

Effective Time Management

Introduction

One of the greatest asceticism for priests and religious in active ministry is the asceticism of time. Our time is not our own. The parish priest or chaplain is virtually on call day and night. And people do call us. A bereaved parent will call a priest when a child has died. Adult children, painfully watching their parents suffer in the hospital, will ask the priest to visit. The lonely and troubled will look to us for understanding and solace. These needs do not fit into a neat nine to five schedules. At times, it feels to us as if we “don’t have a life.” By that I mean we do not have much private space or private time. This is true. *Giving up control over one’s time is a great sacrifice.* That is reason why managing our time wisely is essential to be fruitful in our life and ministry as missionaries.

Time as Gift for the Mission

For missionaries, time is much more than a resource to be managed. It is a gift entrusted by God for the service of His Kingdom. Every hour of the day is an opportunity to love, to serve, to pray, to listen, and to accompany others. Consequently, the asceticism of time is not merely about becoming more efficient; it is about making ourselves more available for God's mission.

Jesus Himself reveals a healthy rhythm of missionary life. His days were filled with preaching, healing, teaching, and accompanying people, yet He never allowed ministry to consume His relationship with the Father. He intentionally created moments of silence, prayer, and rest. The Gospels show this beautiful balance:

- Jesus began important moments with prayer (Mk 1:35; Lk 6:12).
- He dedicated Himself generously to ministry among the crowds (Mt 9:35).
- He withdrew to lonely places for communion with the Father (Lk 5:16).
- He invited the disciples to rest after intense ministry: *"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while"* (Mk 6:31).
- He never hurried because of pressure but acted according to the Father's timing (Jn 5:19; Jn 17:4).

This rhythm teaches an important lesson for missionaries: authentic time management is an expression of faithful discipleship. We organise our time not because productivity is the highest value, but because our vocation deserves our best attention and availability.

The goal of time management, therefore, is not simply to accomplish more tasks but to become more attentive to God, more available to people, and more faithful to our missionary calling.

Reflection: "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Key Takeaways

- Time is a gift entrusted by God.
- Asceticism of time serves the mission.
- Jesus models a rhythm of prayer, ministry, rest, and discernment.
- Good planning protects both mission and spiritual life.

What is Time Management?

Time management is the managing of your time so that time is used to your advantage and it gives you a chance to spend your most valuable resource in the way you choose. Time management is a skill that can be learned which involves techniques for prioritizing activities and using time effectively while eliminating disruptions and time wasters. Time Management is an endless series of decisions, small and large, that gradually change the shape of your life.

Some quotes to reflect

“Time management is not a stagnant process. It is a constant interaction between you, your goals and the constantly changing rhythms and tempos of life. Life is full of surprises, and the ride can be fun, if you have a plan and a way to react and adapt.” (Julie Morgenstern)

Don’t be fooled by the calendar. There are only as many days in the year as you make use of. One man gets only a week’s value out of a year while another man gets a full year’s value out of a week. (Charles Richards)

It’s how we spend our time here and now, that really matters. If you are fed up with the way you have come to interact with time, change it. (Marcia Wieder)

You cannot kill time without injuring eternity. (Henry David Thoreau)

You will never “find” time for anything. If you want time, you must make it. (Charles Bruxton)

Don’t say you don’t have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein. (H. Jackson Brown)

Questions to Ask Yourself about Time Management:

-  *How can I balance conflicting priorities?*
-  *How can I deal with surprises in time scheduling?*
-  *What level of commitments can I handle?*

Effective time management involves three skills:

- I. Prioritization**
- II. Scheduling**
- III. Execution**

I. Prioritizing techniques

First, make a **to-do list** for the day. Write down all the things you need to get done today, with no regard to the order.

Date:			
01		06	
02		07	
03		08	
04		09	
05		10	

Next, three methods are suggested to help prioritize your things to do.

1. The **ABC rank order method** involves assigning the letters A, B, or C to various tasks:

A = highest priority activities (must do immediately)

B = second-priority activities (not immediately, but you should do soon)

C = low-priority tasks or things you would like to do (can wait to do)

In this method of prioritization, assign tasks from your to-do list to the A, B, or C categories as appropriate to their priority. Once you have prioritized each task as A, B, or C, then complete the A tasks first, then B, and finally C.

A	B	C

(Directions: In column A, list all the things that you must get done as soon as possible. In column C, list all the things that you would like to do but that are not essential. In column B, put everything else.)

2. The **Pareto principle** states that 20 percent of the tasks we do give us 80 percent of the rewards or satisfaction. Thus, with a list of ten things to do, this principle suggests that individuals should give their time and attention to the top two prioritized tasks in their list. (If one has done the ABC rank ordering, then these tasks would most likely be in the A category.)

3. Sometimes it is difficult to differentiate among responsibilities, all of which seem important. In this case, use the **important-versus-urgent matrix** to help you prioritize tasks.

Note that people tend to direct their energies toward box IV because these responsibilities look quick and easy. But attention and time should be focused on activities in box I, because they are both high in urgency and importance. Next, put time and attention to tasks in box II, then to box III, and finally to box IV.

U R G E N C Y		IMPORTANCE	
		Low	High
	High	III a. b. c.	I a. b. c.
	Low	IV a. b. c.	II a. b. c.

Then, begin to work on your tasks in the following order:

I	a	
	b	
	c	
II	a	
	b	
	c	
III	a	
	b	
	c	

IV	a	
	b	
	c	

II. Scheduling Techniques

Once you have a solid idea of what needs to get done, there are several choices you can make about scheduling your responsibilities. If you have a few major projects to do, try the boxing method.

a. Boxing

Divide your day into five parts: morning, noon hour, afternoon, dinner hour, and evening (or designate other parts of the day if these don't fit your particular daily routine). Then write down the significant tasks and assign them a block of time that is most suited to your schedule.

08 am – 12 pm	
12 pm – 01 pm	
01 pm – 06 pm	
06 pm – 07 pm	
07 pm – 10 pm	

Tip: To be effective you will want to take small breaks during these large blocks of time.

b. Time Mapping

If you have many little things to do, try the time mapping schedule.

08.00 am	
08.30 am	
09.00 am	
09.30 am	
10.00 am	
10.30 am	
11.00 am	
11.30 am	
12.00 pm	
12.30 pm	

c. Weekly Planning

Daily planning is most effective when guided by a broader weekly vision. A weekly review helps missionaries avoid living from one urgent activity to another. Instead of merely reacting to daily demands, they intentionally allocate time to the most important dimensions of their vocation. At the beginning or end of each week, ask:

- Which pastoral commitments are fixed?
- What formation or study needs attention?
- Which community responsibilities require preparation?
- Have I scheduled adequate time for prayer and recollection?
- Have I planned moments for exercise, rest, and fraternity?
- What unexpected pastoral needs might arise?

A weekly plan provides flexibility while ensuring that important responsibilities are not forgotten.

d. Monthly Review

Once each month, set aside 30–60 minutes to review how your time has been used. Reflect on questions such as:

- Where did I spend most of my energy?
- What activities truly advanced the mission?
- Which commitments could be simplified or delegated?
- Have I maintained a healthy balance among prayer, ministry, administration, study, and rest?
- What is one improvement I want to make next month?

This periodic review prevents burnout and helps missionaries remain intentional rather than merely busy.

III. Execution Techniques

Execution is the implementation of your prioritized schedule (what you have accomplished with the first two skills of prioritization and scheduling).

Here are some tips to help you execute your daily schedule:

- a. Assign a deadline (goal) for each task or project
- b. Break large projects down into smaller tasks, and assign a deadline for each task.
- c. Work on one section of the project or task at a time. Work until it is complete. Experts indicate that it is better to have one or two completed tasks than a handful of unfinished ones.
- d. Reward your accomplishments with small pleasures to motivate yourself to accomplish designated goals. Avoid immediate gratification—that is, reward yourself after satisfactory completion of each job, not before.

Sometimes it helps to list your goals and deadlines and also the rewards you can give yourself for completing the goal or meeting your deadline.

	Goal/ deadline	Reward
01		
02		
03		
04		
05		
06		
07		

Time Wasters

	Time Wasters	Possible causes	Solutions
01	Lack of Planning	• Failure to see benefit • Activity orientation • Successful without it	• Recognize that planning takes time but saves time in the long run • Emphasizes that success is often in spite of, not because of, methods

02	Lack of Priorities	• Lack of goals and objectives	• Write down goals and objectives
03	Over-commitment	• Broad interests	• Choose a few, then say NO to further requests for involvement • Decide which things must come first • Develop a personal philosophy of time, relate priorities to a daily/weekly “To Do” list
04	Management by crisis	• Lack of planning • Unrealistic time estimates • Problems orientation	• Allow for adequate time; allow for interruptions • Be opportunity oriented • Act instead of react
05	Haste	• Impatience with detail or routine matters • Responding to the urgent • Lack of planning ahead • Attempting too much in too little time	• Take the time to do it right the first time, saves doing it over • Distinguish between urgent and important • Take time to plan • Attempt less; delegate more
06	Visitors	• Enjoyment of socializing • Inability to say no	• Do it elsewhere • Meet the visitors outside or at the door • Avoid situations where you know you like to visit but don’t have the time right then • Say no • Suggest doing something at another time
07	Indecision	• Lack of confidence in the facts • Insistence on all the facts – paralysis of analysis • Fear of the consequence of a mistake	• Improve fact finding and validating procedures • Accept risks as inevitable: decide without all facts • Use mistakes as a learning process • Think of possible consequences and courses of action to deal with them • Get facts, set goals, investigate alternatives and negative consequences, make the decision and implement it

Overcoming Common Obstacles

Two common challenges deserve particular attention.

Procrastination

Procrastination often arises from fear, perfectionism, or feeling overwhelmed. Helpful strategies include:

- Begin with the smallest possible step.
- Use the "five-minute rule": commit to working for just five minutes.
- Complete one important task fully before moving to another.
- Celebrate progress rather than waiting for perfection.

Fatigue

Fatigue reduces concentration, increases mistakes, and often leads to wasted time. Helpful practices include:

- Respect regular sleeping hours.
- Schedule demanding tasks during periods of highest energy.
- Take short breaks between long periods of work.
- Maintain healthy eating and exercise habits.
- Recognise when rest is more productive than continued work.

Daily Discipline Rule

At the beginning of each day, identify **one key task** that must be completed before the day ends. Finish it completely before moving to less important activities.

This simple discipline gradually builds consistency, confidence, and freedom from procrastination.

IV. Self-Care: Caring for the Missionary

Missionary generosity should never become an excuse for neglecting one's own physical, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Healthy missionaries serve longer, love more deeply, and remain available to God's people with greater joy.

Jesus Himself cared for His own human needs. He rested, prayed in solitude, shared meals with His disciples, and encouraged them to do the same (Mk 6:31).

Healthy stewardship of time therefore includes caring for oneself. Practical habits include:

- maintaining regular personal prayer;
- scheduling sufficient sleep;
- engaging in regular physical exercise;
- protecting one day or several hours each week for renewal;
- nurturing healthy friendships within the community;
- limiting unnecessary use of mobile phones, social media, and the internet;
- taking annual retreats and periods of silence seriously.

Self-care is not selfishness. It enables sustained and joyful missionary service.

Signs that greater balance may be needed

- Constant fatigue
- Irritability
- Loss of enthusiasm
- Neglect of prayer
- Difficulty concentrating
- Overdependence on digital devices
- Feeling constantly "busy" but rarely fulfilled

Key Takeaways

- Rest strengthens mission.
- Prayer renews ministry.

- Healthy habits prevent burnout.
- Digital discipline protects attention.

Final Reflection

Managing time is ultimately about managing our vocation. Every day is a gift entrusted to us by God, and every hour offers an opportunity to grow in love, serve others, and deepen our communion with Christ.

The missionary who learns to order time wisely is not simply becoming more productive. He is becoming more available—to God, to his community, and to the people entrusted to his care.

Like Jesus, we are called to embrace a rhythm of prayer, ministry, fraternity, study, service, and rest. Such balance allows us not merely to accomplish many things but to remain joyful, faithful, and fruitful throughout our missionary journey.

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

Further Reading

- Allen, D. (2015). *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. Revised Edition. Penguin Books.
 - A classic guide to organizing work, managing commitments, and increasing effectiveness.
- Covey, S. R. (2020). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. 30th Anniversary Edition. Simon & Schuster.
 - Particularly helpful for understanding priorities, personal mission, and effective stewardship of time.
- Covey, S. R., Merrill, A. R., & Merrill, R. R. (1994). *First Things First*. Simon & Schuster.
 - A valuable resource on living according to values rather than urgency, using the Important-Urgent Matrix.
- Morgenstern, J. (2004). *Time Management from the Inside Out* (2nd ed.). Henry Holt.
 - Offers practical strategies for organizing time around one's personality, responsibilities, and goals.
- Newport, C. (2016). *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. Grand Central Publishing.
 - Explores strategies for sustained concentration and minimizing digital distractions.