

Time Management

About the Author

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I. WHY DO WE NEED TIME MANAGEMENT?

Our lives are busy. Despite all the things designed to make our lives easier—microwaves, stoves that cook and refrigerate, washers that wash and dry—our lives are busier than ever. Most of us rush around with more things on our to-do list than time to complete it all.

Many Women's Ministries Leaders find they have a family to look after, often work full or part-time, and are involved with church responsibilities. Included in these responsibilities is Women's Ministries.

How do we accomplish it all? With God's strength.

God does not want us over-worked or over-burdened. He promised that He would give us rest. God longs for us to do only what He has called us to do and to let everything else go.

With God as our time manager, our lives can be different. Yes, they will still be busy. Yes, we will still have days when we wonder if we can get everything done. And there will be days when things go undone. But by allowing God control of our calendars and commitments, we will experience the freedom of trusting Him to accomplish through us what He desires.

Research has shown that people who work in an organized, calm way accomplish more than those who are constantly rushing through their agenda in an attempt to accomplish too much. People who are hurried are less creative, less effective, and ultimately less healthy—physically, mentally, and spiritually! Time management is valuable to everyone. It can help you accomplish more in the same or less amount of time than if you were rushing. It can help you be more effective and reduce the amount of stress in your life. And with God as part of your time management team, you'll be accomplishing the most important items on His agenda.

II. HOW DO WE LEARN TO MANAGE OUR TIME? (OH-1)

First, pray. The most important key to time management is prayer.

"Add another item to my already too full list?" you may be asking. A popular book written on prayer and time management sums it up in the book's title, *Too Busy Not to Pray*. Prayer is essential in ordering our lives and allowing God to direct our schedule and commitments.

Take your schedule to God.

*So teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
— Psalm 90:12*

Give God your schedule, your responsibilities, your commitments. Ask Him to help you to know His will, to establish your priorities, to help you say no to the things that, while good things, are not part of His plan for you.

Remember that we are each given 24 hours a day. God wants us to use them effectively.

Set priorities and goals.

List all your roles. Woman, wife, mom, daughter, employee, friend, church member, Women's Ministries leader, etc. Next, take these roles and list them in order of priority. Ask God to guide you. What are the most important things God has called you to do? Many times our schedules do not reflect what we determine are the priorities of our lives. Instead, our days are too often filled with the "urgent" while those roles and responsibilities that are the most important to us get pushed to the side. That's not what we want. That's not what God wants.

Do the important things first. Give the greatest and most immediate attention to the most important jobs.

Executive Essentials, Mitchell J Posner

Determine your goals. What is your purpose? You may want to look at your goals for each of your roles. What do you want to accomplish as a woman? If married, being a support for your husband. Encouraging him in his daily roles. Helping to nurture his relationships with his children. What is your goal as a Women's

Ministries Leader? What do you want to accomplish through your ministry?

Do the same for each project you work with. For each program, event, or resource that you plan, determine what the purpose of the project is. What do you want to accomplish through this? What is the mission of the project? As we look at each project through the goal we hope to accomplish, it will help us to stay focused, and not get distracted by unnecessary details.

Eliminate unnecessary and inappropriate activities.

Ask yourself, "Is this part of what God has called me to do? Does it fit with the priorities of my life?"

It's a trap many Christians, especially women, fall into to try to be everything to everyone. To do everything that we're asked to. But God has called us for specific things. It will mean saying no to some good things. It may mean letting go of one responsibility every time you take on something new.

Know your priorities. Live them. Let go of everything that God has not called you to do.

Remember that this does not mean that we spend all our time working and none playing. God does call us to play. With our families. With our friends. He desires us to take care of ourselves. He often called His disciples to come away from the crowd, following the example that He Himself set. Jesus took time to renew and refresh Himself. Despite all that there was to do, and the short time He had to do it, Jesus did not rush, did not stress, took time for friends, and took time to spend resting with God.

Delegate as much as possible.

Many people don't delegate for a variety of reasons:

- They feel they could do the job better themselves.
- They have not planned ahead and there isn't time to delegate.
- They're afraid that the job might not get done. Or at least not done "right."

But delegation is important. When we delegate, we are not only relieving some of the burdens and responsibilities from our shoulders, but we are also enabling others to use their gifts and talents in service to God and people. Many times it also gives us the opportunity to mentor someone else into leadership and service.

Effective delegation can be done by:

- Praying and asking God for the right people
- Exploring a vision of what you want to accomplish in a way that those working on the project can grasp the idea and get excited about it
- Outline tasks clearly and make sure the person understands what is expected
- Establish “checkpoints”—opportunities to check on the progress of their work
- Praise for tasks completed—encourage those who are working with you

Effective delegation will help train more people to share leadership responsibilities. When you delegate, you are mentoring new leaders! And mentoring is an important aspect of Women's Ministries.

Plan and schedule the use of your time – weekly and daily.

- Leave room for unexpected events. Our lives are so busy sometimes that nothing else will fit. Always schedule so that if something unexpected pops up, it won't ruin your entire plan.
- Eliminate and reduce as many distractions as you can.
- Make optimum use of your peak energy time—are you a morning person? A night owl? Schedule your most important tasks when you are at your best.

III. DAILY PLANNING (OH-2)

Pray over your schedule each day. Allow God to show you what needs to be done today and what can be scheduled for another day. Give Him your plans—what do you want to accomplish today? What have you planned on doing? Give it to Him and then ask Him for what He desires. Trust Him to do what is the most important and don't beat yourself up over items that go undone. When you give Him your schedule, it's His responsibility.

The Three Golden Rules of Daily Planning

1. Make a list of things to do today.
2. Set priorities and work on the most important.
3. Do it every day.

In addition to “to do” lists, master lists are very helpful. These are continuous lists of ideas, tasks, telephone calls, errands, agenda items, report notes and other jobs to do. Add them to your list as they arise. Cross them off as you do them. Note deadlines of when items need to be completed. Schedule them into your daily planner.

Some quick tips for planning:

- Have a writing pad beside your bed—if you wake up thinking of an idea, jot it down. This not only records your ideas, but also is great for reducing stress. Once “dumped” on the writing pad, your brain switches off again and you’ll sleep more easily.
- Have a scribble pad with you as you travel (or a voice activated tape recorder) to do the same as you drive.
- Use the time spent waiting for appointments by taking something useful to read or projects to work on with you. These are also great opportunities to update your calendar.

Keep to Your Schedule

While it’s important to be flexible, it’s also very important to keep time commitments.

- If you’ve scheduled an appointment for 2:00 pm, make sure that you are there at 2:00 pm. If something detains you and you will be unable to be on time, contact the person with whom you are meeting and let them know you are running late. Offer to reschedule for a time that will suit them if needed.
- If you’ve scheduled a committee meeting to begin at 1:00 pm, begin promptly at 1:00 pm regardless of whether everyone has arrived. In this way we can teach others to be on time, too, or else they will miss out.
- If your program is to begin at a certain time, begin promptly.

Many times we can be careless about our punctuality. But by not being prompt for appointments or beginning events/meetings on time, we not only throw our schedules off, but others’ schedules as well. Keeping things on time will cause less stress to our lives and show value to those around us.

Even when being late or starting late is socially acceptable, we can set a new precedent by being on time and starting promptly.

Your Daily Planner: A Time Management Tool

Choose a daily planner that will best suit your style. Qualities to consider when choosing one:

- A “planner” format; ie, It is a planning tool.
- A daily planner that lies flat
- A daily planner with a time management section
- A range of features (like sections for address book, goal planning, expense records, etc.)
- A day-to-a-page format
- Consider a loose leaf system so that you can add or remove pages

What will you write in your daily planner?

- Daily appointments, weekly appointments, monthly appointments
- Room for comments for planning and recording
- Reminder of telephone calls/record of significant conversations
- Reminders
- Meeting notes
- Goals
- Ideas
- Happenings

Make your planner work for you. It can become a powerful time management tool. Ideas to consider:

- At the beginning of the year enter important dates like meetings, school and public holidays, conferences, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
- Avoid scheduling too tightly. Give yourself "margins"—space to add items that pop up if unexpectedly.
- Each day, check the next day's appointments and activities so that you are prepared.
- Keep your day planner with you. This will enable you to add notes as you think of them.

(OH-3)

A well maintained diary, given the nature of life and time, is anything but systematic or neat; it is full of tentative plans, plans re-planned, crossing-out, scribbled ideas and items suddenly remembered. The only diary system worth having has simplicity and flexibility; even then, it will be no more than a tool of time management. More important by far is a realistic attitude to planning...
Getting Things Done, Roger Black

IV. PAPER MANAGEMENT (OH-4)

Paper mismanagement can cripple your ability to function effectively...The real cause of a paperwork crisis is a problem with decision making; picking up the same piece of paper five times and putting it down again because you can't decide what to do with it. It is curious, but true, that many executives who are experienced in making decisions, feel stymied by individual pieces of paper.

The Organized Executive, Stephanie Winston

What to do with all the paperwork that enters your home or office? Find yourself moving it from place to place? Or piling it until there's so much you'll never get through it? How can we get a handle on the enormous amounts of paperwork that invades our lives?

Sort your paperwork the first time you handle it. (OH-5)

You can learn to "DRAFT" your mail. Go through the entire mail; sort into one of these five categories:

- D Delegate**—This could be incoming information that should be delegated to someone with a responsibility for that particular activity. Or, it could be something that you feel would be of interest to another colleague—clip a quick note to it and put in your "out" tray. (At home, put it at the person's place at the kitchen table. This is a great time to teach your children how to handle paperwork, too.)
- R Read**—Have a file for journals, articles, updates, magazines, etc. for later reading (ie. save these for appointments or that time before bed.)
- A Act**—When you have sorted all the mail, return to this pile and attend to those items that need immediate attention. Check each piece of mail for deadline date, "return" forms, and required signatures.
- F File**—A recent survey concluded that 75% of all the paperwork we file will not be seen again until we clean out our files! So consider carefully whether you need to file it. (Those requiring filing would be company and relevant government policy documents, certain legislation, correspondence that has longer-term implications, etc.)
- T Toss**—This applies to junk mail, advertising, etc. Be strong. Don't be a hoarder unless you know for sure you use the material within the next month. By then the product will have been superseded and the price increased anyway.

Never handle a piece of paper more than twice. (OH-6)

- The goal is to handle a document a maximum of only twice – once on sorting and once when resolving it.

Screen unnecessary paper.

- Remove your name from mailing lists that provide you with junk mail.
- Cancel subscriptions to newsletters, catalogues that you do not use, or serve no real use.

Allocate a time for paperwork each day.

Discipline a habit of processing paper—either at the beginning or end of the day for at least 30 minutes. It will give you a feeling of accomplishment.

Focus on your action pile.

- Prioritize your list
- Explore timesaving options—form letters, compliment slips, handwritten replies
- Use the telephone—its quicker and cheaper
- Use email—its more convenient for many business people
- Make marginal notes to assist with replies

V. MEETING MANAGEMENT (OH-7)

When planning meetings, to make them more time efficient, remember the steps to organizing your day.

First, pray about the agenda. If possible, pray to open the meeting. Ask God's guidance and wisdom. Seek God's will. Too many times at meetings, even within churches and ministries, we attempt to get business done and totally forget to seek God's input on what He desires us to do.

Prioritize your agenda. Begin with the most important topics. That way, you give your best energy to the most important. If the meeting needs to end at a certain time, the most important items will have been covered.

Remember your mission and purpose. What is the purpose of your meeting? Don't get caught up in the trivial. Make sure what you do—even in your meetings—fits with your mission and purpose. (i.e. We can spend a lot of time discussing the decorations for a Women's Ministries event and neglect putting much time into discussing ways of drawing women to Christ which is truly our purpose.)

Distribute your agenda a few days before your meeting. This allows people time to pray and think about the items that will be discussed.

Allow others to contribute to your agenda. Make it possible for leaders and those who are chairing committees to add to the items to be discussed. You can do this several ways:

- Set a deadline for people to submit agenda items. Make sure they know how to contact you—either through the telephone or email, or if you need the item on paper.
- Allow people to add to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting. The disadvantage to this is that you may lengthen your meeting; you may get “surprises” that you didn’t expect; and it doesn’t allow other committee members time to think and pray beforehand about the item.
- Automatically add each department or committee to the agenda so that they can give a report on what they’re doing.

Begin and end your meeting on time. It’s very important to begin and end your meetings at the time you’ve set. It will keep the meeting flowing, but will allow everyone to know in advance how long the meeting will be, thus allowing them to better plan their own schedules. This applies to all meetings and programs you are responsible for.

Set time limits for discussion. You may want to plan in advance how much time is spent discussing each item, as well as who will lead the discussion or explain the proposal. If you get stuck on one item, take time to pray about it—asking for unity and God’s guidance. If you still cannot make a decision on the item or come to an agreement, table the discussion to the next meeting, giving every one more time to pray and think about the item.

Stick to the agenda. It’s easy to get side tracked or to stray from the topics on hand. Stick with the allocated order and times. Stay firm with the agenda to gain respect as a productive chair.

A sample agenda might look like this: **(OH-8)**

Topic	Person Responsible	Objective	Time
1. Approve agenda	Carla	Decision	3 minutes
2. Leaflets	Diane	Information	5 minutes
3. Success of function	Janet	Celebration	3 minutes

During the meeting, have someone keep notes as to what decisions were made, what action was taken, what needs to be followed through on, etc. They can be written in the form of minutes or as an Action Sheet: **(OH-9)**

Item Number	Topic	Action & Time Frame	Person Responsible
1	leaflets	Approved printing 1000 by April 6 for retreat in June	Diane
5	retreat	Have retreat applications in churches no later than April 1	Chelsea
6	next meeting	decided to meet March 28 at 3 pm	Janet

VI. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Our lives would be manageable if we did only one thing at a time, worked on only one project at a time. But the reality of our lives is that we will always be multi-tasking and have more than one project happening at one time. How do we keep track of what needs to be done for multiple tasks and stay on top of all the details for each one all at the same time?

Many of the tools we've already discussed will help.

Schedule all the details that need to be done and the deadlines on your calendar. Schedule time to work on each item. Putting them on your calendar will not only remind you of what needs to be done, but will set aside time to work on each project.

Make a list of everything that needs to be done for each project. Make sure to include all details—phone calls, letters to be sent, etc. If you've delegated parts of the project, include times to contact the person working on the project to touch base.

Working backwards from your deadline, schedule the details on your calendar.

For example, say you were planning a tea for the women of your community and church. What details would need to be done? Make a list.

- Scheduling the use of the church fellowship hall or other location.
- Talking to the decorating committee about ideas and vision for the event.

- Advertising the event in the church bulletin.
- Advertising the event in the local newspaper.
- Sending invitations to members who are not attending church.
- Having extra invitations available at church for church members to hand deliver.
- Contacting and scheduling your speaker.
- Purchasing a gift for the speaker.
- Asking the treasurer for a check for the speaker.
- Planning the menu with those who will be taking care of the meal.
- Purchasing supplies.
- Arranging special music.
- Printing a program.
- Arranging for a short inspirational reading to begin the program.
- Ask someone to have a blessing for the meal.
- Have a brochure on the church and its programs available to give to guests afterwards.
- Locating enough teapots and teacups from church members to borrow for the event.

Your list might have more or less items.

Next, taking your list, begin to schedule each item on your calendar. If the event is planned for May 20, you will want your invitations in the mail two weeks before. So write that detail down to do on May 6. You might want to begin advertising three weeks in advance, so make a note to contact the church bulletin secretary and to write an article for the local newspaper on April 29. A week before the event, you schedule time to purchase a gift for the speaker and to call the treasurer to ask for a check. A month before the event you schedule time to meet with various committees to begin working on the different aspects of the event—decorations, food, program. Make a note to speak with each person in charge of something one week before to double check that things are going smoothly.

As you break each project down into small to-do's and schedule them on your calendar, each project will run smoothly and you won't need to stress about forgetting something or having to do too much at one time. Because you are scheduling, you can balance how much work you need to do each day.

Remember to delegate as much as possible. Pray over every detail of your event. With God's help and the help of a good team, you'll be surprised at how things will flow and work out despite the number of activities you're involved in.

VII. "YOU" MANAGEMENT (OH-10)

Because our schedules are so full, there are things that have to go undone. Good things. But there's just not enough room in our day for everything. Unfortunately, too often what goes is time to take care of us, time for our family and friends, time for fun. We are so busy working; we forget the importance of relaxation, people, and fun. That's not what God intends. He did not create us to be workaholics. He created us to be people. Jesus' ministry lasted only three years. There was much that could have been done. Yet Christ always took time for prayer and for people. He went away by Himself often to refresh and renew Himself and His relationship with His Father—setting an example for us.

We need to include time in our schedules to take care of our bodies, our relationships, and our spiritual lives.

Good health is important. Not only will it help us to live longer lives, but it will cause us to be more productive as well. Eating healthy foods, exercising, drinking plenty of water, getting enough sleep, and fresh air will all help us to feel better, have more clarity in thinking, and give us more energy and focus. But too often in our busy lives we eat whatever we can grab, skip exercising, grab a sugar laden drink instead of water, get fresh air only when we're rushing from our car to an appointment, and get way too little sleep. We believe that making time for exercise, sleep, and eating healthy takes too much time. Wrong! Doing these things will actually make us more productive.

To live a healthy life does take some preplanning.

First, schedule in time for exercise several times a week, preferable daily. How do you schedule in another item in an already-filled day? Combine activities. Go for a brisk walk while you pray. Exercise, using a treadmill for instance, while you watch the news or other television shows you take time to watch. Get little bursts of exercise by taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking as far from the building as you can, taking a quick walk around the block during your lunch hour (just keep some walking shoes in your desk drawer), or take a walk with your husband or friend in the evening—using the time to talk while getting in some exercise and fresh air.

Make a commitment to go to bed early. If you haven't completed your tasks by 9:00 pm, then reschedule those jobs for the next day and go to bed. You will have more energy and clearer thinking if you get enough sleep. The National Sleep Foundation estimates that one quarter of the adult population in America doesn't get enough sleep. Lack of sleep can interfere with memory, energy levels, mental abilities, and emotional moods (causing us to be irritable or angry.) It also weakens our immune system, making us more susceptible to

diseases and disorders ranging from diabetes to cancer to the common cold. It affects both our mental and physical health. The average adult needs six to nine hours of sleep. Having a regular bedtime and rising time will help us to feel more alert, make our mood more pleasant and keep us healthy. It may mean cutting out activities or TV programs, but it's worth the effort.

Don't forget the importance of healthy eating. Studies have shown that a diet heavy in refined sugars and fat not only lead to health risks, but cause us to be more sluggish and tired. Yet many of us eat on the run, grabbing whatever we can as we go. We eat many meals in the car as we drive to another appointment or errand. Eating healthy foods does not have to be a burden on our schedules; but it may require preplanning. Purchase healthy foods and snacks when grocery shopping. Keep them on hand and ready to go. Carrot sticks and celery, peanut butter and apples, pretzels, prepackaged salad, nuts and other fruits are all healthy alternatives to the office donuts and pastries, or what the vending machine has to offer. Carry a water bottle in your car and keep another on your desk. This will not only help to remind you to drink plenty of water, but will cut down on the temptation to grab a soda from the machine.

Schedule in time for the family dinner. Sit down together to a healthy meal. (There are cookbooks available with healthy recipes that can be prepared in half an hour.) Not only will this benefit your physical health, but it will help to keep your family relationships healthy as well.

Take time for relationships. In the scheme of things, our relationships with people are one of the most important parts of our lives. While we can't take our home, car, clothes, job, or other materials with us to heaven, we can impact the lives of our family and friends in such a way that they choose a relationship with Christ and heaven. They're the only things we can "take" with us. Plus, friendships keep us sane. When women are stressed and talk to a friend, a hormone, oxitoshin, is released that calms our system—not only causing us to feel better mentally, but lowering our risk for stress-related illnesses and premature death by 60%!

We can schedule in time for friends. Lunch out with a friend. Dinner with our family. A "date night" with our husband. Write it on the calendar. Remind yourself of the importance of people, relationships, and time out having fun with people you love.

Make time for God. This is the most important relationship in our lives. But it is also often one of the first things to go from our schedule. Spending time with God. Praying. Bible study. Only 37% of adults take time to read the Bible each day. (Barna Research 2001)

Again, we can schedule in time to spend with God each day. Many people find that beginning the day is the best time in their schedule. It may mean going to bed a little earlier so that you can get up earlier. But it needs to be a priority in our lives. All of our accomplishments mean nothing if they're done apart from our relationship with God – even if they're done *for* Him. He doesn't want our work; He wants us. It's not about our adequacy; it's about intimacy. Our works come from our relationship with Him. In order for that to happen, we need the relationship.

Write it on your schedule. Plan for it. Guard it.

We can treat our commitments to exercise, time with family and friends, and time with God with the importance that we give to other appointments. When someone asks for us to commit that time to something else, simply say, "I'm sorry, I already have a commitment for that time. Is there another time?"

In order for us to best manage our time, we need to have balance in our lives. Our lives run better when we learn how to better manage our projects and schedules, but it is also important to make sure our days are balanced. We need time to work on our projects, ministries, and jobs; but we also need time for God, family, friends, and ourselves.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Our lives are busy. And as Women's Ministries leaders, they will always be busy. But as we allow God to be our time manager, giving Him our plans, schedules, agendas, and programs, we will accomplish what is most important and not feel over-burdened or over-worked. He invites us, *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30

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