

Introduction

There are many ways of handling your emails. The key is to find a way that works for you AND for those who send you emails. We all have a system. The question is do you have a system for dealing with incoming emails that ensures they are actioned quickly and efficiently, or do you have a system that ensures they pile up and get forgotten about?

Some people's work is entirely emailed based, but that is not the case for leaders. The danger is that we allow our emails to take up our most productive time, or spend too much time doing them.

Six Basic Principles

1. Establish a method for processing and keep this processing method as simple as you can (see below).
2. Don't do them all day, do them in batches. Research shows we are more efficient when we batch work together i.e. do our emails at the same time. We are also less likely to be distracted which enables us to focus on whatever we are doing better. Work out how long you need each day and then put that time in your diary (see below), and ideally choose one of your less productive times of the day to do them.
3. Turn them off in between the times you have identified to do them so you aren't tempted/distracted.
4. Don't check your emails (i.e. have a quick look to see what is there but not do anything with them), process them (i.e. follow the process you have identified to deal with each email).
5. Unless you have a pressing need and are very quick at typing on your phone, don't do your emails on your phone. For most people it takes more time on your phone (therefore is less efficient) and tends to mean people are doing their emails throughout the day (which goes against the second principle).
6. Avoid the temptation to cherry pick emails i.e. only do the ones that you feel interested in doing.



KEY INSIGHTS

'One of the most important soft skills you can have is figuring out how to deal with a high volume of email. And the only way to do that is to put some kind of system in place that's simple and repeatable and is going to allow you to have a life outside of email.'

Merlin Mann

'Your inbox is not your to do list.'

Graham Allcott

'Administration is the practical behind-the-scenes aspect of making everything happen.'

John Truscott

'Email is an abysmal task management tool and a woefully poor scheduling tool. That leaves email as the place for communication – communication and nothing else.'

Tim Challies

We have three levels of attention: proactive, active and inactive. Processing emails is best done in the active phase. Proactive attention is best used for the hard work of thinking, preparing talks, writing, study, planning.

Graham Allcott

Get Inbox to Zero Now

To do this you need two parallel processes:

PART ONE: ESTABLISH A METHOD FOR PROCESSING YOUR EMAILS EFFICIENTLY

- Go to your diary and put in two hours to set up a method for processing emails in the next month.
- When you get to this two hour slot, don't do anything else. Start by working out how many emails you receive on average a day. Allow three minutes per email. For example if you receive on average 30 emails a day you will need 90 minutes a day to process your emails.
- Go to your diary, place a repeating appointment/s for the amount of time needed each day to process emails (for example 90 minutes) at a time when it is most likely you will be able to do them. You can break this into two or at the most three slots throughout the day. Then process your emails at that time/those times on each day.
- Establish your folder system. The most basic system is a five folder system (see Lead On article on filing for further detail).
 1. **Inbox** Where email arrive and get processed.
 2. **Trash** (deleted) Your deleted emails folder.
 3. **Kept mail** (archive/reference) Either one folder and use the search facility to find what you want, or a series of subfolders related to your areas of work/projects.
 4. **Read** For items that you will read when you have a few spare minutes.
 5. **Waiting** Put here emails when you are waiting for someone else to do something.
- Unsubscribe from any emails you receive regularly that you rarely if ever look at. This simple tip will reduce the number of emails coming in.
- Set up a method for processing emails. A simple one involves four possible options for each email:
 1. **Delete** It will be accessible in your trash or deleted folder if you really need it.
 2. **Do it now** If it is going to take less than three minutes, do it now. Then delete the email or file it.
 3. **Defer into diary or to do list** when an email is going to take significant time or you need more information to process it (diary for any time related activity, to do list for anything else). Then delete the email, file it in kept mail, or copy the email into your diary/to do entry.
 4. **Delegate** Send it on to someone else and then if you need to keep track of it move it to your 'waiting' folder.
- Move on to Part 2.

PART TWO: DEAL WITH YOUR BACKLOG

- Create a backlog folder in your email programme.
- Place all the emails in your inbox in the backlog folder. You are now at inbox zero i.e. you have no emails in your inbox. Phew!
- Make sure you use your method for processing emails established in part one to keep the inbox empty.
- Go to the backlog folder. Arrange emails in date order starting with oldest. Click on the first one and scroll down to a date six months before the date you are doing this on. Holding the shift key and click on last email six months down. These highlights all the emails that are older than six months old. Delete all these emails. They are more than six months old. There is no point in processing them.
- Count the number of emails remaining in your backlog folder and divide by 30. This will give you how many 30 minute slots you will need to process the emails from the last six months. Go to your diary and put in 30 minute blocks over the next few weeks to process this backlog using the approach you have identified above. For example, you have 300 emails in your backlog folder, divide by 30 = ten 30 minute blocks to go in your diary. At the end of these blocks you will have emptied your backlog folder.

FIVE POTENTIAL SCHEDULES FOR PROCESSING EMAIL

- **Once a day** Ideally at around the same time each day during a mid-energy level point, and indicated by an entry in the diary. Let people know when you process emails so you set expectations around when you may get back to them.
- **Two or three regular times** Process to zero at set times two or three times a day.
- **The hourly dash** 10 minutes every hour. Works for those in particularly reactive roles or fast paced working cultures.
- **10-90** Emergency scan early in the day to check nothing urgent, then close down until time to process later in the day.
- **Extreme** Once a week for one hour.

James Lawrence

March 2019



Some Ideas on How to File

Whilst this handout focuses mainly on filing paper, much of what is suggested will apply to email/computer filing as well (with a little adaption).

1. DO LESS OF IT!

I know, I know, stating the obvious. But doing less of it is a good starting point i.e. do you really need to file that item? Much of what gets filed never gets looked at. So, when you open a letter, return from a meeting, are given something... ask yourself do I really need this? Often someone else will be responsible for keeping it, in which case you probably don't need it. Bin it.

2. CREATE A SIMPLE SYSTEM

There are incredibly complex filing systems out there, but in reality a very simple one will normally suffice. For most of us there are three types of filing:

- **Working** Things we are currently working on and need to access regularly. Ideally these items are within reach of our main working space. I often use two things for my working files. (1) Ring files for any meetings I regularly attend to keep relevant paperwork in, clearly labelled so I can instantly take it down off the shelf and take it with me to the meeting. (2) Hanging files for any other items I may need to access regularly, in an under-desk filing draw.
- **Reference** Things we are likely to refer to. Ideally this is in the same room/area we work in. These items are normally in my filing cabinet.
- **Archive** Things we need to keep but rarely look at. These can be located in a different room or even building. They can be put in archive box files, but must be clearly labelled!

For your filing cabinet, the simpler the better. Alphabetical is a good starting point. Clear labelling is vital.

And one further useful file, a bring forward file. This is a file with monthly separators in it, January to December. You place in the relevant month in a plastic wallet anything that relates to a one-off meeting/event for that month. Then when the event comes all you need is instantly to hand.

3. DECIDE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY FOR YOU TO FILE

There are likely to be two choices:

- **Batch it** Have one receptacle where you put everything that needs filing and once a week/fortnight do all your filing in one batch. For this to work, you must place all items instantly in the receptacle when you have stopped using them, and you must do the filing once a week/fortnight (or thereabouts) so it doesn't build up.
- **Do it as it arises** Whenever you have a piece of paper that needs to be filed, do it there and then.

People will differ in their preferences here. Just choose what works for you.



4. HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT TO HAND

If you use four hole ring binders, make sure you have a working four hole ring punch on your desk and a spare set of binders. If you use plastic wallets, have a plentiful supply to hand. If you use a filing cabinet, make sure you have spare dividers and a simple means of labelling them to hand. If you can't access the right materials instantly you won't do your filing.

5. CLEAR OUT WHATEVER SYSTEMS YOU USE AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR

In a slightly less busy time of the year, go through all your files and clear out anything you haven't used for a year, either to bin or archive. This sort of thing needs to be put in the diary otherwise it rarely gets done and your filing systems become too full and unwieldy and then you can't file anything else and the backlog grows.

6. ENJOY!

You're wondering about the fun element aren't you? Well, be creative and choose your fun. Some place a large jar of M&M's (or equivalent) on their filing cabinet and whenever they file an item have one. Others treat themselves to five minutes on a fun App that they can use when they have done their batched filing for the week, or a magazine they read. You get the idea, a treat that rewards you for fast and simple filing that brings a smile to your face when it is done.

Electronic Filing

The most helpful tip I've heard on filing is to try and use the same filing system across all your files i.e. the same folder structure for paper, email folders, on your hard drive, in Dropbox, Evernote and so on. This means when you turn to any filing you are used to the folder structure and don't have to flit between different ones.

With this system in place the principles above apply, but with one significant difference. With electronic stuff it is generally best to file it straight away. So, as soon as you have finished replying to that email that you need to keep, file it. When you have created that document for a project you are working on, file it in the relevant folder on your hard drive. When you come across that really helpful quote related to a topic you know you are going to be preaching on, file it in the relevant Evernote folder.

Emails

There is a debate on at the moment about whether to file emails at all or just leave emails in your inbox and use the search facility to find what you need. I am on the file side of the debate, but quite understand why others prefer not to.

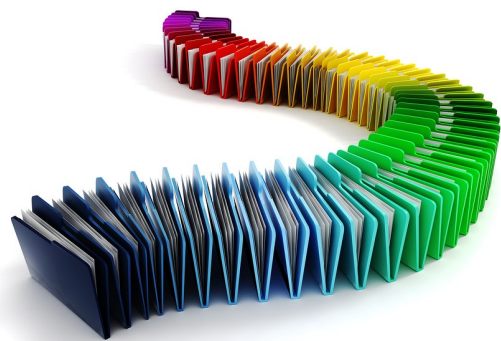
The simplest email folder structure might be:

- **Inbox** This is where your emails enter your system. The key here is to process your emails, not check them, ideally once or twice a day. Once processed you then decide what to do with them (see below).
- **Deleted/Trash** This is where emails automatically go when deleted from your inbox. Be sure to turn off the automatic empty feature and then empty your deleted folder every six months (or whatever timescale works for you).
- **Read** Place in here anything that you might like to read but don't have time or inclination to read straight away. Then in those spaces where you have a few minutes to read you can go in here and read whatever takes your interest. Once read, the item then needs deleting or referencing.
- **Waiting** Place in here anything that requires action by another person before you can process the email completely. Be sure to check this folder at least once a week so you can chase people up if they haven't replied.
- **Reference/Kept mail** (or archive) Place in here everything you want to keep for future reference. You can either put them in subfolders (following the structure of your other filing systems) or use the search facility to find things when needed.

Further Ideas

- www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_85.htm
- www.dummies.com/home-garden/8-tips-for-organizing-your-paperwork/
- www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/information/skills/mfile

James Lawrence



Peter Brain

Pastoral ministry is hard work, and it is all too easy for pastors to burn out. In his new book *Going the Distance: How to stay fit for a lifetime of ministry*, Peter Brain draws on his years of ministry experience to give helpful advice to pastors so that they can finish the race. In this edited extract, Peter discusses why 'self-care' is so important.

Intentional self-care – looking after yourself sensibly – on the part of pastors is not a matter of selfish pampering; it is essential to maintaining an effective ministry over the long-term.

Why is Self-care Important?

The nature of pastoral ministry makes self-care important. My own experience convinces me of the greatness of pastoral ministry. Pastors taught me the Christian faith by their credible example and clear teaching. Nothing could be greater than to be at the forefront of God's purposes in building up his people.

This is confirmed by Scripture in many places. The apostle Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, recorded in Acts 20:17-38, demonstrates the greatness of all ministry. He says in verse 28:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

These words remind us of how important every congregation is. It is a task of great importance to pastor people who are a part of God's church.

The work of a pastor is unique. Christian psychologist Dr Arch Hart has commented that "ministry is a unique vocation and if undertaken seriously the most dangerous occupation around... in choosing ministry one chooses to command an outpost of unequalled danger which threatens from without and within".

The greatness and uniqueness of the pastor's work leads us to recognize the seriousness of the work. This is felt in the tone of Acts 20. False teaching is just one of the reasons the pastor needs always to be alert and sharp. Self-care promotes that alertness.

Intentional self-care can be likened to the safety valve on the old pressure cookers, designed to stop us from blowing up (and indeed, as often happens, blowing off at others!). This is not self-indulgence; it is a wise mechanism that makes for a healthy pastor.

Personal Expectations

There are many reasons why pastors need to pay attention to self-care. Very often it is our own expectations that set us up for our greatest problems. Four observations, all from my own experience, serve to illustrate my concerns.

VERY OFTEN IT IS OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS THAT SET US UP FOR OUR GREATEST PROBLEMS.

In 1992, I surveyed Perth Anglican Clergy concerning various ministry matters. The results would, I'm sure, be applicable to any number of other dioceses around the Western world. I asked them to answer the question, "On average I work days, hours each week". I then compared their answers to the answers given to the question addressed to congregational leaders: "How many days or hours do you expect your Rector/minister to work?" The results were:

	PASTOR'S ACTUALS		LEADERS' EXPECTATIONS	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
Hours	60	50-85	45	37.5-54
Days	6.0	6-6.5	5.25	5-6

One pastor who noted the large discrepancy between his actual work pattern and his leaders' expectations was greatly helped to overcome the pressure that he (mistakenly) felt from his lay leaders. Such realizations may help pastors to be free to give time to the congregation, rather than to be driven by false or imagined expectations. We are very often driven people, and our own worst enemy.

For some pastors, the call to ministry is equated with always being on call. This can easily be the result of an inner drivenness (to be seen or to prove ourselves), rather than a well thought-out commitment to pastoral ministry. Of course, pastors want to be always available to people. Being available, however, is different to always being 'on call'. Never resting, or always dropping everything in response to the latest crisis or telephone call, is not

healthy. Crisis-based ministry will rarely achieve much, and will be difficult to sustain with any sense of satisfaction or joy. A pastor who is available and refreshed will be able to fulfil his or her duty more effectively than one who is worn out by crisis care, or dependant upon the crisis to set the agenda. Most crises can wait for a few hours, or even a day or two. They have been often weeks, even years, in the making! The confident and caring appointment made for tomorrow or the next evening is a loving indication of the pastor's desire to care and fulfil the pastoral responsibility. When we are so busy that we drop everything for every crisis, we find that many people from our congregation won't call us, because we appear to be so rushed and busy all the time.

The Cost for Family and Friends

Most pastors have families to care for. All pastors do well to take the time to nurture friendships. Yet we easily take for granted the loyalty of family and friends to ourselves and to (our) ministry. This means we easily presume upon this loyalty and squeeze them out, in time and in emotional energy and attention. Since this rarely happens overnight, and is a process that gradually becomes more and more habitual, we pastors must pay special attention to nurturing our families and friendships. We may not notice this process, but we can be certain that our spouses and families do. We do well to attend to their signals.

This became very clear to me when my wife, who is very committed to ministry, remarked to friends, "Life is often easier when Peter is not home". That cry from her heart pierced mine, not only because I love her and our children dearly, but also because I consider that I owe them a commitment and care that takes priority over the church. Self-care will ensure that a proper balance is in place. It prevents bad habits becoming ingrained that cause resentment, indifference or anger to grow in the pastor's family.

Our son's athletic coach drummed into him the saying, 'practice makes permanent'. Bad habits become ingrained. By contrast, self-care allows good habits to emerge and grow. Part of our humanity is to enjoy the relationships that God gives to us. Healthy self-care will make sure that time and patterns of living enable our relationships to grow.

Positive Reasons for Self-care

Self-care is therefore a way of recognizing our ministry as a good, God-given gift. According to Dr Hart, "Most ministers don't burn out because they forget they are ministers; they burn out because they forget they are people". Surely this is why God gave us the command to rest from our labour one day in seven. It is his gracious provision, because he knows our bodies and minds need regular rest. Just as he has kindly built into every 24 hours time to sleep, so he has given a weekly day of rest. By

taking a day off, we are agreeing with God our heavenly father that our bodies "being fearfully and wonderfully made" require the refreshment of rest.

Clearly God wants us to work creatively. It is part of what it means to be made in his image, but to do so we need to rest regularly. Failure to rest regularly means our work becomes drudgery and an end in itself. Inefficiency sets in, as the law of diminishing returns takes over. On the other hand, a proper balance of work and refreshment, of work, family and friends, can ensure that our work is seen as a way of serving others. Then these attendant difficulties can be kept in focus.

Far from being a reason for self-indulgent laziness or an incentive for pastoral hypochondriacs, self-care is really a way of ensuring that we will remain effective in the great work God has given us to do. The phrases I hate hearing the most from parishioners are, "I didn't want to bother you, you are always so busy" or "you always look so tired".

Self-care helps me engage in the art of being an "unhurried pastor". This phrase has nothing to do with laziness, but everything to do with availability and freshness for the task. Self-care will help us practice this art. Often pastors are busy because they are lazy! They are too lazy to work out priorities and then to put them into practice. The unhurried pastor will establish self-care patterns that will enable him or herself time to set priorities (itself essential to self-care) which will allow freshness and vitality to thrive.

In building self-care principles and patterns into our lifestyle, we are offering other people, especially fellow Christians, a healthy pattern for Christian discipleship. Certainly this will be so for the pastor's family. If the pastor can never stop still long enough to enjoy friendships and relationships, it will come as no surprise if his or her family cannot or will not do the same, especially toward the pastor. On the other hand, a balanced pastoral life will model the importance of service and hard work, while affirming the place for rest and the nurture of family and friendships.

Self-care means that we will build into our lives patterns that demonstrate our reliance upon God. Passages from 2 Corinthians demonstrate a resolute commitment to the hard work of ministry and an equal resolve to rely upon God (11:28-31; 4:7-18). Reliance upon God will be especially important to pastors who are feeling lonely. The practised pattern of daily dependence will always deliver to us the comfort and strength that we require. Where this practised pattern has been neglected, the going will surely be tougher. This is not to say that God will not come through for us, but it is

MOST CRISES
CAN WAIT FOR A
FEW HOURS, OR
EVEN A DAY OR
TWO.

to affirm that we will have cheated ourselves of the care we could otherwise have experienced.

Self-care maintains a close relationship with God, and provides a pattern by which that primary relationship is nurtured.

An Important Distinction

Is self-care at odds with our Lord's clear gospel call for self-denial? Our Lord's words "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23) are clear and uncompromising.

Hard work and consistent sacrifice is required by virtue of us being Christians – it cannot be otherwise if we are to follow in Jesus' footsteps. Yet being human, we need rest, refreshment and encouragement. No-one can prescribe for another in this area, yet some observations can be made that may help pastors live creatively with this tension. As with other issues of discipleship, the ability to talk about the tension, and to find that others are seeking to work through it, can be as profitable as it is reassuring.

Three popular statements encapsulate the issue for us. Each of these have been very powerful summary statements in my own desire to follow Christ generally and specifically as a pastor:

- 'Only one life that will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last'.
- 'We are saved to serve'.
- 'Jesus is to be Lord of all or not at all'.

My own feeling is that each of these pithy statements are an accurate expression of Scripture. They stir our hearts and minds to self-examination, challenging our level of commitment, and under God can evoke a new obedience and stimulate perseverance. Yet with this, my own conviction remains that devoted service and obedience not only will flow out of a base of thoughtful self-care, but will be fuelled by it. For example, the saying 'Lord of all or not at all', will involve the pastor (indeed every Christian) in subjecting to Christ not only their work in ministry, but also their bodies, minds and spirit, that make the work possible.

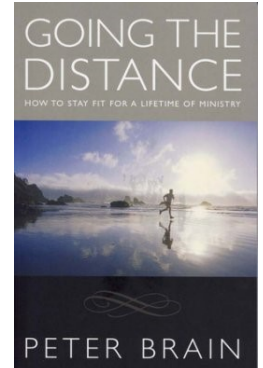
Pastors will need to be vigilant and intentional in carving out time and establishing strategies of care, since a dozen good things will conspire to keep them as intentions only. Denominational and local church leaders can help local church pastors greatly, by giving them permission and encouragement to pursue healthy patterns of care. There is little doubt that everyone benefits when this happens.

Intentional self-care that takes up the opportunities and disciplines offered by the very nature of pastoral ministry, will enable the pastor to keep fresh and thus remain at his or her work. Built into the task are means for self-care.

Prayer, preparation from God's word and time spent with those people whom God calls into his church, can all contribute to the pastor's health. God's grace in calling us, using us to bring others, providing us with a day of rest and going before us to work in others, all help pastors face their task with confidence. Self-denial does not mean denying our humanity expressed in a need for rest, friendship, strength, wisdom and support. Rather, it involves a willingness to deny self-interest. Expressed positively, this will mean accepting the means and provision for care that God so graciously puts in our way as pastors.

The reason for self-care is not so that pastors can become indulgent hypochondriacs, always concerned about their own welfare, or even to avoid the twin ravages of growing older and the fatigue of hard work and pastoral concern. All Christians are meant to be workers. We are saved to serve and work. Pastors have work to do, work that is vital. The assassinated former Archbishop of Uganda said, "He who is forever watching the wind will never sow". Self-care must never be a cover for selfishness, or a cowardly holding back in the interests of self-protection. However, like the mother of the fourth-century apologist Origen, who acted wisely to hide her son's trousers in order to keep him from a premature and unnecessary martyrdom, pastors will understand the wisdom of self-care. Its wisdom is to ensure, as far as humanly possible, a wise and orderly work that conserves a pastor's ministry, rather than a costly burnout.

Going the Distance is available from Amazon.



MINISTRY MISTAKES: THE TYRANNY OF TIME

Alan Stewart

I was recently asked to speak on the topic of what hinders gospel growth and particularly failures in ministry. I was pleased of course to be thought qualified to speak on such a topic! I'm writing from the perspective of someone who has been in full time Christian work.

After 14 years, there are many things that come to mind regarding failures in ministry. However, I'll limit myself to the theme of time. In Christian work (paid or unpaid, full time, part time, voluntary) the hardest question that any of us face is 'what should I be doing now?' What do I do now that will see the ministry grow in one week, one year, five years? Who should I be spending time with? What books should I be reading? If I'm married and have a family, should I be spending time with them? How many hours a week do I work? The 'what should I be doing now' question is harder to answer than the question regarding any individual task.

The four failures that I list below are at a personal level. The good news about ministry is that we are only ever responsible for our own personal actions. We are not and indeed cannot be responsible for the actions of others – that is the good news. However, it is also the bad news – we are responsible for what we do and God will hold us accountable for the use we have made of our gifts and opportunities, 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; cf 1 Peter 4:17, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Failure Number One: Time – Don't Waste It

In full-time Christian ministry we need to be self disciplined because we have a lot of time that we can waste. Apart from a few hours on a Sunday morning or Sunday night, no one really knows where we are or what we are doing with our time. We need to be disciplined in our allocation of priorities. There is a proverb that says 'plough your fields first, then build your rectory or manse'... well, something like that. The problem with 164 hours of unstructured ministry time is that it is very easy for work to expand according to time available. What should take one hour can take all day. In 15 years of Christian work, I confess I have not used time as well as I should have.

Classic time wasters are:

- **Over preparation** We need to work hard on preparing our talks but if we prepare beyond the point of diminishing returns, we are achieving very little. We may spend an extra 10 to 15 hours on a talk that will only improve it by a few percentage points. (I am not

endorsing under preparation, I am simply against over preparation).

- **Sitting at the desk and shuffling paper** It is possible to sit at a desk, shuffle paper, make insignificant phone calls and be consumed with trivia and achieve nothing in a morning.
- **Long phone calls to your friends** Three or four 45 minute phone calls to friend and the morning is wasted. (I've heard it suggested that you should stand up while you are on the phone. This is very effective in limiting the time of phone calls. I've also heard that meetings should be held without chairs).
- **Television (especially late at night)** How much television do we watch during the week? Watching TV when we should be asleep may keep us from a good start in the morning. No one ever said on his or her deathbed, 'I wish I watched more TV'. Late night TV is also no good for the purity of our thought life.
- **Computers** A classic time waster. I am a complete technological incompetent and so I'm not tempted in this area. However, I suggest that if you own a PC or Mac and understand everything that this machine is capable of, you have probably wasted a lot of time fiddling with the computer.

We need to be self disciplined in how we use our time. I have not done as well as I should have in this area over the years.

Failure Number Two: Spending Time with the First Members of your Congregation

For failure number two, let me speak to those who are married or are parents: 'Your spouse and children are not an interruption to your ministry; they are your ministry'. This advice was less than gently delivered by a good friend of mine, now gone to be with the Lord. Those of us who are married and have families, need to spend time with our wives and children. I said to my wife the other day as we were out, celebrating our wedding anniversary, that it was harder and harder now to see our teenage children. They are so busy now; why didn't they have time for me? In her own, gentle way, she said, 'when the kids are little they are always available but you guys are out trying to change the world and all busy, busy. Then as they grow up, you haven't been around and they don't have as much time for you.' The husband then says, 'Well, why didn't anyone tell me?' She rolled her eyes and said, 'Make sure you tell the younger ones when you have the chance.' So if you're reading this, you have been told.

At the same time, I'm not saying we should be picking kids

up from school every day or having long and romantic lunches with our spouses each week. We need to work hard, and to some extent our families will carry the cost of ministry with a busy and tired spouse or parent. However, this is not an excuse for neglecting your spouse and your children: they are the first members of your congregation.

Failure Number Three: Wrong Priorities

In ministry, administration, paperwork and meetings are ubiquitous. They are the air we breathe. If we are not proactive in diarising the truly important, then the urgent and the ubiquitous will take over.

Take, for example, the priority of evangelism. A lot of pastors end up like the guy in my area who owns the fishing shop. He was very keen on fishing so he opened a fishing shop but now he sits in his fishing shop from early in the morning until late at night. Guess what he doesn't get to do anymore – fishing! He is too busy running the shop. A lot of pastors are like this with evangelism. It is often gifts in this area that got us into full time ministry in the first place. However, once in the ministry we are so busy running administration meetings, committee meetings and chasing up a hundred details, we never get time to evangelise. Evangelism should be the first thing to go into our diaries.

In every church I've been associated with, there is a series of men around the fringe of the congregation, sympathetic husbands of wives who belong to the church, men whose children are in the youth group and just blokes that I've got to know. As a male pastor of a church I should, as a matter of priority, be spending time with these men and sharing the gospel with them. (I am sure there is an equivalent for female pastors). But if time isn't allocated up front, it won't be available.

This early allocation of time should be done for evangelism, talk preparation, our own prayer times and discipling of the future leaders of our congregations. I must confess to regular failure in this area, where I've been too busy running infrastructure to actually go fishing (for people, not salmon) – the reason I went into ministry in the first place.

Failure Number Four: Beware of Busyness

As a young man in theological college I was told 'ministry is much more about who you are than what you do'. It was not until the last year or two that I have understood this. Godliness may or may not be next to cleanliness, but it certainly is not next to busyness. Our activism and obsession in planning and strategic action and workaholicism show a lack of faith in the sovereignty of God. We need to trust in God's sovereignty, and rest safe in the knowledge that, as we sit and watch The Simpsons with our kids, God's gospel marches on.

A couple of years ago on holidays I went to two church meetings one Sunday. They couldn't have been more different. One was a very strict, reformed, free Presbyterian meeting: King James Bible, no instrumental music and a one hour sermon. The other was a meeting on the headland at the beach, run by the local Baptist church, with a dozen people and some 'open sharing time'. Music was a tape played in a car with the doors open. However, at both church meetings, there was a Bible verse that hit me straight between the eyes – Psalm 46:10 'Be still and know that I am God'. It was a very interesting verse for a workaholic, trying unsuccessfully to relax on holidays, to hear and consider.

So, the question is how do we avoid these failures and put good principle into practice? Hey, I said at the beginning that this was about my failures in ministry, not my successes. I'm still working on it day by day.

Adapted

