

What does the Bible say about productivity?

July 5, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. If you are a visitor, it is great having you on this July 4 weekend.

We are in a series called “Work Matters To God.” In this is a series we are looking at what the Bible says about our everyday work. Today, we finish the pre-planned teaching section in the series. Throughout the series we provided questions cards. They are a place for you to share your questions on how your faith integrates with the everyday work challenges you face. Many of you shared great questions. Some of those we answered during the series but the remainder we will answer next week as we close the series. It will be a fun weekend.

This morning we have what might appear to be the least biblical of the messages in this series. We are talking about what the Bible teaches about productivity. That sounds like a business issue, not a church issue. There are many business books on productivity. There is David Allen’s Getting Things Done. Stephen Covey and Peter Drucker wrote books on business productivity. Do any of their productivity techniques belong in church? This morning we will discover the answer.

This message is in two parts. In the first half, we will see what the Bible says about productivity. In the second half will be very tactical. I will share some of the productivity strategies I learned over the years and we use around the office. I am still learning in this area and have a long way to go. After the

service, some of you can help me learn how to be more productive but for some of you, the basics I share will be helpful. Let's jump in!

Why study productivity in church?

A lack of productivity is not just a business problem, it is a spiritual problem. Let me say that again. A lack of productivity is not just a business problem, it is a spiritual problem. Let me show you why.

1. God created us for productivity.

...And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Genesis 1:28 (ESV)

This is the charter God gave the human race. The heart of the charter is human beings are to be productive. We are to create culture on the earth. Adam and Eve, along with their posterity, should take the resources of the earth and produce something with them. God told us to develop the earth. God doesn't want the earth to remain an untouched wilderness forever. When God finished creating the earth in six days he said it was very good; that meant the earth was complete and now ready for us to to our job of making something good with it. When the earth was complete, it was like a box of Legos. All the necessary pieces were in the box for us to begin building with them. God told us to be productive.

2. We will give an account to God for the productivity of our lives.

Matthew 25 gives us the parable of the talents. I will not read it but just briefly sketch it. In the parable, the master invested his money with three servants. Two of the servants were productive and did something with what was given to them. They doubled the money the master put in their keeping. They

were commended for using their gifts. The last servant didn't do anything with the money. He just buried it. He was more concerned with not losing it than with using it. For being unproductive, he was condemned. It is the same with us. God gave each of us talents, gifts, and the ability to work, to earn money, to bless our family and bless others. We have time, energy and opportunities. When Christ, our master, returns, the question will be, "Was I using his gifts or just worried about not losing his gifts? Was I productive with what God entrusted into my hands?" God wants us to live productive lives. An unproductive life is something God condemns.

We find the same concern in Romans 14 when Paul talked about the day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;... so then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:10, 12 (ESV)

We can do many things with our lives, but all that matters is what Jesus thinks about our lives when we stand before him. When we stand before Christ, we will give an account of our lives. Part of that accounting will be, "Were we productive?" Did we make use of the skills, gifts and opportunities that God gave us, or did we waste our lives? The more productive we can be for Jesus, the better off we will be on that day.

3. God commands us to use our time wisely.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:15–17 (ESV)

This is the core New Testament passage on productivity. We are not to breeze through life taking whatever comes our way. We are to "look carefully" at

our opportunities and think about how we live. We are to make sure we are making the most of the time God gives us. There a lot of things we can do with our time that are just foolish and wasteful. Too much television can be a foolish, wasteful use of out time. Too much is a foolish wasteful use of our time. Too much Snapchat is also a waste of our time. Don't be a fool. Think about what we are doing with our lives and use the time in our lives wisely.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12 (ESV)

Moses' prayer was that we think about our lives as a limited amount of time. He prayed we don't just burn our time but become wise in how we use our limited time. Before we know it, the currency of our lives will be spent. Think carefully about what we do with our time.

4. God wants us to do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can as long as we can.

That is a quote from John Wesley, and it is a good quote. God's desire is that we live a life of good works. God wants us to be as productive as possible when it comes to doing good works for other people. That is the MO of a Christian. People of the street should know us as the good works people.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

As Christians, we don't need to work on good works to save ourselves. Jesus did all the good works needed to save us. Our job is not to focus on saving ourselves but to focus on loving people. God puts all kinds of opportunities in our paths each week for us to love other people.

...who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

We aren't to be people that do just a few good works but we are to be zealous for good works. Zealous comes from the word zealot. The zealots were the crazies of the day. They were nut jobs. They were totally-off-the-deep-end freaks. We are to be like them. We are to the nut jobs for good works. We are to always going out of our ways to help people in any way we can at any time we can in any way we can. We look weird because we do far more good works for other people than is normal. God wants us to live an extremely productive life when it comes to good works.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:8 (ESV)

God's desire is that we live fruitful lives. We are to do all kinds of good work.

The more we look at it, it sounds like productivity is not just for the business world. It is something we should study in church.

God created us to be productive.

Our lives will be evaluated on their productivity.

God tells us to make wise use of our time so we live productive lives.

We are to be extremely productive and do all the good we can to all the people we can at all the times we can in all the ways we can.

Why is productivity difficult?

If you haven't noticed, productivity, especially in our modern world, is very difficult. What makes productivity so hard?

1. Life is filled with distractions.

There are more things to distract us than ever before. You sit down to pay the bills and before you get started we get a phone call, then a text message, then the doorbell rings. Then a pop-up comes across the screen telling you somebody commented on your Facebook post. You have to stop what you are doing to check on that. We live lives of constant interruptions so nothing gets completed. Can anybody relate?

2. Life is more complex than it used to be.

Only a few years ago, when men went to work, all they carried was a lunch box. Now we skip the lunch box and carry a cell phone, laptop, and a tablet because we work through lunch, we work at home and we work on the commute to work. There are now more laws to obey and online passwords to remember than ever before. There are a few of you out there that are foolish enough to have the same password for everything. If that is you, I recommend you change. However, if you have a different password for every online account, it is impossible to keep them straight. Life is so complex.

We used to be able to do the maintenance on our car's engine by ourselves in our own driveways. Then the engine became too difficult to work on so we needed to take it to the dealer for work. Then the engines became so complex that even the mechanics couldn't figure them out. Mechanics have to hook engines up to a computer to figure out a problem. Things are so complex that on our newest car you can't even change the oil yourself or at a Jiffy Lube. You need to take it to the dealer in Mankato just to get the oil changed. No wonder it is hard to get anything done.

3. We live in an era of knowledge work not task work.

Sociologists tell us the very nature of work has shifted. In the industrial era, tasks were generally self-evident. If you were a farmer, you simply followed the seasons. You plowed fields, you planted fields, you sprayed for weeds and bugs then brought out your combine in the fall to bring in the harvest. Tasks were straight-forward. That has changed.

We now live in an era of knowledge work, not of industrial work. Knowledge work means you not only have to do the work but you have to figure out what is the right work to do because you can't do all of it. There is just too much to do. In the industrial era, a job had closure. For example, you painted a house and when you finished painting a house the job was done. In the knowledge era, we receive 100 e-mails a day. We have to sort through them, figure out which ones to throw away, which ones to act on and which one to do something about a week or a month later. By the time we finish sorting our e-mail, another hundred come into our inbox. We are never done. In knowledge work, which is about creating and utilizing knowledge, you need to be very self-directed. This makes productivity very difficult because there is too much information hitting us in a non-stop way through e-mail, text messages, snail mail, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and that is just to name a few. Once you sort it, you need to be productive with it.

You need to understand how the world has changed. In 2008, the web had 1 trillion pages. By 2013, the amount of information on the Internet was doubling every 72 hours. In 2010, there were 95 trillion e-mails sent a day. That is an average of 153 e-mails for every Internet user's mailbox a day. If you get

fewer than 153 e-mails a day, be thankful you are below average. In 2010, there were 92 million tweets a day. There were also 2.5 billion photos uploaded a day to Facebook.¹ That was 2010! The size of the web was more than doubling every 72 hours then. I can't even imagine what it is today.

While the Bible talks about the importance of making wise use of our time and living productive lives, just working harder and more efficiently can't solve the problem. There is too much to do. Sociologists tells us that to be successful we must figure out the right things to do, learning to discard the rest. Peter Drucker said it well. "There is nothing more inefficient than becoming efficient at doing the things that don't need to be done." The big problem of the knowledge-based work is discovering what the important things to do are, not just getting more work done. What is the answer to this problem? It is something you wouldn't expect. It makes this topic very appropriate to talk about in church.

Jesus is the answer to the problems of modern productivity.

Most of us do not think about Jesus as the solution to the problem of productivity, but the Bible tells us Jesus is the key to living a productive life on this earth. Let's start with the big picture and then tighten our focus.

1. Excluding God from my life leads to ultimate unproductivity.

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? Luke 9:25 (ESV)

The ultimate in unproductiveness is being successful on earth but having it count for absolutely nothing in eternity. Any life on earth lived apart from God is completely unproductive, not matter how successful. The great example is Steve

¹ Perman, M. A., Piper, J., & Perman, M. (2014). What's best next: how the gospel transforms the way you get things done. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Jobs. He was one of the most successful men of the modern era, but as far as I know, he lived his life apart from Christ and all his earthly success counted for nothing in eternity as he will spend eternity apart from God's presence.

In an ultimate sense, he lived a completely unproductive life. Every one of us, no matter how successful we are in this world, lives an unproductive life apart from God.

2. Since sin is the cause of confusion and frustration at work, that makes Jesus the answer for productivity in our work.

In the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve sinned, the earth was cursed.

...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. Genesis 3:17–18 (ESV)

When we read this, we typically think of the curse of sin just affecting manual labor. Farming become hard. Droughts and floods came on the earth. Weeds and bugs choked out productivity. Any kind of work with our hands is difficult.

When we move from the front of the Pentateuch and turn to Deuteronomy 28 at the end of the Pentateuch, we find an elaboration of the curse and we learn more ways that the curse of sin affects work. The curse of sin doesn't just affect manual labor but it affects mental labor. It affects our ability to think clearly and our ability to see what is and isn't important.

"The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. Deuteronomy 28:20 (ESV)

The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind... Deuteronomy 28:28 (ESV)

Sin has not just tampered with the earth making it hard to get a crop but it has tampered with our minds, making it hard to get things done. I don't believe the blindness God talks about in Deuteronomy is physical blindness. I think this is talking about mental blindness. Because of sin, people will be blind to the obvious truth of things. Apart from the wisdom and sensitivity of the Holy Spirit, people can't see the truth. Sin leads people to do lots of unproductive work and lead useless lives.

Sin twists the mind so people think they are smart but in reality they are fools because sin has clouded their thinking. Paul brought us the same themes of Deuteronomy 28 in Romans 1.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools,... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. Romans 1:21–27 (ESV)

Sin clouds the mind ethically so people look at homosexuality and see absolutely nothing wrong with it. They see nothing abnormal about it. To those with the Holy Spirit, the twisted nature of homosexuality is clear but those blinded by sin cannot see it. This is why there seems to be no connection with some people on this issue.

Since sin is the problem, the only solution to the problem of sin is Jesus. Jesus is the one who frees us from the bondage of our sin. He is the one who takes the blinders of sin off our eyes so we can see things for what they are in God's eyes. Jesus helps us to see what is a foolish unproductive use of our time.

Jesus is the only one who can steer us through the multi-faceted input of modern life to live productive lives.

3. Productivity is understanding the will of the Lord and doing it.

...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Ephesians 5:10 (ESV)

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Ephesians 5:17 (ESV)

As Christians, we are to take everything we need to do and want to do and bring it before God; then ask him to help us see what is fluff and what is his will for our lives. We need God to help us think through our schedule and our priorities. If we try to think things through on our own, we don't have the needed wisdom, because of the blindness of sin, to make the right choices.

This sounds trite. It isn't. Most of us start with a busy schedule filled with priorities that don't need to be done, then we ask God to bless it. The Bible tells Christians we should start each day with God. We bring before him all the things we want to do and need to do. We bring before him all the stuff of our schedule and ask him what is important. We ask God to help us organize and prioritize the schedule of our lives.

This is very important in the modern world because there is no way we can get everything done.

Let's shift gears and let me share some of the things I have learned about scheduling. Some of you may do this better, and I am certainly open to learn. I will be all ears after the sermon. For some of you, these basic productivity strategies will be helpful.

How do I structure my time for God-honoring productivity?

1. Begin by a daily time with God.

Some of us think this is just a cute Christian cliché. Remember what we just learned. This is essential for productivity in our work. We must get to know God to hear his desire for our lives. We do this by reading God's Word every day. As we spend a daily time with God, he changes the desires of our hearts to be the desires God has for us. He helps us think clearly about the options in front of us. He helps us see what we should do with our time and the things we shouldn't do with our time. It is our time with God when he shapes the desires of our heart to be the desires he has for our lives.

If we start the day off by just planning our schedule, it is backward. Start the day by spending time with God. Tell him you want to understand God's will for your life today and you want to do it. You want to apply what Ephesians 5 told you do to.

The old saying is true. You are what you eat. If you eat Doritos and hot dogs, you will look like a plump hot dog and smell like rotten Doritos. If you spend your time looking at violent movies, you will learn violence. If you spend your time watching extramarital or premarital intimacy of your television, extramarital and premarital intimacy will become normal for you because that is what you are chewing on subconsciously.

This is why it is so important to spend time each day in God's Word. We need a clean input of truth or we will just follow the trends of the people around. Look what the Bible says about the importance of meditating on God's Word each day so we don't just follow the world around us.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1–3 (ESV)

You want to live a productive life where you see the right things to do? Begin by spending time in God's Word every day. Steer clear of the counsel of sinners. Let God steer your heart. You will see sin. You will see distractions. You will see the unproductive wastes of time.

Your time with God is the anchor of your schedule. Let's call it 15-30 minutes in the morning for God's Word and prayer, just one chapter to read and reread, to think about before you begin building your day.

Here is how I structure my life after my time in God's Word.

2. List my roles.

What are the roles God gave you to play? I like to take a sheet of paper and write them across the top. For example, my primary roles are church, family and personal. Under my primary roles, I write the sub-roles I must fulfill in each area. At church I have three sub-roles. They are preaching, leading and relationships. In my

family the sub-roles I must fill are being a



husband, a father and a son. In my personal life the sub-roles I must fulfill are physical exercise, staying fresh in my walk with Christ and occasional fun. Once I have my primary roles and sub-roles listed across the top of a page, I draw lines down the paper, creating columns. In the columns I prayerfully talk to God about what should be my goals in those areas.

3. Write my goals.

Goals are things I need to accomplish in each role I must plan in my life. For instance, I was traveling recently and feeling sluggish. I remembered my goal was to stay physically fit. If I don't exercise, I get depressed. I feel sick. I am generally an irritable person. That is why I have a goal of staying physically fit.

In my family section, I have a goal of loving and romancing Cindy. My goal is to constantly remind her she is special. I also have a goal of spending time with each of my children.

What is important is that we begin our goal-writing time with God. Remember that we want our goals to be the goals God has for our lives. We want to be sensitive to what God wants for us, not what everyone else around us thinks should be the goals of our lives.

4. Write my actions (Specific, Measurable and Time-based)

This is moving from a general goal to a concrete plan of action to achieve the goal. One of my goals is to stay physically fit so I needed to make specific, measurable, time-based actions to support my goal. For instance, since I was traveling so much

and not getting any

cardio, my specific

measurable time-

based goal became

to run 3 1/2 miles to

and from

	Teaching	Church	Education	Husband	Family	Physical	Spiritual	Intellectual
Goals	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals... Father... Son... Daughter...	Goals...	Goals...	Goals...
Actions	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions... Father... Son... Daughter...	Actions...	Actions...	Actions...

McDonald's before breakfast on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. No I didn't stop and eat at McDonalds, I just ran to it.

Do this with every role you have in your life. Prayerfully set your goals, listening to the Holy Spirit ,then prayerfully write down the actions that will lead you to those goals. When I do this, I end up with a long list of goals and actions. Before I go any farther, I need to trim them down to size.

5. Eliminate actions foreign to my goals.

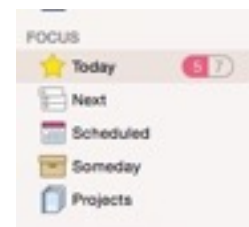
Ask God to help you eliminate actions that pull you off your goals. For me, at one time, I was going to write an app for the iPhone because I have computer programming experience. When I prayed about it, I felt it would be fun but it would pull me too far off my goal of being a pastor and honoring my family. I would spend time that should be church time or family time to work on an app, which was something I could do but not something I should do. You will be surprised how many things we will choose to not do after you pray about it and listen to the Holy Spirit.

6. Defer and delay actions.

I have decent-sized lists of deferred actions. I use a program for organization called Things. I love that it has a *Someday* folder where it allows me to take actionable items and put them in a file that I don't have to look at all day but they aren't forgotten.

Pastor Jordan uses a program called OmniFocus. I used to

use it but it was too complex for me. He is a really smart guy so it works for him.



The things I haven't put in a someday folder but are not high priority I defer to a future date. I put a date on them in the future where they pop up and I can do something with about them.

For example, I have a whole list of idea on things I would like to do for Easter but I won't see them again until about six weeks before Easter.

I end up with a list that was trimmed by prayer. Some of it is just kept on file. Some of it has a date for the future. What is left are action steps I need to do something about. Now let's get out the calendar and get things done.

7. Calendarize my actions.


Take out your calendar and begin by creating anchors. We already talked about the most important anchor. That is a daily time with God, reading his Word, praying for my family, our country, work and our church. We also pray through our roles, goals and actions to make sure God is guiding us on what we should do each day. Here are other important anchors in the calendar we need to schedule.

- **Sleep** — Make sure you get adequate sleep. Force yourself to go to bed early. Force yourself to get up early. This sounds counterintuitive but most people will improve their efficiency by simply getting enough sleeping. We are a sleep-deprived society. Set a wake time and a bed time that supports getting healthy sleep. Put them on your calendar.
- **Time with God** — Remember this is the most important part of your day. You can't prioritize your schedule and think about things the way God wants you to if you don't spend time reading the Bible and praying, letting God create and trim your goals and actions.

- **Physical exercise** — Make sure you schedule time for exercise. Put it in your schedule. You can't keep giving to others when you aren't healthy. Even if it is not much time, make time. Some people exercise first thing in the morning. I like to exercise first thing in the morning and for an hour over lunch. I learned that from reading a book on George Bush and how he crafted his schedule. He started his day early and exercised over lunch to get a de-stressing physical break before a mentally demanding afternoon. It worked for him. It works for me.
- **Family Bible Study Night** — Plan one night a week to have a family Bible reading time. If your kids are young, they will probably let you to read them the Bible every night before bed. Take advantage of that opportunity. I would encourage the rest of us to simply anchor one night a week.
- **Date Night** — If you can anchor a date night, do it. That is a great investment in your marriage.

8. Create time zones that support my roles.

This may be something new for a few of you. I don't believe David Allen in recommending this in GTD. In your calendar, create windows of time when you work on a role or sub-role in your life. For instance, from 9-11:30 a.m. on



	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8am							
9am							
10am							
11am							
12pm							
1pm							
2pm							
3pm							
4pm							
5pm							
6pm							
7pm							
8pm							
9pm							
10pm							
11pm							
12am							

Tuesday is our staff meeting. For me that

is a zone blocked off for leadership-related church activity. Monday afternoon is blocked off for sermon research. Tuesday and Wednesday from 4-5 p.m. is the

time I work on church relationships and take appointments. From 11:30 a.m.-noon is a time when I work on relationships and return phone calls, e-mails and texts. Rather than taking calls all day long I try to let them pile up and batch process them at one time. From 6:30-9 p.m. is often a family zone. What happens is I learned my zones and it helps guide my life so work doesn't get out of balance. Rather than procrastinating on returning phone calls, I hit 11:30 a.m.-noon knock them all off.

9. Avoid interruptions.

We live in a hyperconnected society where our phones and screens are constantly distracting us. If you have intense thought work, set aside long blocks of time where you won't be disturbed so you can get work done. When you finish that time zone, check and respond to all your sources of input in batches. One of the best ways to get these long blocks of uninterrupted time is to start early. The problem is people cannot think deeply when there are constant interruptions.

10. Plan yearly, weekly and daily.

I suggest we don't just take time on a daily basis but we take an extended time to think through things on a weekly, quarterly and yearly basis. This way we can set, and schedule, the big goals in our lives.

Conclusion

The key to productivity is not getting more done, it listening to God and doing the right things. There is always too much to do. There are many things that easily pull us off the roles and goals we have for our lives.

Are we to live busy and productive lives? Yes! We should be as efficient as possible to do all the good we can do by all the means we can at all the times

we can. We will give an account to God for our productivity. There is nothing more unproductive than becoming productive at things God doesn't want us to do.

This week, before you develop your calendar, set time to listen to the Holy Spirit and listen to his voice on what we should do because there is always more than we can get done.



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