

Preach the Word

Discussion Starters

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Managing Ourselves in Time to Preserve Time for Preaching Proclaim Grace Key Issue #3

Use any or all of the following questions for personal reflection or group study. Feel free to pick and choose which applications interest you most; even if you only complete one or two you'll benefit.

One preacher is quoted (p. 1), "When I have the time to enjoy writing a sermon, there's nothing better in the world. But when you don't have time to enjoy it, it becomes drudgery."

What does a week look like when you have “time to enjoy” preparing your sermon? What does a week look like when preparing your sermon is drudgery? What are two activities to which you need to say “yes,” and two activities to which you need to say “no” in order to enjoy preparing your sermon each week? Which are the most mentioned activities in your group? Pick just one and try it next week.

“Each day dawns with sufficient grace in our weakness to redeem the gift of time God patiently places into our feeble hands” (p. 1).

Consider a habitual mishandling of your time that you can place into the redeeming hands of God. Identify one decision or behavior of Jesus who, according to his active obedience, managed himself perfectly in his Father’s gift of time. Write those words of God on a note card, your desktop, or a sticky note for this week and refer to it regularly. Share it with a peer.

“Thom Rainer’s study (*Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*) ... analyzed ‘Effective’ and ‘Comparison’ pastors’ time use. ‘Comparison’ pastors averaged 4 hours on sermon work, ‘Effective’ pastors 22!” (p. 2)

Most of us probably fall somewhere between those numbers for sermon preparation hours. What two or three changes in managing ourselves in time could most quickly help you move closer to the 22 hours mentioned in Rainer’s book?

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In order to more accurately track where you fall in the amount of time devoted to sermon preparation, perform your own self-analysis by keeping track of your hours spent on sermon work from the first steps of planning to the first step into the pulpit. Do this each week for four weeks. It could also be very helpful to jot down a few notes each week about any events or decisions that impacted your use of time. After four weeks reflect on your notes and compare the weeks to each other. What did you do well? Where could you improve? Do you notice any patterns? What would you like to do differently? Write down a few ideas, than ask for feedback. Pursue one idea next week.

"Time spent equipping saints multiplies how needs can be met – often in ways we'll never see. The true measure of our ministry isn't what ceases when we take a call or retire. It is what continues because souls have been edified in Christ" (p. 3)

Our seminary's catalog lists as one of its key objectives in training that its graduates are "zealous both to nurture and to equip the saints." In practical terms, what are the key attitudes and activities that help a pastor carry out such "zealous" equipping of the saints?

Sometimes God does give us glimpses of our lay people meeting needs in ways that a pastor cannot. Think of one example. If you haven't done so before, take some time today to let that lay person know that you thank God for their partnership in the gospel.

"It is a not-so-subtle form of laziness to allow others to fill up our schedules because we didn't bother to do so ourselves with gospel-centered priorities. Ironically, such laziness begets busyness" (p. 4).

List one thing from your ministry and one thing from your personal/family life that — although it is not being scheduled in your calendar at all (or regularly) now — if it were, could make a significant difference in how you carry out that particular calling in your life.

Next week, while letting something else drop from your schedule that you have deleted or delegated, schedule one of those two things you listed as an appointment in your calendar. During the next week, by deleting or delegating add in the other thing you listed. Find a partner for this effort so that you can encourage one another and hold each other accountable.

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"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it" (Isaiah 30:15).

How is each of these four things the LORD mentioned through Isaiah an answer to sinful laziness (and laziness' close cousin, discouragement) and/or to the frantic reliance on our own efforts that so often hinder us from managing ourselves wisely in God's gift of time?

- Repentance
- Rest
- Quietness
- Trust

On page 4, the article listed the following suggestions for making the most of sabbatical time.

- Rejoice in unhurried time for Word and prayer.
- Focus on Christ's mission of heaven for us, our family, and our flock.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of our personal use of the means of grace.
- Study the doctrine of vocation and analyze reasons for repentance and thanksgiving in every area in which God has called us (child of God, husband, father, grandfather, son, brother, friend, synod member, pastor, circuit pastor, etc.).
- Consider how in our public ministry calling our weaknesses are made perfect in his strength and how our strengths also can serve to his glory.
- Evaluate how well we are caring for the temple of the Holy Spirit (our bodies) through sufficient rest, proper diet, and regular exercise.
- Give prayerful thought to pressing challenges and developing opportunities God has placed before us at home or church.

Choose the one (or two) that means the most to you right now. Label a one-hour time slot set aside on your calendar to do it. Reserve the final ten minutes of that hour to check your calendar and set aside your next hour to continue it or to try another one of the suggestions. If you are involved in a group, plan to report the next time you meet. Be honest, encouraging, and ... ***grow in grace!***