

BUILDING THE WALLS OF YOUR LIFE — PART 2

Some people are lazy, and for that reason accomplish little or nothing. Some others never stop, and wear themselves out with busy work and activity—and in the end accomplish little or nothing. The result is the same. Opinions may vary as to which is better. But in terms of outcome, there is no difference.

In the 1949 film “A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur’s Court,” we hear Bing Crosby, William Bendix and Cedric Harwicke sing:

We’re busy doing nothing,
Working the whole day through;
Trying to find
Lots of things not to do.
We’re busy going nowhere,
Isn’t it just a crime?
We’d like to be unhappy,
But we never do have the time!

Rarely is that our deliberate intention, but in terms of results, it may be closer to reality than we’d like to think. It’s easy in Christian circles as “Christian workers” to run from place to place and from thing to thing keeping the plates spinning, responding to need, or even simply maintaining visibility and fostering popularity.

When do we do what’s *right* for us to do?

We’re looking at *Building the Walls of Your Life*. As Nehemiah was motivated to remove the reproach by rebuilding the walls of the city, so we can bring renewed *internal* definition, demarcation and order as we build the walls of our lives. Having dealt last issue with *personal purpose*, we now turn to *time and priority*.

The Wall of Outworked Priority

William Barclay once said that the reason he was able to write so many books was that he had learned the difference between ten minutes and a quarter of an hour. This illustrates for us that increased *efficiency* leads to increased *productivity*. Yet it’s not the place to start—*what* we do must always come before *how* we do it.

The usual distinction made between *efficiency* and *effectiveness* is that efficiency is about *doing things right*, whereas effectiveness is about *doing the right things*. In Matthew 5:1 when Jesus saw the crowds, He was no doubt aware of all the need. Yet His response was not to marshal His disciples in an efficient, delegated manner to meet that need. Rather He went up on to the mountain, the disciples came to *Him* and He first taught *them*. That was longer-term *effectiveness* thinking, and the right thing to do. The crowds would eventually benefit.

Jesus in the Gospels was pursued by people—questioning disciples, demanding crowds and antagonistic authorities—under constant pressure, and yet never seemed to be hurried, stressed or taken by surprise. How was this accomplished? He knew and lived His priorities.

The Great Leveller

When it comes to the matter of *time*, everyone is the same: we all have 168 hours in a week, and the issue is how we *use* them. These decisions are a matter of *allocation*, and unless we make them, they will be made for us. Although to an extent we can “save up time” for a particular project, time has a very short “use by” date! Time passes, and then it’s gone.

Allocating time is analogous to budgeting money: both are limited; the tighter the finances, the more the need to budget—as the busier the schedule, the more the need to budget *time*.

We can't budget time one day in isolation—that's like trying to budget the coins in your pocket—we need an overall approach.

A Time Budget

The demonstration has been performed often. A large glass jar is filled with as many rocks as will fit in it. Is it full? Some small stones are added and fill the spaces. Is it full now? Next some sand is poured in. It looks full. Is it full now? Then a whole jug of water is poured in. What's the lesson? Some would say the lesson is that no matter how busy a schedule is, more can always be squeezed in. But the real lesson is this: you have to get the rocks in first!

What are the rocks for *your* jar? Unless we budget time in priority, our jar may quickly become too full for an important rock to be accommodated. In that case, no amount of *efficiency* will help. We will have compromised our *effectiveness* by not doing the right things.

With a time budget, important things are not left undone. Also, we are free to focus on the planned task or activity without the constant pressure of "everything else I have to do" crowding in on us—these other things are planned for a different time and will be attended to *then*.

Without a time budget, time tends to flow towards our weaknesses. We neglect our strengths because we know we'll "get by", and spend too long on things we're not so good at.

Without a time budget, our time is over-influenced by dominant people in our lives. Others will put rocks in our jar unless we do so first.

Without a time budget, time surrenders to emergencies. Now there are real emergencies, and there are pretenders to that label. Unless this wall is built in our lives, we are victimised by the tyranny of the urgent. Many supposed "emergencies" can in fact be handled later, and, as Gordon MacDonald says, "Not everything that cries the loudest is the most urgent thing." And if we must change our intentions because of a genuine emergency, at least we have a plan to change *from*!

Without a time budget, time is invested in public and visible things, or in fun things. These may be rewarding and affirming, but that does not make them the right things in which to invest time at that moment.

Where do I start?

First, consider your rhythms for maximum effectiveness. When in the week do you do certain things best? When in the day? An hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon can be quite different. Similarly, Monday can be very different from Friday. On that basis, develop an outline understanding of when it is best to plan to do certain things.

Secondly, realise that there will be more "good things to do" than you will be able to do. Prioritising is not simply separating the necessary from the unnecessary, but also the *best* from the *good*.

Thirdly, plan time well in advance. Gordon MacDonald suggests regularly planning your diary or calendar eight weeks in advance. That really is the only way to ensure that the rocks are in your jar before it fills up with sand and water. First, put in your highest priorities—your non-negotiables. Next enter your secondary priorities. Other necessary tasks, activities and demands may then be allowed to flow around these plans. Hopefully there will be room in

the jar for everything. But if some demands cannot be met or some tasks cannot be fulfilled, at least we will know that what “falls off the end” are those things we’ve already assessed as less important.

In that way, as regards use of time, we can live free from guilt. In a time budget, as in any budget, we understand that we simply don’t buy what we simply can’t afford.

Next issue, we will complete this series by considering the Wall of Rest and Renewal.

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Note: All Bible quotations are NIV unless otherwise stated.