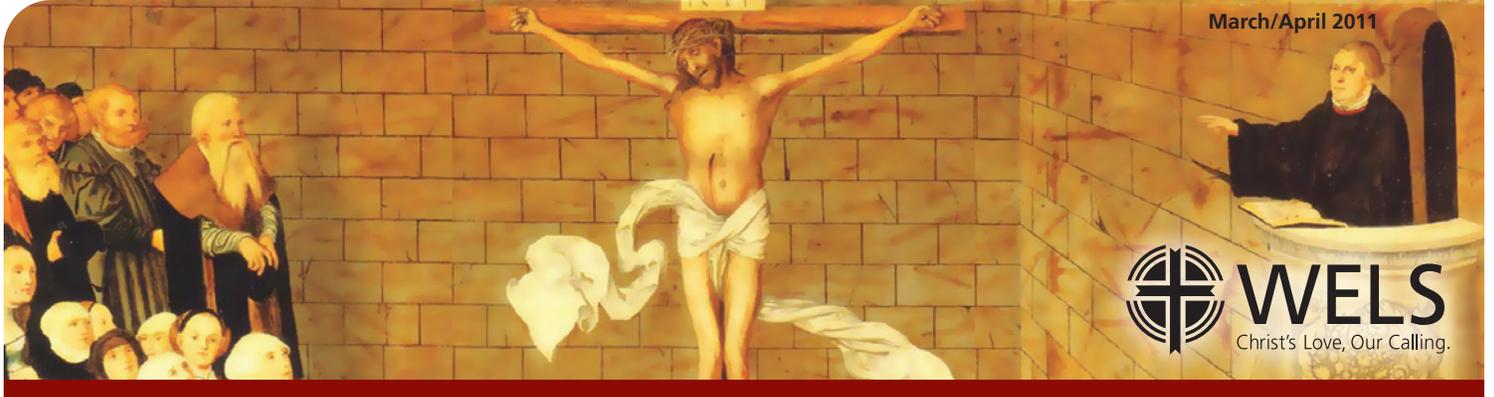


# Preach the Word

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## Managing Ourselves in Time to Preserve Time for Preaching

### Proclaim Grace! Key Issue #3:

By Richard Gurgel

An entire issue devoted to time management? Even without research, I would've anticipated topics such as Christocentricity and law/gospel variety, but I wouldn't have sufficiently diagnosed this issue's impact.

Yet many pastors in interviews and survey made this point: The pastor harried by time pressures may nod politely about preaching growth, but he's already telling himself, "No time for this."

One pastor, identifying his greatest preaching challenge, wrote, "Prohibiting other ministry responsibilities from taking time and energy away from sermon study." Another, when asked what the survey overlooked, captured well this issue's significance. "Deadlines and the press of other duties can often zap the joy out of preaching and preaching prep." Still another, when asked what would be the one thing he would pray for to improve his preaching, noted:

More time to think about a text and about where I'm going with it, and what I'm going to do with it, and what God's people are struggling with, and what I'm personally struggling with, so that I cannot just type and be, "Oh gosh, it's done!" But actually that it really is the best I can offer God and his people this week in gratitude to him for giving me his best.

*"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."*

One brother added: "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." A long-time pastor, now professor, agreed:

[I pray] our congregations and pastors would always recognize that good preaching and the study and the

preparation required for it takes a good amount of time. . . . Pastors and congregations just take on a lot more things to do, and I'm positive my preaching suffered as there were just more and more things that the congregation was doing, so that just plain old shut the door and study for awhile was often really squeezed.

This issue's goal is to provide insights so that sermon work continues to be much more joy than drudgery for us . . . and our hearers.

*Each day dawns with sufficient grace in our weakness to redeem the gift of time God patiently places into our feeble hands!*

But here's a disclaimer: Just as preaching is described as one beggar telling other beggars where to find bread, so I approach this issue. My ministry has often been a "don't try this at home" compendium of time *mismanagement*. I know how daily discouragements tempt us to lose ourselves in "ministrivia"—settling for counterfeit feelings of accomplishment no matter how little my crossed off "to dos" have to do with gospel edification. I know the paralysis of procrastination when an ever growing "to do" list so dwarfs available hours that forging ahead seems a Sisyphean task. I also know the adrenaline rush as my pastoral Messiah complex convinces me I can do it all—thereby planting the seeds of my next Elijah-like crash.

But stumbling has taught me this much: the issue isn't really managing *time*. The key is managing *myself* wisely in God's gift of time. That means accepting this humbling truth: no one causes me more time problems than me. It means dying every day to my alternately arrogant and lazy time-squandering old self. It means rising every day to the empowering truth that, even if all Jerusalem seems reduced to ruins, this is still true: "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23). Each day dawns with sufficient grace in our weakness to redeem the gift of time God patiently places into our feeble hands!

# When 6 + 4 = 22!

*Preach the Word* previously noted Thom Rainer's study (*Surprising Insights from the Unchurched*) of differences between "Effective" congregations that retained visitors and "Comparison" congregations with revolving doors. One factor topped the reasons why people join a church: preaching. Rainer then analyzed "Effective" and "Comparison" pastors' time use (see charts). "Comparison" pastors averaged 4 hours on sermon work, "Effective" pastors 22!

Each week God gives everyone 168 hours. Did some get 18 extra? "Comparison" pastors spent 8 hours on "custodial duties" and 23 on "pastoral care." "Effective" pastors focused on administration and mentoring, training others for "pastoral care." Don't misunderstand. Custodial duties aren't beneath us, and pastors personally dropping "pastoral care" raises questions.

But could it be that 6 + 4 = 22?

Rainer's research echoes Acts 6. The apostles were up to their eyeballs in pastoral care. Time for Word and prayer evaporated. They weren't *against* pastoral care. They were *for* flock nourishment. If shepherds don't pray for wisdom and seek it in Scripture, no flurry of pastoral care can compensate for a lack of edifying food for the flock. In Jerusalem as in your city, the "good" becomes the enemy of the "best."

The other number is 4. As Jerusalem chose Spirit-filled men, they anticipated in living witness Ephesians 4. Pastors are leaders in the body, but the body approaches maturity only when every supporting ligament utilizes Christ-apportioned gifts. Recognizing God often gives them gifts we don't have is also critical to managing ourselves in time.

We're doing fuzzy ministry math if we *subtract* 6 and 4 from 168

and wonder why the remainder isn't 22. In misplaced zeal we perpetrate grand theft ministry: robbing time from Word/prayer while simultaneously stealing gospel service from God's people.

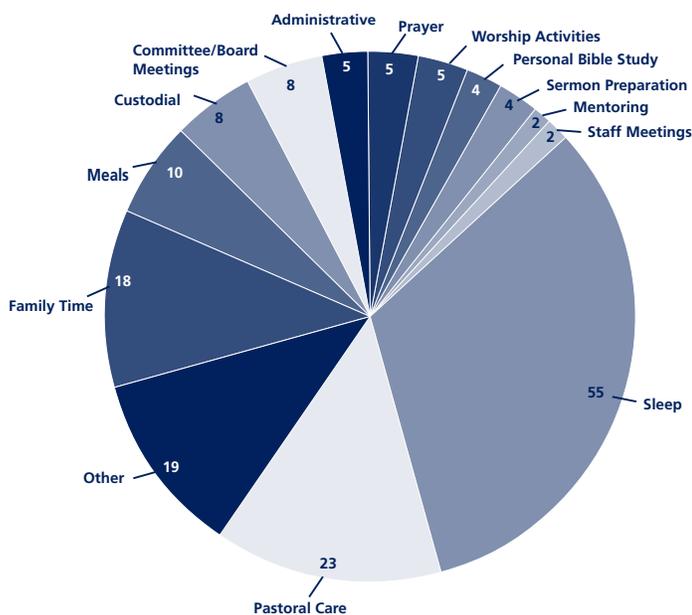
Being overworked and understaffed [cannot] properly be made an excuse for having no time for study. Almost always what lies behind this contention is a 'clericalist' image of the Church. If the pastor holds all ecclesiastical reins in his hands, and has no concept of a shared responsibility which involves lay leaders, then of course he has no time to study. But if he has grasped the New Testament image of the church as Christ's Body . . . then he will be continuously on the look-out for the gifts which God has given. . . . Even 'delegation' is the wrong word for this, since it suggests that the work is rightfully the pastor's but that he rather condescendingly deigns to hand some of it over to others. 'Partnership' is the more biblical concept. (Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 205-206).

One lay person, intentionally overstating, pleaded for such Philippian partnership: "Use your lay people. Abuse them! Many want to be involved."

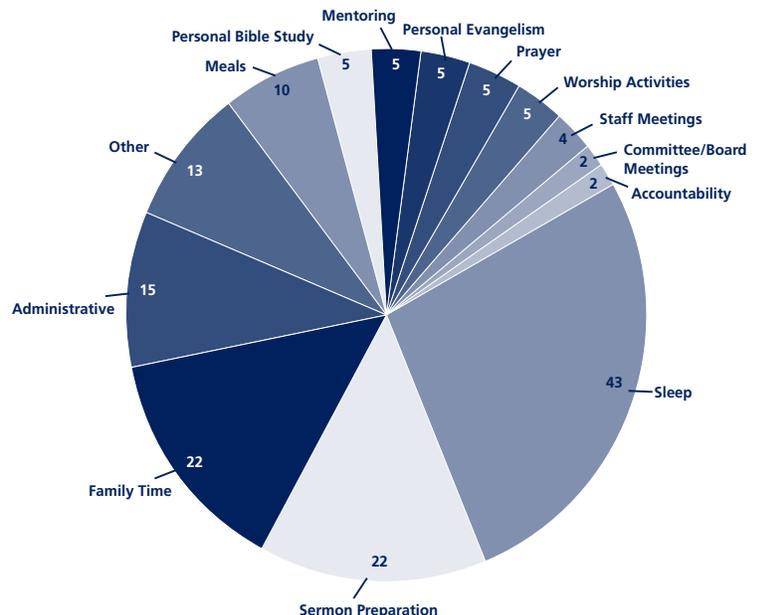
Help others see the need for this partnership by opening eyes to what it takes to prepare solid pulpit food. Members good-naturedly joke about pastors working one day a week, but often accompanying that humor is cluelessness about what we actually do Monday to Saturday. When I've asked lay people how long sermon preparation takes, most underestimated considerably. As ignorant as we can be of members' work demands, the reverse can be equally true. But listen as one pastor pictures a path to partnership:

I don't think any lay leaders who actually analyze a pastor's time conclude: "Pastor, we only want you to spend 5% of your time devoted to a study of the Word, but we want good

*Continued on page 3*



"Comparison" Church Leaders (hours per week)



"Effective" Church Leaders (hours per week)

sermons." Most would say, "The most important thing you do is preaching, and we need good sermons, pastor, so let's up that percentage of time." Get lay people enlisted and say, "OK, if that's the amount of time you want me to spend, let's talk about ways of implementing that so that this other stuff doesn't get neglected."

This seems so obvious! What stops me? At times, my own vanity. Running around frantically makes me feel important and being almost omnipresent at the slightest hint of trouble brings praise for what a dedicated pastor I am. It's as if Psalm 46 read: "Pastor is within her. She will not fall." How easy to cross the line from serving for God's glory to fishing for people's praise. Seldom does anyone pat us on the back for spending hours in prayer and Scripture study. No one sees that. And if they did, some might wonder whether we have too much time on our hands!

Does this mean neglecting people's needs? No. 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. It's one more way we decrease so that Christ may increase!

Bottom line? When theology informs ecclesiology, 6 + 4 can equal 22.



## 80/20 and the Pastor

As we manage ourselves in God's gift of time, how many "to-dos" on our daily schedules shouldn't be there? This *isn't* asking where others partner with us by assuming essential tasks (see page 2). This asks what busies us that isn't worthwhile on *anyone's* schedule.

Richard Koch shares an insight helpful to pastors.

The 80/20 Principle asserts that a minority of causes, inputs, or effort usually lead to a majority of the results, outputs, or rewards. Taken literally, this means that, for example, 80 percent of what you achieve in your job comes from 20 percent of the time spent. Thus for all practical purposes, four-fifths of the effort—a dominant part of it—is largely irrelevant. (*The 80/20 Principle*, 4)

Certainly there's danger in applying the 80/20 principle to God's kingdom. Koch's worldview isn't cross-eyed; it's enlightened self-interest. Unlike a business world (Koch's audience) ruled by bottom line visible results, much gospel fruit is hidden. We live by faith, not sight. Koch has no concept of cross bearing.

Yet it's valid to ask whether a particular cross is Christ-given or self-fashioned. How many undone tasks burdening us with guilt really need to get done? The urgent is *seldom* important (it just shouts louder for attention). And the *important* is seldom urgent (that's why it so easily gets pushed aside). Eugene Peterson applies this to pastors.

Years ago I noticed, as all pastors must, that when a pastor left a neighboring congregation, the congregational life carried on very well, thank you. A guest preacher was assigned to conduct Sunday worship, nearby pastors took care of the funerals, weddings, and crisis counseling. A congregation would go for months, sometimes as long as a year or two, without a regular pastor. And I thought, *All these things I am so busy doing—they aren't being done in that pastorless congregation, and nobody seems to mind.* I asked myself, *What if I, without leaving, quit doing them right now? Would anybody mind?* I did, and they don't. (*The Contemplative Pastor*, 24-25)

*How many undone tasks that threaten to burden us with guilt really need to get done?*

Yes, we are called to be Christ-like servants. But "there is a difference between being a servant and being servile" (Craddock, *Preaching*, 73). 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. Peterson offers a possible solution.

The appointment calendar is the tool with which to get unbusy. It's a gift of the Holy Ghost (unlisted by St. Paul, but a gift nonetheless) that provides the pastor with the means to get time and acquire leisure for praying, preaching, and listening. It is more effective than a protective secretary; it is less expensive than a retreat house. It is the one thing every one in our society accepts without cavil as authoritative. The authority once given to Scripture is now ascribed to the appointment calendar. The dogma of verbal inerrancy has not been discarded, only reassigned.

When I appeal to my appointment calendar, I am beyond criticism. . . . If someone asks me to attend a committee meeting and I say, "I was thinking of taking my wife out to dinner that night; I haven't listened to her carefully for several days," the response will be, "But you are very much needed at this meeting; couldn't you arrange another evening with your wife?" But if I say, "The appointment calendar will not permit it," there is no further discussion.

The trick, of course, is to get to the calendar before anyone else does. I mark out the times for prayer, for reading, for leisure, for the silence and solitude out of which creative work—prayer, preaching, and listening—can issue.

I find that when these central tasks are met, there is plenty of time for everything else. And there is much else, for the pastor is not, and should not be, exempt from the hundred menial tasks or the administrative humdrum. These also are pastoral ministry. But the only way I have found to accomplish them without resentment and anxiety is to first take care of the priorities. If there is no time to nurture these essentials, I become a busy pastor, harassed and anxious, a whining, compulsive Martha instead of a contemplative Mary. (22-23)

# 1 Hour + 1 Day + 1 Week



An intriguing element of the Sinaitic covenant was the Sabbath year. Every seventh year, God commanded Israel to allow fields and vineyards to lie fallow as the land (and people) enjoyed extended rest. The LORD was teaching a fundamental lesson. He wanted his chosen ones to remember whose labor really matters (his, not theirs).

But Israel skipped class! Scripture doesn't record a single observance. Finally, the LORD used the seventy year captivity to provide the rest Israel stubbornly refused (Leviticus 26:34, 2 Chronicles 36:21).

Observing a Sabbath year took trust in the LORD. To rest from labors, to trust that under the LORD's care the land would produce enough, proved too much for Israel. "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it" (Isaiah 30:15).

Pastor, heal thyself! How easy to become so enamored with our labor (whether for things eternal or things earthly) that we take little if any time to step back, to rest, and to ponder whose labor really matters. Unresting, we become easy targets for fatigue of body and soul.

Certainly, there are times a God-ordained cross in ministry prevents significant rest for a period of time. But I know how to fashion self-chosen crosses complete with pious excuses for why my labor is too important to step back for any length of time ("The devil never takes a day off!").

But when our Lord Jesus sends the needy crowds away to pray by himself or to allow for quiet time to teach his disciples, suddenly my rationalizations appear a bit flimsy. Thank God for him who even lived out Sabbath in our place as our perfect substitute!

This leads to a simple yet profound piece of advice a pastor shared, given to him by his mission counselor, Jim Radloff. Take 1 hour to plan your week, 1 day to plan your month, and 1 week to plan your year. Such sabbaticals help us manage ourselves in God's gift of time by refocusing on God's grace that first called us to be his own and then entrusted to us public ministry and royal priestly callings.

On what might we focus when we take a ministry Sabbath?

- ✦ Rejoice in unhurried time for Word and prayer.
- ✦ Focus on Christ's mission 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, citizen, 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 rest, diet, and exercise.
- ✦ Give prayerful thought to pressing challenges and developing opportunities God has placed before us at home or church.

## Take a Seminary Sabbatical!

"When dormitory space is available, I would be interested if the seminary offered room and board at a reasonable rate for pastors wishing to use the campus as a place for personal study, ministry planning, etc." In 2008, 65% of pastors responding to the survey indicated that they either "agreed" (54%) or "strongly agreed" (11%) with that statement.

Dormitory space is available. You're invited to spend some ministry sabbatical time in Mequon! Enjoy the opportunity to attend chapel, audit classes, use the library, stroll the campus, and use the gym, racquetball court, or exercise room.

For those desiring it, the *Grow in Grace* office will provide a reading list as well as set up a time to discuss ideas to make spiritual and professional growth a richer part of regular schedules.

## Spiritual and Professional Growth Emphasis in Circuits – Summer/Fall 2011

With the blessing of the Conference of Presidents, the *Grow in Grace* office will provide every circuit pastor with materials to use with the pastors of his circuit to assist brothers in planning for spiritual and professional growth. The encouragement is for each circuit to set aside one circuit meeting for this purpose. The materials will be available by Easter.



## Please share ideas for key issue #5

Use the ideas link at *Grow in Grace* ([wlsce.net](http://wlsce.net)) to submit resources, ideas, or questions related to key issue #5: *Partnering with the pew*. How can we help hearers grow both in knowing how to listen to sermons as well as in knowing how to give useful and constructive input before and after the sermon?

## Online Resources for Managing Ourselves in Time

On WLS' preaching web site (*Proclaim Grace! preaching.wlsce.net*) are these resources for study by individuals, study groups, or circuits:

- Three video/audios of interviews on managing ourselves in time
- Suggested questions to aid discussion of these articles with others
- Brief reviews of two books:
  - *The Hamster Revolution: How to Manage Your Email Before It Manages You* by Mike Song, Vicki Halsey & Tim Burress
  - *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret to Achieving More with Less* by Richard Koch