

Time Boundaries

I want to use this lecture to spend some time talking about boundaries in relationship to our time, how to leverage our strengths, and then at the very end talk a little bit about some boundaries and working with staff, whether it's a Christian organization or a church. All of these I think of us creating some of those boundaries and helping those that we work with to create those boundaries is really an important skill for us, vital to our own sanity at times but also to help people that we work with keep that.

Let's start with this whole realm of creating some margin with your time. I want to just remind all of us—and I know this is a reminder but I will say it many times—all of our days are numbered by God. We don't have an endless amount of time on this Earth so we have to prioritize accordingly. It's kind of the reminder of Psalms of Moses in Psalms 90 that we're to be careful because our days are numbered by God to give us wisdom, direction. Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 6. "As your calendar goes, so goes your life." If you track that for a period of time, you'll see where you have some control in some of those areas and maybe where you need to create some boundaries or margin.

We need to see some of these principles I think that will help us to govern our schedules. God put twenty-four hours in each day, not twenty-six, not twenty-eight. There are only twenty-four hours in a day. Each of us had been given a certain number of days in our lives. But somehow it seems that for some of us, when it comes to our calendars, we act as if we have an unlimited amount of time or we stretch some of those boundaries where our work day can have a tendency to creep into our evenings which maybe should be spent primarily, if not only, with our family and that focus and that balance.

What happens is, as I've stated there, the urgent will always push out the important. If we have not created some of these boundaries, when there is that phone call, when there is that emergency, when there is someone who just needs to have five minutes of your time, it will always push out the important. That's why we have to in relationship to our time understand what is important for us, what is a priority.

Here is a fact of life. Mark it down. Your time, like everyone's, is limited and all of your time will be spent doing something. That's a duh moment if you will. But here's the key. Somebody will determine how your time is spent. Somebody's going to determine how your time is spent. Will it be you beforehand or will it be someone else who may not have necessarily your best interest at heart? Our

calendar I think best gets some margin when we allow God into it, when we factor that aspect into it. That begins by carving out some time with Him each day.

In everyone's calendar, there is going to be something that will take precedent over all other things. Maybe it's family time. Maybe it's exercise. Maybe it's friends. Something will get a precedent or will be a priority in your calendar. What I'm emphasizing as I've mentioned before but I can't emphasize it enough: make time alone with God a priority. If we don't nurture our own hearts, if we don't work with our own souls before God in His Word and prayer and conversation, whatever that pathway looks like for you, we're all going to struggle in this area. A few moments with God at the beginning of every day. Give God, if you will, the first fruits of your time.

If you were to change your schedule today, maybe this is the question you wrestled with right now, adding only top priority items, what would you need to remove from your existing schedule? If we're only looking at top priority items, God first, what do you need to remove from that schedule? Think about how you want your schedule to look like a year from now and then to begin to move in those areas. This is one of those areas that we've got to create margin with our time because there will always be someone else pushing into that, whether it's our Christian organization or whether it's our church family. So make sure that you start with this area.

Let me move to a second area and that's what I call leveraging strengths. A lot of folks that I know are weary in ministry. They're exhausted. This can be by the virtue of just the volume of stuff that we in Christian organizations or in churches tackle. But what I found, and it's true in my own life, and it often comes out of doing things that are not in the realm of our strengths, that is things that don't bring us life, things that are not where we feel like we're in that sweet spot or in our zone. Those kind of things when we have to do them—and there are some of those that we have to do—they will wear us out. We will feel emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted.

Now, let me say upfront. I understand that it's not always possible for us to work solely out of our strengths to do those things that only energize us and give us life and are thankful that we're alive. But if we're going to leverage for greater kingdom impact that we've been emphasizing in these lectures, we need to push towards this, of leveraging our strengths because as we're going to see we will be far more productive if we leverage out of these areas, ministry or leadership, and I would even argue, in other areas of our life if we can start here.

I want to take you to a passage or scripture where I think this is illustrated so well. It's in Exodus 18:13. "The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said,

‘What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?’ Moses answered him, ‘Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.’

Moses’ father-in-law replied, ‘What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.’” Now, remind yourself where we’re at in this. Moses had brought the people out of bondage in Egypt. They now begin to progress. Exodus 20, the institution of the Ten Commandments with God. There is no law for them at this point in Exodus 18. There is no organization yet.

Now, Moses had been given the responsibility of leading these people, some possibly two and a half million people. They’ve been slaves. No need for organization or boundaries of any sort. God is going to give them, beginning here and further throughout the Book of Exodus and through the rest of Torah, social order. But at this point, early on, it’s Moses and God and for the people for the first time, freedom—freedom from bondage.

Now here’s the point I want to make. When you start a new job or you own your own business, you know that you’d do whatever it takes to get that business or organization off the ground. Maybe you’re planting a church and you will do whatever it takes to make those connections, to have those people involved to begin that. We show also that we’re hard workers. We want to prove our value to the company, or in the case of owning your own business or in a church plant, you’re the only one there is to do it so you have to work hard.

All of us have probably done this in most of our jobs growing up, and we especially do this in ministry early on, in a new church plant, or even in a new situation where we come in to pastor a church or lead an organization. We want to prove our value to that organization, so we really push it and we work really hard. Here is the emphasis.

Here is where the boundary comes in. What begins as a necessary evil will eventually hurt the productivity. We need to learn to focus because in all reality, none of us is really good at a lot of things, maybe two or three things at the most. I hate to tell you that but it’s the reality. You can’t do it all. There are areas that you are strong in and you leverage those and you enjoy those and people recognize you’re really good at that, and there are other things that you’re not so good at. You’ve got to come to that realization.

Those few things are where we need to focus our time and energy, those things that give us life and that we know that we are good at because when we're in our groove doing the thing that we're wired for or what we're good at, people are amazed. God uses us to impact lives. It makes a difference. The cool thing is it just comes naturally to you. You don't even have to really think about it and it gives you real life in the midst of all that.

Most of us even as pastors or leaders of Christian organizations don't have the gift of leadership. I saw a George Barna some research by him one time that said 85 percent or a greater of pastors who are leading churches don't have the spiritual gift of leadership. Here's what I found out in my own experience—that we need to lead by our giftedness or our areas of strength. For me, I don't believe I have the gift of leadership but I'm placed in positions of leadership within the church and in Christian organizations.

So I lead out of my gifts. I lead out of my strengths, my ability to speak, to use that communication skills or my gift of shepherding or my gift of encouragement. I leverage those things, those strengths of mine, those things that God has blessed me with but also given me some of those natural abilities and I leverage those things to provide leadership. The truth is that of all the things that are expected of you in ministry or in your organization, only a couple of things really make a difference.

Become indispensable to your church or your organization by marrying your skill set with your job description. That's where you will ultimately make a difference. It is at this point I'm convinced that you will find your margin professionally. When we are able to—and again, you may not be able to do it right now all at once—but if you can marry your skill set to your job description, everybody's going to be blessed.

Back to this passage in Exodus 18. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, says, "Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform." Jethro in essence says to Moses, "Moses, here are two things—two things—that you need to do, two things that only you can do. Here they are. You need to be God's representative to settle disputes between the people. Secondly, you must teach the decrees and laws to the people." That's it.

If you're going to have the kind of influence and impact, that's where you need to draw your boundaries. Those two areas, we need you doing those two things. How in the world would you implement that? Read on verse 21. "But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds,

fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.” Isn’t that what we want after all?

In verse 22, notice it says, “They will share it with you.” Here’s the principle of focus and boundaries that margin—or you could put boundaries—allow us to do less and accomplish more. If we’re leveraging our strengths, if we set some of those boundaries, these are the two things that I must do. As a matter of fact, these are the two things that only I can do that it will allow me to do in some sense less but accomplish more, and I can guarantee you, you won’t feel as exhausted emotionally, physically, or even spiritually.

To Moses’ credit, he listened. Exodus 18:24, “Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.” Now here’s the question. Would you have listened to that? Are you open to other people’s input especially in this area? Are we even open to God’s input into all of this? Let me say it again. Focus is the key. As much as possible, we need to work out of our strengths and delegate our weaknesses. Let me emphasize this again. Remember, we’re going to work towards this. You may not be in a situation where you can do that. But as we’re setting some of these boundaries and looking forward, managing our time, setting some of these new directions in our schedules and in our life, here is where we want to begin.

Too often we do just the opposite. We spend a lot of time working on our weaknesses and then we just kind of wing our strengths. If we get to a place where you are only doing what only you can do, we’ll be lining ourselves up to be most effective for most impact and maybe fulfilling God’s will for what He’s called you to ultimately do. The illustration I like to use is that of juggling balls. It’s not an issue of confidence because everybody can juggle balls.

You can take two and just simply toss them up and down. We simply need to know how many balls can be juggle. Two? Three? Four? Five? Six? Everybody can just toss up the two of them. It’s not a matter of confidence. The key is how many balls can you juggle. If you try to juggle too many of those balls, you’ll look totally incompetent. The key is to know what are those balls? How many can I handle? What are those priorities and boundaries particularly in the realm of my strength?

Here are three things to do now that you can begin implementing. First of all, what defines success for a person in my position? I’ll use that loosely. What would it look like to make an impact in your organization or in the church? This is where we need to start. Secondly, write the ideal job description with these parameters: Success for a person in your position along with the mission in your organization,

and your skill set. So write that job description based on those three things. And then third, sit down and have a conversation with your supervisor or maybe it's a pastor if you're on staff or the board of that church or a Christian organization.

Take your job description that you've worked on and let them know that it's something you'd like to work toward. Maybe the supervisor, maybe the pastor, maybe the leader of that organization will allow you to try it for a predetermined length of time and then you'll sit down once again and re-evaluate. It's moving in the direction of some clear boundaries of those two or three balls that you're going to juggle that are really your strengths. I think you'll become more effective and the amazing thing is that church, that organization will also see you're really much more effective in only doing those things.

Let me talk also for a few moments about staff. When you lead a staff or organization, do this whole realm of boundaries for your team as well. Help them set their own boundaries. Make sure you talk through boundaries. Make sure that you understand and they understand that this is a value for your organization or church. Seek to allow them to work from their strengths, to have those kinds of conversations we just talked about. Leverage those for the kingdom and the organization as a whole because what I found over the years is that a great staff is made up of great leaders especially if you're the one who's assembled them.

The goal is a staff culture that's characterized by mutual submission. The way that I emphasize that is that we're constantly raising the question, "What can I do to help?" Mutual submission is the idea of how can I help you and how can you help me? Not "How can I use you? Or how can you help me?" We're constantly asking the question of the team of each other in this servant-leadership aspect. What can I do to help? I love what Patrick Lencioni writes. He says, "The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency of members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group. Team status and individual status are the prime candidates."

As a leader of a staff or an organization or in the church, it will be imperative for you to create and maintain a sustainable pace because here is the key for us in Christian organizations. Without margin built into our lives, without those clear boundaries for us personally as leaders and for those that are part of our staff or organization, there will be no room to serve. That is the amazing thing that we often miss in the business of Christian work is if there's no margin, there's no room to serve because under pressure, guarantee it, every one of us become self-serving. It becomes about me. It becomes about my project. It becomes about my reputation.

We create our own little silos when we get so busy that I can't look around me and raise that question, "What can I do to help you?" When there is too much to do, even in ministry, I become self-centered. Here is the issue. Without margin, we seek out our own kingdoms! Without margin, without boundaries, without some sense of the whole picture, we will seek our own kingdoms. Ministry is a marathon and we must set a reasonable, sustainable pace. We as leaders of staff and organization must monitor this regularly. If we don't, we're going to see casualties—moral casualties, family casualties, people breaking down relationally. We may get the work done but I'm not sure in the way of which will it be done. We certainly won't be honoring God.

Celebrate and reward greatness when you see it because what is rewarded is repeated. If we reward boundaries, if we reward margin, if we celebrate people doing those kind of things, it will be repeated. Teach those of your staff or organization how to say no respectfully, to know what those boundaries are, and to be able to say, "No, I can't do that. I want to be able to help because that's the big question we're saying, but this is outside those perimeters, that boundary that we have mutually agreed upon."

As a leader you'll need at times to confront your own ego. What's more important: creating a great organization or creating a name for yourself? Ouch, right? If your goal is the organization, you'll learn to serve other people. If it's about gaining a name for yourself, you will be content being served. I would just say very honestly. If you simply see your staff even in a church situation as sort of a supporting cast, then at least be honest enough with them and tell them that and then allow them to walk because I certainly would. But at times, we allow people in positions of leadership to use us as a resource or a tool. I would say get out of there quickly. You owe it to them.

Leaders attract people. They don't go out and get people. When you see a leader who understands these principles that we're talking about, man, those are the kind of leaders you'll follow and that's the kind of leader that I want us to be. So the question again is, "What can I do to help?" When we find ourselves leading organizations, that's one of those bumper guards if you will, those guard rails that we're going to constantly ask so that we create and leverage strengths and relationships. How can I serve you and what can I do to help?