

Stewardship of Time



by the Rev. Ralph Blomenberg

Post-Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) is a collaborative effort of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's Pastoral Education department and LCMS districts to help pastors and their wives in the transition from seminary to congregation. To learn more, visit www.lcms.org/pals.

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Introduction

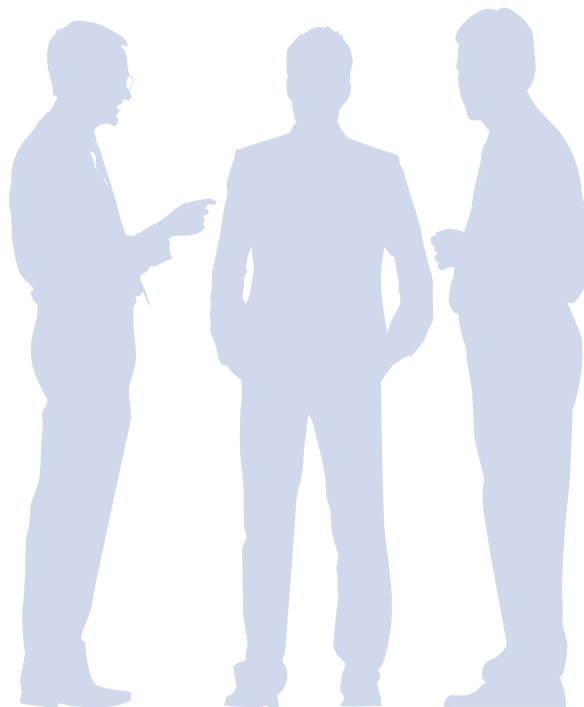
In seminary, time management was different than in high school, where you were in classes all day. You spent less time in class but had a lot more to get done. Managing time meant figuring out a routine to attend classes, get homework and projects done on time, do fieldwork, perhaps work one or more jobs, and take care of family needs. You had to decide whether to attend chapel and whether to get involved in campus life.

Life as a pastor may present you with a full schedule of activities or large blocks of time that you have to manage. Both have challenges. Ministry includes hard deadlines, like Sunday mornings and board meetings, and all kinds of things that need to be or could be done. Consequences for missing deadlines are different than with school.

In parish ministry, like in seminary, you may often wish you had an extra hour in every day or an extra day in every week, which I can't offer — but I believe you can learn to stretch your time to do what needs to be done.

Our discussion will center on four main themes:

1. **stewardship**, which helps us see time as God's gift of opportunities;
2. **boundaries**, which help us work toward a fair division of time between work, family and personal life;
3. **priorities**, which help us to set aside our best time for our most important opportunities; and
4. **discipline**, the ability to know time-wasters and keep them at bay so we can make the most of the time available.



Session One: Stewardship — Time Is a Gift of Opportunities Given by God

Two views of time

1. *Chronos* describes time as a measurement — minutes, days, months, years, even lifespans.
2. Jesus often used a different word for time: *kairos*, which means time in the sense of opportunity.

We are not Jesus, of course, but as His servants, it is useful to think of our use of time both as *kairos* and *chronos*, opportunity and measurement of minutes. The time you and I have, whether spent for personal, family or ministry purposes, is a sequence of opportunities God gives to receive and share, work and play, enjoy and serve.

Managing time is a stewardship issue

There are no millionaires with time; we all get the same 168 hours a week, the famous 24-7.

Good communication is important.

For a couple, being good stewards of time is crucial. How might they invest their time in their relationship?

Whether a pastor is married or not, his stewardship of time has a great impact on his family, his health and his church.

Ps. 31:15 says, “My times are in your hand.” Literally, all the moments of our life, from when we are conceived to when we die, are God’s gift, His trust. He does not intend for us to use them all for work, or all for play, or all for sleep. But like the money He gives to us, He wants us to use them wisely in service to Him.

Of course, that means lots of decisions need to be made as a pastor:

- › Sermon preparation
- › Visits
- › Study and reading
- › Prioritizing opportunities
- › Devotional life
- › Balance of vocations
- › Time off

In our next segment, we will talk about setting some boundaries for our stewardship of time.

Discussion Questions

1. Talk about an experience when you were late for something. Why did that happen?

2. Were there hard lessons to learn in managing time at seminary? What did you learn?

3. Can you remember being unprepared for class because you had “wasted” time?

4. What do you think are the most difficult time decisions in being a pastor?

5. Where do you think you need the most help in learning time stewardship?

Session Two: Boundaries Between Work, Family and Personal Life

City limits and property lines are boundaries that define where a city or a property begins and ends. Football fields and baseball diamonds define the place wherein the game can be played and designate what is out of bounds. Job descriptions, call documents and marriage vows establish boundaries around expected activities and indicate what is out of bounds.

Boundaries serve a useful purpose in our stewardship of time in the chronological sense:

- › Creation
- › Work six days per week? Or seven?
- › What about a five-day workweek and a two-day weekend?

What is the standard that a pastor's workweek should follow?

What does the Bible say about the pastor's schedule?

Perceptions can be extreme:

- › "Pastors have a pretty good gig, since we just work on Sunday mornings!"
- › Or pastors may be on call "24-7," giving the impression that we work all the time.

To be honest, the pastoral ministry can be a place where you can get away with laziness — at least for a while — or can get burned out with frenetic working night and day. But it doesn't have to be that way. I believe most lay leaders and family members want our lives to be in balance and will help us to do that. They want us to take vacations and have time off — but also to be accountable for them.

Establish boundaries

Establishing helpful boundaries begins with a general idea of how time should be divided, and then it needs to have the input of our congregations and, if married, our spouses.

- › The 40-hour workweek made famous for factory and office workers may not be our best pastoral paradigm.
- › People in a "profession" or calling often expect to invest 50-55 hours per week in direct work.

This is an important issue to think about. If a pastor believes that he is neglecting his family or becoming a workaholic by working more than 40 hours a week, he is likely to become resentful of the congregation that expects more or a ministry that demands more. If a pastor spends virtually all of his time serving others and has no energy or time for his family, he is not keeping the expectation of the Bible that he to whom is entrusted the household of God must also manage his own household well (1 Tim. 3:12).

Set a schedule

I have found that it is useful to divide each week into 21 units: morning, afternoon and evening for each of seven days.

- › Schedule 13-15 of those units for planned activity as a pastor, such as study, preparation, worship, teaching, appointments, visitations, funerals, weddings, meetings and so on.
- › Schedule 6-8 of those units for family and personal time, plus the nighttime hours.
- › Morning and afternoon units are generally about four hours each.
- › Evening units may be two or three hours, resulting in an average "workweek" of 50-55 hours.

Are there exceptions? Of course!

- › Weddings, funerals and emergencies.
- › But exceptions should not be the rule.
- › If several weeks involve going out of bounds in the time spent, we should plan a time to catch up to restore a proper balance and to attend

to family and personal matters that have been neglected.

Plan your visit

In my setting, I have lots of homebound and hospital visits to make and lots of weddings for which to prepare. It helps me to have in mind a normal amount of time involved:

- › A homebound visit: about 45 minutes;
- › A hospital visit: about 15 minutes; or
- › An appointment with a couple planning to be married: an hour each time.

Not every visit is normal, of course, but if I have no sense of limits going in, I may spend lots more time without really accomplishing anything more. That helps me — and them — use that time well.

Personal time

Do I have boundaries around a day off and personal time as well? Yes. Which day you plan to take off may be influenced by:

- › Whether you have children at home
- › Whether you have a day school in which you teach classes each day
- › Whether you have other staff members
- › Where your study is located

Flexibility is key

Being rigid in boundaries of home or work is not helpful.

- › In ministry, there needs to be flexibility when family events arise or real emergencies occur.
- › Not responding to a congregation member who has been in an accident or is critically ill because it is your day off can result in problems (if you are still in town).
- › Likewise, not being at important family events because you planned poorly may lead to negative consequences.

Organized time is time well spent

Boundaries help overcome distractions and feelings of guilt.

- › Some pastors feel guilty while they are in the office because they are not spending enough time at home; and
- › They feel guilty at home, thinking of what they should have gotten done at work.
- › In both cases, they are distracted and cannot do their best.
- › If we can focus on what is most important within the boundaries, we likely will not experience one priority bumping up against another.

The weekly and daily schedule of a pastor may vary widely, because we are in many different settings. It would not be helpful to simply say, “This is how your schedule must be,” even as it would not be fair for me to tell you what your monthly financial budget should look like. These things depend on our circumstances. But in every circumstance, the setting of good boundaries is a real blessing.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think it is helpful to plan boundaries around time for ministry, family and self?

2. How much time each week do you think a pastor should usually spend on pastoral work?

3. Should you count worship and devotions as “work” time, or is that something you are simply doing as a Christian, not as a pastor?

4. Should a congregation have a say in how much time a pastor should “work” and how much time he should have “off”? If so, who should speak for the congregation?

5. How can a pastor (and his wife) communicate his work schedule in a way that helps him be accountable to members and leaders, without bragging or complaining or punching a clock?

6. Should a congregation be involved in how much time a pastor might be involved with boards, committees and groups outside the congregation? If so, how?

7. Do you agree that the pastoral ministry can be a place “where you can get away with laziness — at least for a while — or can get burned out with frenetic working night and day”?

8. What are the benefits and challenges of having an office outside the house?

9. If you are married, how can you share calendars to ensure that each other’s priorities and time requirements are met?

10. If a pastor is not married, who might help hold him accountable for time boundaries?

Session Three: Priorities — What Comes First, and Why?

Which is more important: to make the mortgage payment or to buy a new set of golf clubs? Most of us would get that right! Why? We were taught priorities, meaning certain things come before others because they are more important. The Ten Commandments say honoring God is to be our first priority — no other “gods” are to come before Him. This also is an important principle in the stewardship of time. How can we plan to use our best time for our most important opportunities?

How people spend money says more about their values than what they might say. The same is true for looking at our calendars. How do we really spend our time?

- › Try keeping a log for 30 days on how you spend your time.
- › Sometimes we spend time on things we like to do or that bring positive feedback, even if they are not the most important.
- › Have you majored in minors and need to make a change in priorities?

Establish priorities

Setting priorities begins by accounting for our responsibilities and ranking them, such as preaching, teaching, visiting, praying, counseling, writing, editing, preparing for and attending meetings, studying, and the rest.

- › This list varies a lot, depending on your setting.
- › Try to put on the list as many things as you know are expected of you.

As a vicar, my supervising pastor told me that there are two things you cannot neglect: preaching and visiting. If you do not visit, you do not know your people and their needs. If you are

unprepared at the largest gathering of your flock, you have wasted a precious opportunity to feed them from God’s Word. Clearly, there is more to do than visiting and preaching — but is anything more important?

In setting priorities, there are many useful tools:

- › Day-planners and lists, both paper and electronic.
- › A “to-do” list that identifies tasks that need to be done each week:
 - › Most important to least important
 - › Highlight those tasks that are urgent
 - › Assign a specific time for the tasks
 - › When the task is completed, mark it as done

Sometimes the *kairos* seems to make no *chronos* sense. Many times I have made a three-hour round trip to a hospital for a 30-minute visit with a patient or family member. That is not particularly efficient, I suppose; but in times like that, efficiency is hardly on the mind of the patient and family in crisis. That visit brings God’s Word to them in an important way at a very opportune moment; the other things I might have done while I was traveling can be done another time. It may not be good stewardship to make that trip every day because of other people who may be neglected, so I may supplement visits with phone calls, but there is something tangible – incarnational – about being there in person: touching, holding, standing with them.

Allow for the unexpected

It will not always work out as you plan.

- › Emergencies, sickness and surprises.
- › Give your best time to the most important tasks.
- › If you allow what seems urgent to get your best time, you may find yourself unprepared for what your congregation has a right to expect will be done well: preaching, worship, teaching, visiting.

Most of us learn the importance of saving some money in an emergency fund so that we can handle surprises when they come up. I have not found a way to store up time for that, though I would love to be able to bank a couple of hours or days! What I have learned is that planning and working ahead allows me to respond to emergencies better. And if my family understands the nature of these emergencies and sees me also guarding family time, it is better than when I make all of those decisions independently.

Discussion Questions

1. List the main things that are expected of you pastorally each week.

2. Rank from 1-5 the most important items on your list.

3. Estimate the amount of time the top five things on your list require. When in your week are you able to budget time for them?

4. Where do devotions fit in your week? How much time should you spend in prayer?

5. If there is not enough time to do everything expected of you, what options might you pursue other than just not doing some of them?

6. When emergencies have demanded an unusual amount of time and energy, how might you plan to catch up with what was neglected, including family/personal time?

Session Four: Discipline — Recognize Time Wasters and Keep Them at Bay

A dripping faucet may just seem like a nuisance, but if not fixed, little drips can add up to hundreds of gallons and lots of dollars. A small pinhole in a tire does not lose air quickly, but if it is not fixed, the tire will eventually go flat. So it is with time. Hours and days are made of minutes. In this section, we will talk about how to keep time from slipping away by avoiding the “drips” of bad habits and distractions and the tyranny of the urgent.

Good habits

- › Helpful in making your time work for you.
- › Do you have rhythm in your week and in your work?
- › Set aside certain times each week to do regular tasks (e.g., sermon preparation).

Routines for blocks of time

- › Mornings: devotions, preparation, staff meetings and writing
- › Afternoons: visits and counseling appointments
- › Evenings: meetings and appointments that cannot be fit in earlier in the day

It is not a rigid rhythm. Interruptions happen. Deaths and funerals and emergencies take place. But having a rhythm to fall back on allows me to deal with priorities. And when there are no emergencies or I feel like I am caught up, it takes discipline to work ahead so that I am better prepared and not in a panic when the next surprise occurs.

Keep distractions to a minimum

- › Open your door when people are welcome to come in and talk.

- › Close the door during the time set aside for sermon preparation and try to take only emergency calls. Why? To the extent that I can control it, I would like to be uninterrupted so that I can give the sermon my best effort.
- › You may find that cleaning off your desk, or at least moving other things from sight, is worth a try when trying to focus on a certain task at hand.

Distractions are not just people and phone calls

- › Texts come in. Emails arrive. Facebook updates are interesting. We have access to blogs and Internet searches.
- › Assign some time to email, Facebook, texts and tweets. But do not give them an open checkbook, or you might find yourself “bouncing checks” by being unprepared, missing appointments and letting time manage you instead of the other way around.

Tyranny of the urgent

- › Urgent things can crowd out more important things.
- › Sometimes it is good to ask, “What am I choosing not to do because I am doing this?”

Pastors need to be accessible and should not be locked in an “ivory tower” or study. At the same time, pastors need to have self-discipline, which others will respect. It is important for us to protect the time it takes to digest God’s Word and pray to Him so that we will be prepared to faithfully feed His flock.

Discussion Questions

1. How helpful is your current routine of doing pastoral work? Where could it improve?

2. How do you feel about choosing not to be available when you are working on a priority? Is there education needed to help people understand this?

3. What do you think are the biggest “drips” of time for you? What can you do to fix them?

4. How would you describe the difference between “urgent” and “important”? Is it possible for some things to be both important and urgent?

Conclusion

Ecclesiastes 3 famously describes the rhythm of life in this world: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up.”

Those words also might help us to reflect on how the minutes and hours and days and weeks God entrusts to us can be used best. In your vocation as pastor, God gives ample time for work, and time for relaxing; time for others, and time for self; time for study, and time to share; time for praying, and time for people; time for family, and time for the family of God.

Will you be a perfect steward of time? No. You will fret over time wasted and grieve over opportunities lost. Those are good times to remember that Gal. 4:4–5 is not only for others, but also for us: “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

You were entrusted by God to be a pastor not because of your perfection, but because of God’s grace. He desires that you deliver His gifts to His people in His name at this time. But because our time is limited, and all time will one day come to an end, we seek most efficiently to do His work while it is still “day.”

Over the years that God gives you to live and to serve, your pastoral calling may change, as may your family and personal responsibilities. Yet you always will deal with the stewardship of time, boundaries, priorities and discipline, as long as God gives you life and breath.

I hope you find great joy in serving God’s people with His precious gifts of Word and Sacrament. You have the privilege of investing your life in the lives of your family and the people of God. I pray also that you are a good steward of the *chronos* of time by discerning the most important *kairos* of opportunity available at that moment.



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