creation. Why? Because my efforts have been about as effective as any attempt I would make to manage gravity. In other words, useless. Completely useless.

No matter what I do, I can't change the amount I receive. I set and work at goals to change the amount, but I get exactly the same amount. And to make matters worse, I can't even affect the rate at which I receive it. I set and work at goals to change the rate, and I get it at exactly the same rate.

What have I stopped trying to manage? Time. Why? First, I'm a time-bound being. I'm trapped in

time, and there is no escape. Second, whether I like it or not, I receive the same amount of time each day. And third, no matter what I do, I receive time at the same rate: 60 seconds per minute, 60 minutes per hour, 24 hours per day. I can't make a day 40 hours long. Can you? I can't even add 1 second to a day. Can you?

Simply put, I am completely unable to manage time. My efforts to manage time are as effective as any attempt I would make to manage the revolution of the planets around the sun or the earth's rotation on its axis. Let me be frank: your efforts to manage time are as effective as any attempt you would make to manage sunset. When's the last time you set a goal to change the time of sunset and it worked, even to an infinitesimal degree?

However, the good news is that God manages time. And the good news is that what God calls us to do is to manage ourselves within the time he gives us. So, it's how you manage yourself within time, not how you manage time. In other words, focus on yourself (which you

can affect), not on time (which you can't affect).

Practical implications?

1. Stop asking "How can I get more time?" and "How can I use my time effectively?" Start asking "How can I manage myself effectively within the time God gives me?"
2. Stop saying things like "I need 30-hour days" and "I need 10-day weeks." Start realizing that when you say things like that, you're commenting on how effectively you manage yourself and/or your level of trust that God gives you what you need.
3. Stop trying to manage time. Start focusing on managing yourself.

To increase your focus on self-management, reflect on 1 or more of the following:

1. **Do right things, then do things right.** Make sure you are working on the truly important before you spend time fine-

tuning what you are working on. This is a challenge. Why? Because it is easier, for example, to edit than it is to develop high quality content. Discipline yourself to do right things, then do things right.

2. **Focus.** On your God-given mission. This means saying “no” to certain requests, and saying “no” takes discipline.
3. **Think big.** Expand your vision. Play a bigger game. Regularly ask yourself questions like “What 3 dreams do I want to realize?” and “What 3 things could I do in the next 30 days that would make a real difference?”
4. **Define your goals.** Consistently make your goals SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Making your goals SMART takes discipline, but doing so helps you clarify what you want to

achieve. And knowing what you want to achieve helps you make better decisions about what to do next.

5. **Know the score.** Know where you are in terms of achieving your goals. Consistently track your progress. This takes discipline, but doing so will help you make effective decisions about what to do next.
6. **Schedule your big priorities first, your smaller priorities next, and so forth.** Don’t schedule renewing the newspaper, for example, before you schedule your key ministry goals. Discipline yourself to do this. Doing this will help you stay focused on your big priorities.
7. **Plan backward.** Plan like you would for a dinner party. Picture your house cleaned, your table set, and your meal prepared. Then figure out what you need to do to get your house cleaned, your table ready, and your meal prepared. In other words, picture the goal accomplished, and then plan backward. Say to yourself, “Just before I achieve my goal, I need to _____. And just before I do that, I need to _____. And just before I do that, I need to _____.” Planning backward takes discipline, but it results in a streamlined plan of action.

8. **Get organized.** Schedule time each week to review your goals, empty your inbox, and plan out the coming week. Discipline yourself to do this for a minimum of 30 minutes each week.

9. **Get resources.** Discipline yourself to secure the resources you need to achieve your goals before you start working on your goals.

10. **Get support, encouragement, and accountability.** Discipline yourself to get these on a weekly basis, for example, by getting a coach.

Now, take action to increase your self-management:

- Choose 1 of the 10 items mentioned above. Design a SMART action plan that will help you increase your self-management:

By _____ (date),

I will _____

- Next, make a commitment to achieve this action plan, and tell someone about your commitment.

- Finally, achieve your action plan.

Remember, it’s self-management, not time management. Work smart. Today.

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