

Good Words – Life Series

Christian Productivity 101

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“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. John 15:1-8 NKJV.

Is there such a thing as *Christian Productivity*? I believe there is. Is God concerned about the productivity of His people? I believe He is.

God the Father is concerned about productivity and *fruitfulness*. In *John 15*, Jesus mentions four levels of fruit-bearing branches:

- *First*, branches that *do not bear fruit*. V2.
- *Second*, branches that *bear fruit*. V2.
- *Third*, branches that *bear more fruit*. V2.
- *Forth*, branches that *bear much fruit*. V5.

Without a relationship with Christ (abiding in the vine), we cannot bear any fruit or be productive. But the greater the level of fruit bearing, the greater the Father is glorified. The more we abide in the vine, the more fruit we can produce.

This isn't about doing more, earning more money, though that's part of it. This is about living a productive Christian life. It is about doing what God wants us to do. Nothing in our life is productive if we don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact our entire life will be lived for nothing, if we don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Productivity can turn into an idol if you let it. When we accomplish goals and complete simple tasks, endorphins are released in our brain that gives a sense of satisfaction. We can actually become addicted to that endorphin rush, which may be God's natural way of motivating us, but if we start to idolise the “high” we get when we're productive, we need to take a step back and reevaluate our priorities.

As with just about everything it's a matter of the heart.

Here's a quick view of Christian Productivity.

1. **Make sure God comes first.**

What is our ultimate goal? Getting things done, or pleasing God? Serving God and pleasing God must be our goal. Everything we do must come from our relationship with the Lord.

When we're right with God, we'll be more likely to hear from Him and do what He wants us to do. That is Christian productivity.

2. **Make sure our heart is right.**

Guard against greed and selfishness.

- a. *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or **whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.** 1 Corinthians 10:31 NKJV.*
- b. *And **whatever you do** in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17 NKJV.*
- c. *And **whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord** and not to men Colossians 3:23 NKJV.*

3. **Make sure we're doing what God wants us to do.**

That means we are in relationship with Him, we hear His voice, know and do His will.

So what comes first in Christian productivity? Jesus!

If we love Jesus and want to please Him in everything we do, and if we know what His will is for our lives, then whatever we do, is not either sacred or secular, but everything we do, be it mundane, ordinary and unspiritual, becomes a holy task done unto our Saviour Jesus, for His glory.

Why should we be productive? Here's a few reasons: You'll get more done in less time, you'll feel like life is better, you'll improve your general confidence, you'll free up time to do more of what you love, you'll be better at making faster, better, bigger and harder decisions, and you'll battle less with procrastination and the analysis-paralysis trap. That certainly will mean we're glorifying God!

My role for more than thirty years meant I was pretty much my own boss, leading organisations and volunteer staff. So the productivity levels were all my responsibility. I confess I am no scholar on these matters but I have found what works for me, and I have made it a focus of study to learn more about this great topic.

So here's my **Top Twelve Productivity Tips**.

1. **Look After Yourself.**



*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?
1 Corinthians 6:19 NKJV.*

We've only got one body, just the one! And, when we are a Christian, God lives in us. *God*, lives, in, us! (Think about that incredible truth for a moment). Therefore we need to look after the temple, the dwelling place of God.

It's quite simple. If any machine is not in good order, well maintained, adequately fuelled and lubricated, it will not be productive. It's the same for us.

- Don't sacrifice sleep. Never ever do that. You'll produce more with more sleep.

- Hydrate. NOT coffee, but water, in addition to coffee.
- Exercise. Light cardio regularly is life-changing, life-extending.
- Take breaks. Intensive focus can only be given for a few hours.
- Eat well. Junk in = junk out.

Be the best you, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

2. *Find Your Zone.*

We all have certain times of the day when we're better than others. Discover when your brain works best; mornings, afternoons, evenings, night-time. Are we a fowl or an owl? I discovered early on in my working life, that I am a fowl. I love mornings, and I function best, do my best brain work, think clearer, hear from God better, make better decisions, and have more wisdom, in the mornings.

So, that means creativity, in the mornings. Decision making, in the mornings. Strategic planning, in the mornings. Crucial, future-dependant decisions, in the mornings, key (but limited) appointments, in the mornings. In my afternoons, it is administration, follow-up, emailing, phone calls, and things that don't require a lot of focus and brain power.

Its called finding your circadian rhythm – your best times for certain work. Trial and error is the best way to discover it. Keep a notebook (or iPad/iPhone) handy and write down what time of the day we make the best decisions, do the more productive tasks.

It's all part of discovering that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, (*Psalm 139:14*).

3. *Relentlessly Pursue Complete Communication.*

This is a huge area. Some of us might think that that is all we do all day; communicate with colleagues, superiors and staff! Don't waste time and energy with incomplete, unclear, confusing, incohesive communication.



- i. *Differentiate between communication and connection.*
Is this email, phone call, text, even meeting, about communicating something, or, is it about making, building or strengthening a connection (relationship)? It could be for both, but knowing that is important.
- ii. *Don't waffle!*
One thing bugs me a lot, it is communication or attempts at communication that says very little. Just too many words that don't need to be there. Short, to the point, clear communication is always more productive in the long run.

iii. *Clear facts.*

Always, always, *always*, have the facts clearly laid out, in plain English. And short bullet points are usually best. I don't know how many invites I've received to an event, and some crucial detail has been left off, forgotten or omitted which means I have to get back to them and ask the obvious. Always speak the truth, the facts, in clear, unambiguous, unconfusing language. *We are not afraid to have the hard conversations* – was a key value at one of my roles, which drove us to make sure we said what needed to be said, in an unoffensive way, but also clearly and truthfully. And don't be afraid of repeating yourself.

iv. *Prevail over your email.*

Emails are a necessary part of life nowadays. (Ahh, remember the days when we just wrote a letter or card and posted it, or, picked up the phone, or..., called around unannounced and chatted briefly face-to-face)?



Here's 7 Keys to mastering your emails, adapted from an unknown source.

- 1) *Unsubscribe from email newsletters.*
- 2) *Turn off notifications.*
- 3) *Only process emails three*

times daily; use the 321 method:

3x daily, morning, noon and night (or whenever suits you).

21 minutes max each time. Set a timer!

4) *Immediately apply the for D's:*

- *Do it.*
- *Delegate it.*
- *Defer it.*
- *Delete it.*

5) *Think twice before forwarding.*

6) *Use the subject line for the message/action/information.*

7) *Keep emails short.*

And the thing is, when we build these things into our routine, and let everyone know, they understand and respect us for being so organised, disciplined and productive. Don't let emailing and the internet take over your day, which it so easily can. I've found emailing is best not for emergency communications, which is better done using the phone or face-to-face and followed up with an email to confirm the facts.

v. *Use the best method for the occasion.*

Seems obvious but I find myself defaulting to my favourite method of communicating, which is usually email, but the occasion may best be suited to another form, depending on the recipient, their age, role, and the reason for the communication. Think first, then decide on the best way to transfer the information.

You can never overcommunicate, so relentlessly pursue complete communication, because;
Clear Communication Creates a Confident Course.

4. *Limit Social Media.*

I know of a successful writer, who has an assistant, and part of her role is to change all his social media passwords and not give them to him, until 2.00pm. So he doesn't have access to any of his social media platforms in the mornings, freeing him from the distractions they so often are, thus allowing him to focus on productive work.

Another business woman, who also happens to be a writer, has no social media accounts. Yes that's right. She has *no social media accounts!* And she still runs a very successful business earning in excess of six figures annually.

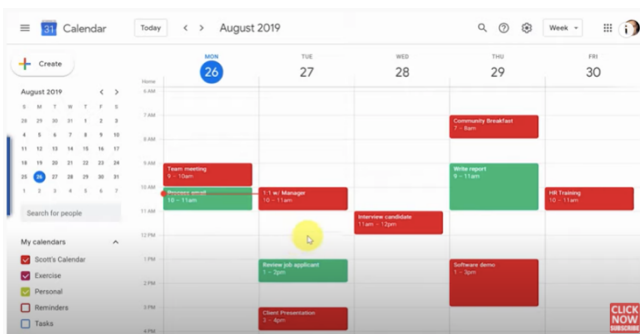
If Facebook, or LinkedIn, or SnapChat, or what-ever-else social media accounts you have, are draining you of time, focus, energy, and not delivering for you, then..., may I suggest you close those accounts. It won't be the end of your world. It could be the beginning of a new one.

Social media should serve us in our work, and be another tool (if we use it) of productivity in our tool box. At the very least turn off all notifications.



5. *Time Block.*

This is one of my favourite productivity tips. Time blocking is simply blocking out time in your diary for tasks; not just appointments, but time to work on specific projects and nothing else. Say from 9.00am until 11.00am next Tuesday you'll be working on XYZ project. Nothing else. If someone wants to see you at that time, sorry, you're booked.



Today's digital diaries are great for this, as you can easily colour-code the various entries. And that looks really snazzy!

It works very well. At one time when I was a Pastor I was speaking four times every week. Twice on Sunday, and two Bible School Lectures midweek, which required extra research, more content and a better level of delivery. Four sessions, every week.

So I blocked out Tuesdays and Wednesdays and spent those days researching, preparing and writing those presentations. Everyone knew that on Tuesdays and Wednesdays I was not available, for anything, except an absolute emergency. My family and the office staff also protected that time for me.

And the wonderful thing is, when Tuesday came around, I was in the zone! I was ready. No distractions, no interruptions, no other work to be done, just focus and write those presentations. When a fantastic idea came outside those days, I just wrote it down on my notebook (iPad nowadays), and left it.

Time block as much as possible. Time block your personal devotions. Time block family time. Time block holidays. Time block date nights. Time block one-on-one with the kids. Time block thinking time for those critical decisions. Time block prayer. Time block administration. Time block communication. Time block staff connections. Time block professional development.

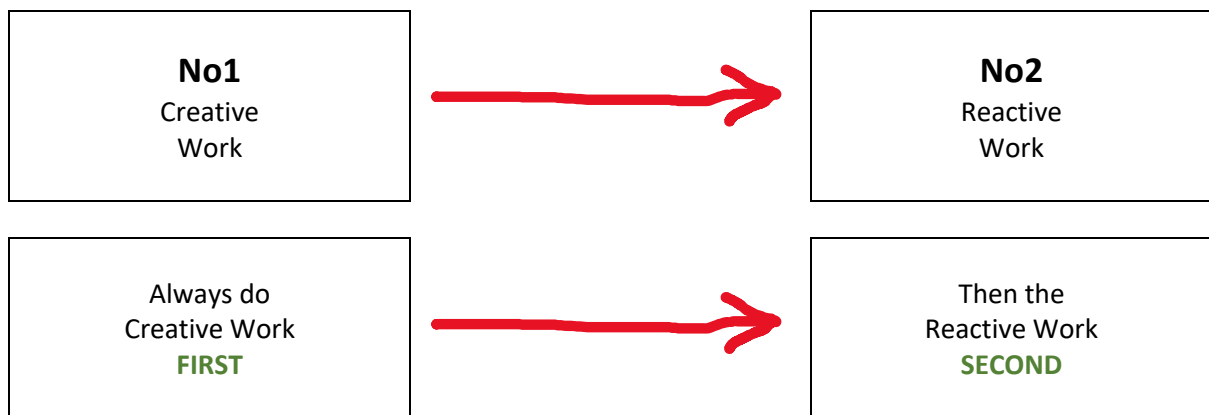
Time blocking works. Set a weekly program/plan and stick to it. Tell all the people who need to know what your program is and they will learn to respect it.

6. *Creative Work 1st - Reactive Work 2nd.*

Jonathan Milligan, Blogger, www.bloggingyourpassion.com, says we should do creative work before reactive work.

Time Block mornings, or afternoons, or evenings, whenever we're at our creative best, and do nothing but create! I am amazed at how the brain works. I schedule writing time, and I find that the creative energy flows right at that scheduled time! Incredible.

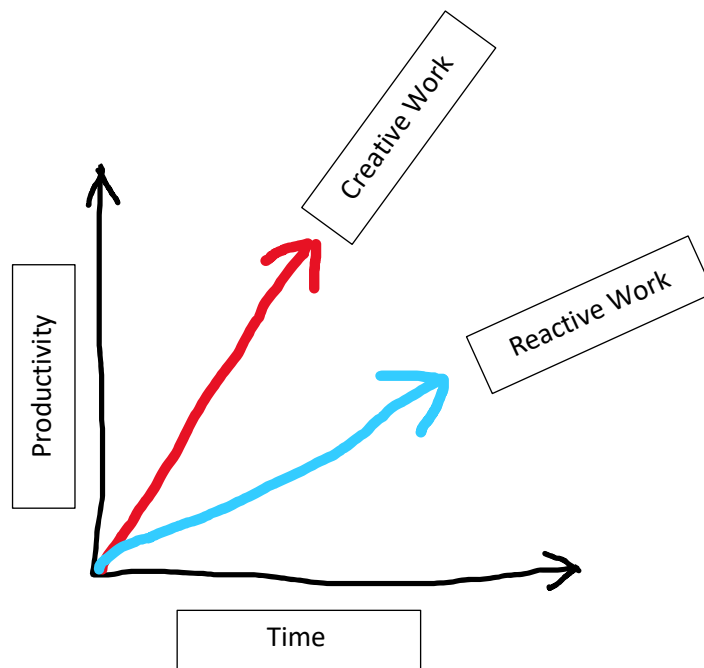
But be committed to do creative work first, then we can do the reactive work second.



As leaders and managers, sometimes we seem to spend most of our time putting out fires. Necessary work, we think. However, important though it is, putting out fires may not always be the best use of our time in terms of productivity. It is being reactive, which is necessary in emergencies.

Creative work on the other hand, is when we set aside time to *create*. To dream dreams, to think about systems and processes, to stand back and take a wider angle view of what's going on, to be inspired with ideas for future development, ideas that will add to the bottom line. In my experience a fire (emergency) is not as serious as it first seems and can more than likely wait until we're able to train suitable people to handle it with minimal involvement or deal with it ourselves when we have scheduled time.

It's another area where we can become organised, and make sure everyone in our world knows we are occupied and undisturbable when we're in that creative time block.

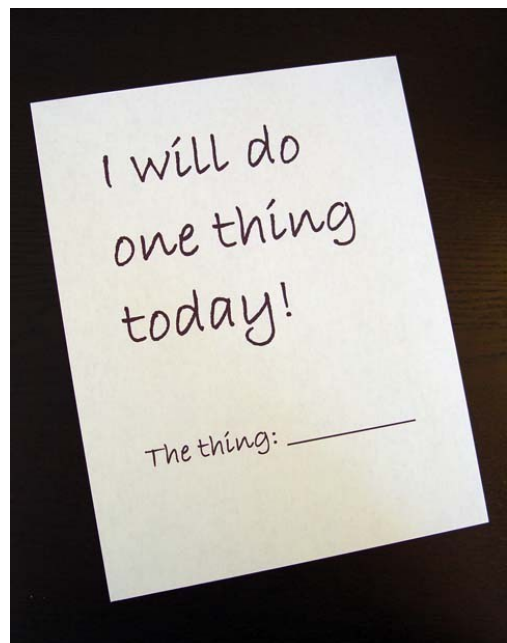


7. Prioritise.

We all know this is an important area. You know the story; write a To Do List, and prioritise the important ones and do them first. Which is good, and right.

But in my experience there's only ever one or two or three things that **MUST** be done now. A better question is what does God want me to do **NOW**?

I keep lists, but my best lists are my **One Thing Lists**. In other words, what's the **One Thing** I must do today, absolute top priority? And what's the **One Thing** I must do this week? This month? When we have a To Do List that just keeps getting bigger and bigger we get depressed and overcome by all we have to do. But by using a **One Thing List**, and doing that *one thing*, we feel great at having achieved something worthwhile and crossing it off our list. We hardly need to consult our To Do List, as we just know what the **One Thing** we need to do is.



Don't be distracted to waste time on non-important things. Prayerfully consider what's your **One Thing** that **MUST** be done tomorrow?

8. *Outsource Heaps!*

Outsource heaps, as much as possible. It frees you to do your best work.

Delegate, outsource, contract out all we possibly can. The world is awash with experts in every field. There's just not enough time for us to become an expert in everything required of us. So get the people who love doing ABC, to do it for us.

Technology is not one of my strengths, I'm just a basic tech user. So I get people who *love* the tech side of things, to do it for me.

I read the story of an employee of a tech company, a computer programmer, and the management were concerned about him. His productivity was excellent, his work turned in every day on time, so they had no issues there. But there were some anomalies in other areas so they investigated. They found he was spending most of every day surfing the internet.

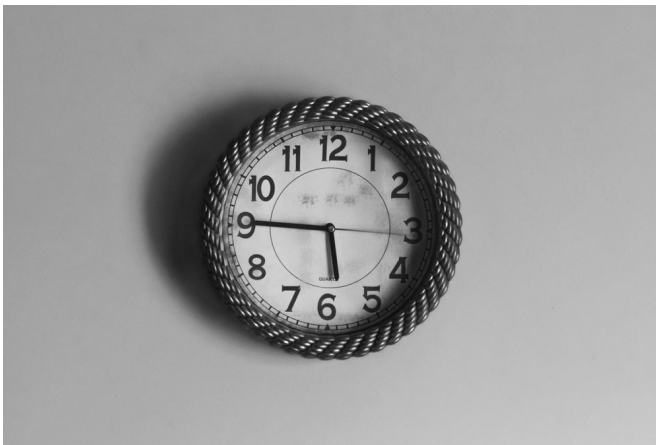
It turned out he was outsourcing most of his role, to a computer programming company in India. He was paid \$200,000 per year, and was paying his Indian company \$50,000 per year for their work. He would send them the work in the morning, and last thing in the day he would receive from them the completed work, and turn that in as his work.

He was duly fired. The author of the book where I read the story says instead of firing him he would have doubled his salary! For his resourcefulness and ingenuity.

We become more productive when we narrow our focus, and become an expert in *something!* Then we can really produce some great work, and manage the outsourced jobs.

Don't become a wandering generality. Be a meaningful specific. Darius Foroux, www.dariusforoux.com, quoting Zig Ziglar.

9. *First Hour Is Vital.*



I am a believer! In the importance of the very first hour of the day. From that moment when we are first conscious (which for some might be later than others), to the end of our first hour awake, what we do in that hour is foundational to the rest of our day.

In that golden hour, we can feed and nourish our spirit, soul and body. We need input and so to read, meditate, pray, exercise are things that will set us up for the day. Studies have shown that those

who have scheduled input at the start of their day, have better output for the rest of the day.

Begin each day in prayer, Bible reading and meditation. Renew your mind each morning before you head out into the world. This is likely the most important productivity tip.

My day's first hour includes stretches, hydration (large glass of water), then Bible reading, study, meditation, and prayer. Then its exercise and breakfast.

Connect with God in the first part of your day.

10. Say "No" More.

Here we are again! At this powerful little thing, the word *no*. (And I'm the worst at this one believe me!). But when we know who we are and how we're wired up, we become more confident to be selective in the things we commit to. We know that saying yes to areas or roles or tasks or projects that fall outside of our strengths, or outside of our ability to devote the focus and energy to it, is just going to end up in frustration, lack of satisfaction, lack of energy, and lack of motivation. And the result of all that is very low productivity, and chances are if we're a boss or manager, we'll be a very grumpy one.

In the short term however we are called upon from time to time to do things outside of our strengths and talents, and what our role expects. At those times our strength of character and maturity shine through and we do a good job. But, long term, it's just unwise to persevere.

Saying no to the wrong things positions us to be ready and able to say yes to the right things. Saying no to good things means we're ready to say yes to the God things. Both no, and yes, are powerful. Grace and wisdom is required for the exercising of the authority of both.

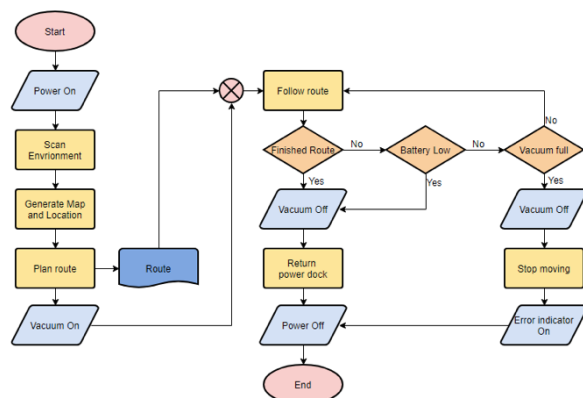
Say *no* more. I don't know who it was that said, *Success can be best measured by the things we don't do, rather than the things we do.*

11. Know Where We're At.

This productivity tip is interesting. Too often we have trouble with our productivity and time management, because we don't understand where we are with a task on the stages of the project management process. There are stages to the progress of a project, even small home projects. Even they will go better if we understand something of the *Project Management Process*.

In other words, understanding the basic process of a project's management in very basic form; Concept Capture, Planning, Costing, Launching, Execution, Managing, Completion, and De-brief.

Too often I've seen good people, gifted managers and leaders make a mess of issues and projects, not on the basis of the rightness of the project, their passion and heart and belief in it, or resources available, but because they didn't nail down where this task, or that task, fitted in to a greater scheme (project) and therefore they flitted from one task to another without a cohesive,



overarching, controlling system or plan, and therefore didn't achieve nearly as well as they should have.

Much of a leader's work is actually project management, (and this is true of church leadership too) so upskilling in this area will pay dividends, and the leader will be much happier being more knowledgeable and more productive.

12. Be Flexible.

Finally, having said all that, the final of my **Top Twelve Productivity Tips**, is to be flexible. Things happen. Life happens. Emergencies happen. Stuff outside of our control comes along and threatens to mess up our hard-won progress and carefully-laid plan. These events are the testing of our metal for sure.

And the Holy Spirit sends people and events our way, because He knows we are *walking in the Spirit*, (*Galatians 5:25*), and are willing to obey His promptings.

But stick to the plan, absolutely, stick to these productivity tips, but, when stuff happens, just roll with it, deal with it, and come back to the plan and move on. Don't get upset (like I used to, badly) when an emergency came along and shuffled about my carefully written and staged plan. Life will go on. We will get back on track and resume productivity.

So there we are. My **Top Twelve Productivity Tips**.

Here they are in summary.

1. **Look After Yourself.**
2. **Find Your Zone.**
3. **Ensure Complete Communication.**
4. **Limit Social Media.**
5. **Time Block.**
6. **Creative Work 1st - Reactive Work 2nd.**
7. **Prioritise; use a "One Thing" List**
8. **Outsource Heaps!**
9. **First Hour Is Vital.**
10. **Say "No" More.**
11. **Know Where We're At.**
12. **Be Flexible.**

I hope they're helpful, and will springboard you on to achieve your God-given goals. Knowing you've brought Him Glory by being fruitful and productive is a great place to be.

Life Series

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