



Planning

MATTERS

WORKING ON MINISTRY
NOT JUST IN IT

A black and white photograph of a person's hand holding a smartphone, with a laptop screen visible in the background. The person is wearing a watch on their left wrist. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hand and the devices.

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This ebook was adapted from the Planning Series on the Send Network site.

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Published by The Send Network
4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta, GA 30022
www.sendnetwork.com



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING

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DUSTIN WILLIS

Every day we are either working in our lives and ministry or we are working on our lives and ministry.

Working in is like a painter who works hard at creating a striking work of art but stubbornly never breaks to take a step back from the canvas long enough to see the big picture. He is too busy in his work, and the idea of stopping or slowing down brings about frustration.

With great discipline we must step back and observe what is unfolding in front of us. Stepping back and observing the canvas gives way to understanding the idea of working on my life and ministry. Am I saying you have to step back from a painting for it to be good? No, but seeing the big picture and planning well can be the difference between good work and great work.

I am extremely determined in life and ministry and driving to the grocery store for that matter. I am the guy who sees the arrival time that my GPS communicates, and then I seek to beat the time. If you are like me then you are often driven by results and your tendency is to move into the work as fast as possible.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

Many of us are of the mindset that you should build the plane while flying it. Is it dangerous to build a plane while flying it? YES, but am I saying don't try it, NO. I am just challenging us to at least have a blueprint you've sketched out that you refer back to every once in a while.

Today begins a two-week series where we want to collectively challenge ourselves to pause long enough to step back and spend some time

“working on” life and ministry vs. “working in” it all the time. Preparation and planning can be a huge difference-maker in the execution of what God has called you and your family to.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

PROSPER THROUGH PLANNING

Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.

Proverbs 21:5

The point here is not that if you plan you too can prosper and have a private jet and your own island. Planning is a principal that tends to lead towards success versus just flying by the seat of your pants in hopes everything will all magically work out.

PLAN WITH AN OPEN HAND

I want to give a word of caution and encouragement as we begin this series. While we become more proactive in our planning our tendency will become to hold tightly to those detailed plans with out relenting. I want to challenge you as I challenge myself to make plans but to hold them with an open hand. Our plans will not always work and there will be provisions we must give along the journey.

I know some of you are planners down to the dotting of the “i” and the crossing of the letter “t.” I once had an excel spreadsheet for a vacation with just me and my wife. It was not her favorite, and it is safe to say the plan didn't last. Dwight D. Eisenhower stated so clearly “In preparing

for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

God will use your planning one way or another and we must trust that truth knowing that in the end His purpose will prevail.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Proverbs 19:21

In this eBook, we have some of Send Networks great young leaders to speak into the principals of planning and preparation. DA Horton, Alan Briggs, Dean Inserra, Matt Rogers, Bland Mason, Bryan Barley, and Brandon Shields will lead us through this important topic.

We will discuss planning in regards to the following areas of life and ministry:

- Priorities
- Rest
- Vacation
- Personal Schedule
- Preaching
- Church Calendar
- Mission

It is absolutely critical to step back from the canvas every once in a while and prayerfully consider what’s next or you may get to the end of your work and wonder how you ever got to a place you never desired to be. Spend time working on life and ministry rather than always working in it.



PLANNING YOUR PRIORITIES

D.A. HORTON

D.A. Horton currently serves as the Executive Director of ReachLife Ministries, the non-profit ministry of Reach Records as well as the National Coordinator for Urban Student Missions at NAMB. Prior to serving at ReachLife, D.A. was an urban church planter, pastor and Lead Teaching Elder in Kansas City, MO for 6 years. D.A. is currently using the Spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has given him to edify the body of Christ while serving under the leadership at Blueprint Church where he and his family are privileged to hold membership. He and his wife of 10 years Elicia have two daughters, Izabelle and Lola and one son, D.A. Jr.

“I’m done.”

These are two words that no church planter wants his wife to say. They carry enough power to bring the most prideful man to his knees. Trust me, I’ve walked with a limp since the day I heard them. I was boarding a flight from Kansas City to Chicago and wife and I were arguing over my lack of engagement with her and our kids over the past month. When I pulled the this is ministry card she responded with two words before hanging up.

At first I didn’t stress because I felt my wife was in the wrong for not following God’s call on our lives in ministry. We were busy because that’s ministry. I got it but somehow she didn’t. I operated under the conviction that the gospel’s work in our city was too great a task for me to slow down. I saw the people in our community as sheep without a shepherd and my compassion for them prevented me from having any compassion on my wife and kids.

Every church planter recognizes the God-given priorities He has deposited in our hearts. Yet what many of us lack is the ability to prioritize these priorities.

MY PRIORITIES

Every church planter recognizes the God-given priorities He has deposited in our hearts. Yet what many of us lack is the ability to prioritize effectively. Our lack of organizing our priorities causes us to burn the candle from both ends. This leads us to burnout, making us prone to sloppy decisions with our emotions, finances, sexuality and theology. I wanted to

prioritize but I didn’t know where to start.

As a church I planter I’m a visionary who only see A and Z and none of the letters in between. My wife on the other hand excels at identifying the blind spots I never consider because she focuses on the Bthrough Y. She often asks questions about specifics to gain clarity, which has led me to think she’s poking holes in my vision. To avoid this I began to withhold my ministry plans from her. I still saw her as a priority to me in marriage but no longer in ministry. I was wrong.

This was real life up to the moment she said, “I’m done.”

After take off, God started breaking my heart by leading me to the Cross—where I confessed my sins and asked Him for the grace and strength to change. When I landed in Chicago I immediately called Elicia and repented. The Lord began to meld our hearts together and through the course of our conversation we developed a plan to safeguard our marriage from ever arriving at this low point again.

OUR PLAN

We identified and prioritized 4 non-negotiable priorities that we felt are permanent in life. These priorities would determine how I spend my time daily. I pray you’ll consider putting these in place in your life as well.

1. Time with God.

If we’re not daily disciplined in spending time with God in private we’ll be more prone to implement our plans and not His. In the quietness of most mornings I get alone time with God and line out the tasks of my day and ask Him for wisdom regarding them.

2. Time with Family.

I asked God to place in my heart a deep desire to engage with my family and I challenge you to do the same. I needed to regard them as precious in order to prevent me from placing them as a sacrifice on the altar of ministry.

3. Time with Accountability Partners.

Alongside my wife, I work to have two to three other men help shepherd my heart. These are men that I make myself known to—meaning I confess my sins, unpack my fears and struggles. Before making any decisions in life or ministry, I have a conviction that there would be harmony in the hearts of my wife and my accountability partners. This harmony is an indicator of God's will.

4. Time for Work.

Since work was a reality before the Fall in Genesis 3, its safe to say God created me to be a producer not just a consumer. Daily I create a task list with sub-headings regarding the assignments that need to be completed. I've had to train myself to have expandable boundaries with my task list because life happens and it often prevents some deadlines from being met.

To God's glory these priorities have kept my wife and me away from the words "I'm done" since 2009. Since church planters are pulled in so many directions daily, if we're not careful to prioritize our priorities, we are susceptible to make poor or sinful decisions that may damage the reputation of our Lord. Nothing could be more counter-productive and this should drive us to develop a plan that helps us prioritize our priorities.

PLANNING YOUR SCHEDULE

MATT ROGERS

Matt is the pastor of The Church at Cherrydale in Greenville, SC (www.tccherrydale.com). He is a graduate of Furman University (BA in psychology), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (MA in Counseling), and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (MDiv in pastoral ministry) and is currently completing his PhD from SEBTS in Applied Theology. Matt writes for a number of evangelical organizations as well as maintains a personal blog at www.equiptogrow.com.

This all pales in comparison to the joy Matt finds in being the husband of Sarah and the father of Corrie, Avery, and Hudson. Follow Matt on Twitter @mattrogers_

1 week
7 days
168 hours
10,080 minutes
604,800 seconds

Each moment is a gift from God. Every second is a divine opportunity. Rather than seizing these moments, however, many of us are guilty of squandering our time with mundane, trivial, or lazy lifestyles rather than using them for God-honoring purposes

Ephesians 5:16

A PASTOR AND HIS WORK

A pastor must develop a plan for his work in order to fulfill his task of shepherding God's people and avoid wasting precious time. It may seem like a pastor's work is never complete. The endless stream of appointments, emails, sermons, and meetings can feel crushing. This reality is amplified by the fact that we are caring for broken people which leads to painful conversations, fractured relationships, and hard decisions. The result is often frantic lives that miss God-ordained opportunities for doing good and caring for God's people. As a church planter, four years into my first church pastorate, I have found three critical factors that shape how I should plan my work schedule.

Every second is a divine opportunity. Rather than seizing these moments, however, many of us are guilty of squandering our time with mundane, trivial or lazy lifestyles rather than using them for God-honoring purposes.

MY ROLE

God has called me to a specific, God-ordained role in the local church. I am a pastor – but I am not a generic pastor. I am a pastor with certain gifts given by God's Spirit, and I've been placed on a team with complementary gifts who are together given the task of leading God's people. The team, and the church, function most effectively when I am spending the majority of my time doing the things that God has gifted me to do and allowing others to do the things that they are most gifted to do.

These gifts vary from pastor to pastor—from preaching to counseling to administration to leadership. But one thing is certain—no one can do everything. I neglect the gift that God has given me when I do not do the things that I do best. And I rob others of the joy of using their gifts when I do things that they need to be doing. You can best discern your role by asking yourself questions like:

- What areas of ministry are the most fruitful for me?
- What roles bring me joy and ignite my passions?
- What areas of neglect on my part cause the church to suffer

most?

- What are other people on my team gifted to do better than me?
- What other gifts do I need to add to my team as soon as possible?

MY RESPONSIBILITIES

My pursuit of my unique role as a leader need not, in fact, must not, cloud the fact that I am responsible for accomplishing certain responsibilities. I cannot use my personal passions or desires as an excuse for passivity.

This is particularly true in the early years of planting a church when technology may cause us to desire the specialized ministries of men who lead far larger, older, and more mature congregations. For example, we may desire to spend all of our time teaching and writing, but this is not possible. We are responsible for making sure we have a place to meet, that children are cared for and that the bills are paid. Often these tasks cannot be delegated (yet). As a result, we must spend some of our time doing generalist tasks, whether we like them or not. Our responsibility forces us to ask:

- What tasks must happen each week?
- Which ministries must I develop first and which can wait until the church is older or I have more leaders?
- What responsibilities do I need to do now which I may be able to delegate as the church matures?
- What things am I putting off by wasting time (with things like blog reading or social media watching) that have to be done?
- Where is our ministry currently weak and what should I do to

strengthen that area, whether I enjoy doing it or not?

MY RHYTHMS

Scheduling roles and responsibilities is a daunting task. To plan well, you must consider how to spend the majority of your best time working in your roles and fill the gaps by working on your responsibilities. To do this you must know yourself well.

For example, my personal role necessitates that I spend a large amount of time casting vision, teaching, preaching, and writing. My responsibilities require that I spend some time providing biblical counseling or doing administration. Personally, I thrive in the mornings (except Monday mornings) and tend to grow weary in the afternoons. I can often do more between 6:30-7:00am alone than I can between 1:00 and 4:00 pm. For this reason, I try to write, teach, and prepare in the mornings while reserving the afternoons for pastoral counseling. I tackle administrative tasks on Monday morning – when I often tired from a full day on Sunday. This allows me to thrive in the areas where I am most needed, while still accomplishing the things that I have to do. To discern your rhythms ask:

- When are you at your best?
- Which days or times of the day do you most often get in the zone?
- How can you match your roles to your rhythms?
- How can your responsibilities fill in the gaps?

90 seconds

That's the number of seconds it took me to read this blog. Was it well spent? Time will tell.

PLANNING YOUR PREACHING

Bland enjoys spending time with Teresa, his best friend/wife of 20 years, and their three kids, Jordan, Hannah, and Sarah. He and Teresa moved to Boston to invest the rest of their lives for the purpose of planting a gospel-centered church that impacts the nations. He earned a Master of Divinity and a Ph.D. from Southern Seminary and taught theology courses for several years as adjunct faculty at Campbellsville University. Bland serves on the side with Baseball Chapel as the chapel leader to the Boston Red Sox.

BLAND MASON

As you are starting or seeking to grow a church, few things can have greater impact than the regular preaching of God's Word. Many of us are concerned about what we will preach next Sunday, but it is important to keep the big picture in mind since after a bunch of "next Sundays" we end up several years down the road. Better to have a map ahead of time to guide the trip than to look back and realize you drove like a 3 year old hyped up on Skittles.

PRINCIPLES FOR PLANNING YOUR PREACHING

1. DECIDE ON YOUR METHODOLOGY.

There are good reasons to preach verse-by-verse through books of the Bible as it demonstrates a high value on God's Word, builds biblical knowledge and lets the book set the agenda for the series. But there are also good reasons to do a series of topical/expository sermons, also called "doctrinal preaching," where you can highlight your core values as a church as revealed in Scripture, give a systematic theological look at the Holy Spirit, marriage, suffering or another contextually relevant topic.

Many of us are concerned about what we will preach next Sunday, but it is important to keep the big picture in mind since after a bunch of "next Sundays" we end up several years down the road.

2. PREACH THE WHOLE BIBLE.

If you are giving more than 2/3 of your sermons on the New Testament (less than 1/3 of the bible) what does that say to your church about the

Old Testament? When Jesus was resurrected and appeared to his disciples he didn't tell them "Hey forget all that old stuff, let me tell you what's new." Instead, Jesus showed the disciples how the law, the prophets and the Psalms all point to Him (Luke 24:44). Make sure that while you preach the Jesus revealed in the New Testament that you don't neglect the Jesus foretold in the Old Testament.

3. CONSIDER DEPTH AND BREADTH.

When it comes to preaching through books of the bible or even topical series, you need to think about both depth and breadth. Are you going to take four-plus years to preach through Ephesians like Martyn Lloyd-Jones or will you cover it in six weeks? Your context can and should have an impact in this area since there is no biblical mandate to preach a book or doctrine in a certain amount of time. In some communities taking two years to give a broad diet of the Word of God (#2) may be appropriate because of transience. In other communities taking five years, or even longer, to achieve the same goal may work well.

4. PLAN TIME OFF.

Part of planning your preaching is planning your time off. I realize every church plant is unique and at certain points, especially early on, you might be preaching every week of the year. Taking weeks off from preaching can let you rest, give another preacher the opportunity to gain experience and let the congregation listen to another voice. Rather than planning Sundays off a few weeks out, it is best to plan for the year so you can have adequate time to find someone to fill in those weeks for you well ahead of time. I choose often to preach for two to three months in a row and then take two to three weeks off to allow for prolonged prayer and planning.

Planning, like preaching, requires a lot of work

but the call to preach the Word requires we take the task seriously.

5. KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY.

The planter needs to know his community well in order to faithfully proclaim the gospel in a culturally relevant way. Contextualization doesn't just apply to each sermon but also to the overall strategy of preaching. What are the rhythms of your community? When are people most likely to visit? Is there a liturgical tradition in the culture (for example, Boston has a lot of post-Catholics)? You should leverage the energy a new series can create in a strategic way for the mission of the church in your community.

6. PRAY.

I am amazed at how often I find myself undertaking planning and “strategery” for City on a Hill Church without taking the time to earnestly seek the wisdom and direction of the real Senior Pastor, Jesus. He is often gracious to build his church anyway but sometimes he just allows me to struggle with something just to show me my foolish self-reliance. Our prayer life may be the single greatest indicator of where our heart is as a planter or pastor. Does prayer mark your preparation and planning? Don't just pray as you prepare individual sermons but also as you think and plan the preaching calendar for your church.

PREACHING TO MAKE DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

Planning, like preaching, requires a lot of work but the call to preach the Word requires we take the task seriously. Your church's preaching schedule should serve the overall mission of the church to make disciples equipped for mission and one thing is for sure... that will not happen accidentally.

PLANNING YOUR CHURCH CALENDAR

BRYAN BARLEY

January 2014

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Bryan Barley is the Pastor of Preaching and Leadership at The Summit Church Denver (www.summitdenver.org). He grew up in Richmond, VA. After high school, he attended the University of South Carolina where he earned a degree in History, and more importantly, met his wife, Megan. After getting married in 2007, they moved to Raleigh where Bryan earned a Master's Degree in Theology from Southeastern Seminary and completed a church planting residency. They love calling Denver home, and now live in the Curtis Park neighborhood where they have two chocolate labs, and Megan works as a Nurse for Denver Public Schools.

When I think back to when we first planted in Denver, I laugh at how we had no real plan for our church calendar. The unspoken assumption was we'll have a gathering and small groups (because that's what churches do), and by doing this on a weekly basis, we'll grow a lot, every week, forever.

This had as much effectiveness as Denver Broncos Coach John Fox would if he told his players at the beginning of the season, "The plan is to win every game. Now let's go out there and do it." Our intentions were good, but our execution was lacking. In the wake of this leadership fail, there was a lot of unmet expectations and burned out members with filled-up schedules.

We soon learned we needed to master our calendar or it would master us. As we began to think more strategically about our church's calendar, we started by asking five key questions:

1. WHAT ARE YOUR COMMUNITY'S RHYTHMS?

A one size fits all approach to church programs and plans is insufficient when you recognize how unique each community is. For example, prior to moving to Denver I lived in a family-oriented area in Raleigh, North Carolina, where churches saw Christmas as a strategic time to expect and capitalize on an influx of growth with holiday concerts and outreaches.

I now live in a neighborhood where there are far more decorations for Halloween than Christmas and December vacation days are used to get into the mountains to capitalize on ski-season. If we weren't aware of the cultural differences it would be easy for our church to launch major initiatives during an unfavorable rhythm in our community's calendar, consequently misappropriating our time, energy and money.

We want to study our community and its rhythms to know not just when to plan for growth, but also when to anticipate and enjoy rest and

recovery.

If you don't master your calendar it will master you and your people.

2. WHAT ARE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S RULES?

As you're planning your church's calendar, it's important to be able to answer why you're scheduling what you're scheduling. Too often programs are scheduled because they worked somewhere else, or someone in the church asked for them, rather than holding a firm belief that this will advance the mission.

Our vision must give birth to some rules that govern when we'll say yes and no. For example, at the heart of our vision is that every one of our members serve as missionaries regularly engaged in our community. Out of this vision, we've created rules to limit the number of events we'll organize as the church and ask our people to be a part of each month, because we want to preserve their schedules for missional living and community engagement.

3. WHAT IS A REALISTIC PLANNING UNIT?

By planning unit, I mean a period of time around which you typically plan your calendar. My observation is that most churches favor one of two units:

The Week. This is a first inclination because of the natural process of planning a weekly service. But we've found this unit is too small because it focuses too much on the weekly grind and too little on long-term vision.

The Year. We also leaned toward yearly planning because of the natural

cultural rhythm of evaluating life and setting goals every January 1st. We've found this unit too large because it doesn't compensate for the many changes that can happen quickly in a church's early years.

The Fifth. While we have both weekly and annual planning meetings, we've identified "fifths" as our ideal planning unit. We divided our year into five major sections in conjunction with our community's rhythms and set goals, expectations and evaluations around these seasons.

4. WHAT ARE WE SUBTRACTING AS WE ADD?

Most church plants begin programmatically simply because they don't have the resources to do much. However, as we grow it's easy to perpetually add programs to the calendar without recognizing there comes a time to take something off. When we say yes to something new, we have to seriously evaluate saying no to something old.

5. WHAT'S IN PLACE TO COMMUNICATE AND EXECUTE?

A plan is only as effective as its execution, and so we need systems in place to make sure the right people understand what we're doing. Because our church limits itself to have just a few scheduled programs, we try to communicate them with excellence. This means major planning sessions filled with whiteboards, synced calendars among key leaders and multi-layered and repetitive communication via Sunday Announcements, e-mail and social media.

Remember, if you don't master your calendar it will master you and your people. What's your plan to to communicate and execute your vision over the coming year?

PLANNING YOUR MISSION

Brandon is the founder and Lead Pastor of Soma Church located in midtown Indianapolis, IN. He is the happy husband to Emily and daddy to their four children - James, Cooper, Lilly Claire, and Hadley. Brandon has published several journal articles and contributed to a book on family ministry, and received both his MDiv and Ph.D from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

BRANDON SHIELDS

When we arrived in Indianapolis nearly three years ago to begin planting Soma, we longed to experience a deep and lasting renewal of the city through the unleashing and multiplication of missional disciples. But in a city of nearly 2 million people with unimaginable brokenness and zero relationships, where exactly do you start? How do you measure fruitfulness in mission? It didn't take long for the angst and excitement to give way to frustration and disillusionment.

For the last several years, my experiences in church planting and conversations with dozens of planters around North America have led me to conclude that we need a majestic dose of sobriety, repentance, patience, imagination and realism in our approaches to mission, particularly in large urban settings. While I don't have all of the answers, I believe that God in his kindness has led us away from some of the chronic "missional anxiety" plaguing much of church planting and is leading us into a place of non-anxious, faithful and strategic presence among the people he has given us to love well.

Here are two things we have learned in our (mostly) failed attempts to live on mission and equip others to do the same:

1. WE STOPPED TRYING TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN AND STARTED LISTENING TO AND FOLLOWING THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT.

There is nothing more exhausting and discouraging than trying to manufacture mission. And yet, there is an enormous amount of pressure placed on planters to justify their very existence by the quantity of frenetic community activity—after all, what else are you doing with all of that support money and free time? (See church planting reporting mechanisms, prospectus timelines and first-year budgets for symptoms of this disease).

The good news of the gospel is that the pressure is off to make things

happen! Jesus did the heavy lifting by making peace in his cross, and he sends us out to our cities with the peace and joy of his Holy Spirit as He builds his church. Our vision for mission had to die and be reborn several times during the first year as we moved our attention from our misguided strategies to the relationships and opportunities the Spirit was clearly putting before us.

2. WE EMBRACED A SIMPLE PROCESS OF "HOPEFUL REALISM" FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING—DREAM BIG, START SMALL, GO DEEP AND PACE FOR THE LONG HAUL.

Once we realize we don't have to make things happen, we create the missional space to settle into what God is already doing to make Himself known in the city. We don't have to launch large, try to rush to sustainability or prove our missional grit to Tim Keller by launching non-profits, centers for faith & vocation and theological training centers for pastors within our first two years of existence.

The gospel frees us to slow down and sober up in our view of mission. As Corbett and Fikkert note in *When Helping Hurts*, "The North American need for speed undermines the slow process needed for lasting and effective long-run development." (131)

Church planters who have been graced with the self-awareness to understand the freedom of the gospel and the complexities of the city can embrace what we'll call "hopeful realism" —praying and working for God to change our city while realizing that the only real hope for lasting change in our city is for God to one day fully restore his kingdom on earth.

The gospel frees us to slow down and sober up in our view of mission.

Working from this framework simplifies the planning process because now we can labor in patient obscurity by occupying the neglected spaces of our city with a faithful gospel presence. For us that's meant praying bold prayers while simultaneously starting with the overlooked people and places God put in front of us—buying groceries for a year for a single mom with four kids, serving lunch to our homeless brothers and sisters under a bridge, coaching sports teams and partnering with one small non-profit in the first year of our existence to serve the poor.

Going deep with these people over months and years has now led to a groundswell of opportunities to serve our city. In fact, we are overwhelmed with the sheer number of things being brought to us because we are a trusted asset in the community.

How do you plan mission for your church planting team or congregation? Are you busy giving people stuff to do, or are you loving the people God has actually placed around you right now?

A black and white photograph of a mountainous landscape. In the foreground, a stone-roofed building is partially visible. A bridge spans a valley, with a car and a truck crossing it. The background features steep, forested mountains under a hazy sky.

PLANNING YOUR VACATION

Dean Inserra is the founding and lead pastor of City Church in Tallahassee, FL. He is married to Krissie and has two sons, Tommy and Ty, and a baby due in August.

DEAN INSERRA

I am someone who believes that “balance” is overrated. Rarely have I met great, effective leaders who are living perfectly balanced lives. They are “all in” in their commitments and the efforts to which they devote themselves.

For me, this is especially true when it comes to my family and my life as a pastor. Both are far too important to be merely balanced. They deserve all of me, full speed.

Part of making sure that happens is making sure I have a plan to take time off away from the church on vacation.

For me, this is especially true when it comes to my family and my life as a pastor. Both are far too important to be merely balanced. They deserve all of me, full speed.

This way I can be fully engaged when I am in the pulpit, office, home, t-ball fields or out with friends. I’ve learned that if you speak of vacation as a hypothetical, it won’t happen. So when it comes to vacation or time off from the church, I plan it out in advance and recommend you do the same.

1. VACATION DOESN’T JUST MEAN OUT OF TOWN, BUT TIME OFF PREACHING.

I am usually off on Sundays that I know will be lesser attendance days. Be honest. All your church growth theories get clobbered that Sunday after Christmas or on 4th of July weekend. Those are great times to take off. I also usually make sure I’m off during our county’s school spring break.

I never go more than eight weeks at a time without taking a Sunday off. I need it, and City Church needs it, if I am going to be 100%. This doesn’t

mean I’m on the golf course all week. Having a Sunday away from the pulpit allows me to get ahead in sermon writing and other work, spend more time with our staff and be all the more excited to be back preaching the following week.

2. MAP OUT YOUR PREACHING CALENDAR AT LEAST 6 MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

I’ll have our local school calendar, local college sports calendar and anything relevant to our city in front of me so I know the wise Sundays to take off. For example, if there is a huge home Florida State football game, I will definitely be preaching, because everyone will be in town that weekend.

Know the dates of local festivals when the city is busy, and long weekends for the schools when folks will be gone. This also allows you to give preaching opportunities to others in your church, and that is important for development. Every Sunday is not the same. So don’t pretend like it is!

3. TAKE A WEEK DURING THE SUMMER WITH YOUR FAMILY AND LEAVE TOWN.

Now it is pretty tiring going out of town with young kids, to the point where my wife refuses to call it “vacation.” It might be exhausting, but getting away together is needed. We plan to be gone the first week of June every year. To be able to take these trips we save money from weddings I get paid to do or speaking engagements. I make sure I have the Sunday at the end of the vacation week off so I’m not thinking about a sermon all week.

4. ALLOW 30 MINUTES A DAY ON VACATION TO RESPOND TO EMAILS.

Some will disagree, but you will be less stressed if you check some email and do some work after the kids go to bed when you're out of town instead of coming back to tons of things to do when you get home. Coming back swamped is not the goal of being out of town. I keep my phone in the car and check my messages at the end of the day, but that is it.

Get planning! Take some time off. Everyone needs you "all in," not balanced. This will take some planning, but it is worth it.



PLANNING YOUR REST

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ALAN BRIGGS

“I don’t have time to rest. I’m a church planter.” I appreciated his honesty, but I cringed. This is the norm in church planting—sprint for a few years and hope the church makes it.

Ironically, the church planter is more at risk than the church is. Every hard-working spiritual leader I know struggles to build in rest. We can always find a reason to avoid having a real weekend, finding a weekly rhythm or scheduling that much needed staycation.

At our core most of us believe we will never burnout. If we’re young we believe the lie that people my age don’t burn out.

We all know people who didn’t “go the distance” in ministry. I’m not talking about accepting another good opportunity or sensing a genuine call out of church ministry. I’m talking about burnout.

At our core most of us believe we will never burnout. If we’re young we believe the lie that people my age don’t burn out. If we’re older we believe the lie that we just need to keep this crazy pace for a few more years and we can rest during retirement.

WHAT IS HOLDING ME BACK FROM RESTING?

1. We lack trust.

We don’t trust that God works when we don’t. As spiritual leaders we aren’t starting a mission— we’re joining one. God was at work long before we arrived on the scene and will be at work long after we exit.

Most church leaders don’t trust their team to lead without them. We

want to trust others to lead in our stead, but it’s scary. We are control freaks, and we must release things if we are ever going to find rest. Early on in ministry I would be states away on vacation still emotionally present at the gathering.

I would call the teacher right before and check in right after. My team could smell my lack of trust. Today I love losing track of what day it is on vacation or being fully present at a cookout while the event is going just fine without me.

2. We are insecure.

We often feel like we’re not doing enough. Every week ministry presents a bigger to do list than we can conquer. Feeling secure in God’s love frees us from performance and leads us to rest. We need to learn to enjoy sleeping in, reading a book that doesn’t make us smarter and taking our kids to the park.

3. We are addicted to adrenaline.

Many pastors have an adrenaline dependency. Once we finish one event we start thinking about the next one. Our frenetic energy keeps us discipling people, responding to hard situations, leading teams and producing a large event every week without stopping to take a breather.

HOW CAN I START PLANNING REST?

1. Anticipate the rest spots.

When I was a mountain guide I would look up the mountain and create our next landmark goal. The group would push hard, reach the micro-goal and rest for a while. Ministry requires us to push hard, but we need to anticipate rest stops ahead and block that time off.

2. Commit to a weekly sabbath.

Find a day off that works for you and commit to neglecting work and focusing on personal and family refreshment.

3. Create an annual rhythm for your church.

Your church needs to find a rhythm of rest. Every church needs to find months or weeks they can power down, lighten meetings and program sparingly. You will show your leaders value and create better retention rates.

We are stewards of this one life, and I choose to do everything I can to run this race with perseverance. Plan rest into your schedule or your schedule will plan you.

WHATEVER IT TAKES

There was a ministry season where my schedule was a log jam. I was getting drained, and I needed to find a healthy weekly rhythm. I narrowed in on accomplishing specific things each day. I hit admin, email and scheduling hard on Monday. I focused on team meetings and leader prep on Tuesday.

I focused on recruitment and teaching prep on Wednesday. Thursday, my last day of the work week, became my ministry highlight reel where I focused on leadership development and relational discipleship. It was my reward for getting everything else done, and it felt like ministry hedonism. This weekly rhythm made my weekends far more refreshing. These little motivators keep us on track.

There's a lot at stake. We're fighting a battle between the flesh and the spirit, between a me-centric and a God-centric life. We are stewards of this one life, and I choose to do everything I can to run this race with

perseverance. Plan rest into your schedule or your schedule will plan you.