

# How to Do the Main Thing

“And he said unto them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth’”

(Mark 1:38).

**“W**hat is the main thing?” That question serves as a good place to start this lesson. Your “main thing” is your area of specialization; your unique God-given ability. Jesus described it this way, “For this is what I came for” (Mark 1:38).

H. Dale Burke in “How to Overcome Overload” says that our “main thing” includes three characteristics.

1. My main thing is “mission critical.” It is essential to the growth of the ministry. Done well it moves the organization forward.
2. My main thing is “top priority.”
3. My main thing grows out of my unique abilities.

## Organizing the Work Week

H. Dale Burke in *Less is More Leadership* groups activities into four major categories, and sets time aside for each in order to keep his work balanced. This requires planning your week in large blocks of time, either full or half days. Focus on one objective at a time.



### Rest time

Focus on your health, spirituality, and marriage.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” (Exodus 20:8-10, *NIV*).

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (The Message).

“Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31, *NIV*).

Mary Southerland in “How to Deal With Stress” tells the story of a tourist taking a safari in the jungles of Africa. He hired locals to carry his supplies and to serve as guides. On the first day they walked rapidly and went far. The tourist was thrilled with the progress, rose the second day, eager to get on the journey again. The locals refused to budge. They insisted that they needed to sit and rest. They explained to the tourist that they had gone too fast the first day. Now they were waiting for their souls to catch up. She concludes, “The more responsibility we carry and the busier we are, the more we need regular solitude!” A Greek proverb says, “You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.”

God is willing to help us if we will obey His Word, rest, and spend time in His presence.

#### **Renews–**

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

#### **Restores–**

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake” (Psalms 23:1-3).

#### **Refreshes–**

“The times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Cecil Murphey in *Live Ten Years Longer* encourages pastors to do three things.

1. Find a regular exercise you will enjoy.
2. Change the way you eat and drink. He doesn't recommend a diet (which implies taking things away) but suggests a balanced diet. He also urges pastors to drink more water. During the night bodies lose the equivalent of two glasses of water in moisture.
3. Get more rest. Getting plenty of sleep is essential to the body. The body repairs the wear and tear of the day through sleeping. When you don't take time to sleep your immune system suffers. He also encourages pastors to rest their mind by laying aside the stress you carry within.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, *NIV*).



### Results Time

Focus on the “main things” that advance the mission. Time needs to be spent focusing on the unique role God has for you personally. Use the portion of the day or week when you do your best work. Structure your schedule around the “main things.” Tackle priorities one at a time and in order of their importance. It may help to break a project down into chunks and approach the work one chunk at a time.

Burke finds that when he tries to fit more than one of these needs into a block of time he experiences frustration and defeat rather than fulfillment.



### Response Time

Focus on things that result from your result time or main thing. These are things not critical to the mission but still important. This is usually focused on others, processing things that flow out of your main thing, including administration and follow-up.



### Refocus Time

Focusing on how you adjust what and how you undertake projects. This is when we work on the mission, reflect, assess, adjust, and innovate for the future. Retreat to refocus. Refocus weekly, monthly, and yearly. An ancient Chinese proverb says, “Muddy water let stand will clear.”

Rick Warren in “Seven Secrets of Stress Management” says that “Preparation prevents pressure but procrastination produces it. You work by either priorities or pressures.” The old cliché “don’t put off until tomorrow what can be done today” goes a long way to prevent overload.

When involved in emotionally draining activities take time to prepare, and then to recover. Richard A. Swenson in *Margin* said, “Calendar congestion and time urgency have robbed us of the pleasure of anticipation. Without warning, the activity is upon us. We rush to meet it; then we rush to the next; and the next.” He advises that when the activity is over take time to reflect, evaluate, and remember.

### Reading the Gauges

Bill Hybels in a *Leadership Journal* article entitled “Reading Your Gauges” talks of three gauges that we need to routinely check in our lives.



**Spiritual Gauge**—How am I doing spiritually? The spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, Bible reading, meditation, sacrifice and others pump high-octane fuel into our lives providing strength for ministry.



**Physical Gauge**—How am I doing physically? Exercise, proper diet, and rest are important.



**Emotional Gauge**—How am I doing emotionally? Certain activities drain our emotional petrol tank. Bill Hybels calls these “Intensive Ministry Activities” which include confrontations, counseling sessions, exhausting ministry sessions, board meetings (to name a few). Refilling your emotional tank takes time.

To maintain emotional resources use your spiritual gifts or unique abilities. Many times you will feel more energized after using them. Serving outside your gift areas tend to drain you.

Remember Jesus at the well talking to the Samaritan women? When His disciples returned bringing food, Jesus said, “My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34, *NIV*)

Doing what He was called to do was fulfilling, and energizing, rather than draining. You will receive strength from doing your main thing, and the church will be thrust forward.

Peter Brain in *Going the Distance: How to Stay Fit for a Lifetime of Ministry* explains Christmas Evans, a British evangelist, once made the comment, “I’d rather burn out than rust out in the service of the Lord.” Many pastors operate on a similar principle. James Berkeley gives this alternative:

“I admire the bravado. It sounds dedicated, bold, and stirring. However, when I view the burn-outs and the almost burn-outs who lie by the ecclesiastical road, the glory fails to reach me. I see pain and waste and unfinished service. Is there not a third alternative to either burning out or rusting out? In Acts 20:24, Paul stated, “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.” Herein lies the model I choose to follow. I want neither to burn out or rust out. I want to finish out the race.”

### Study Questions

1. What are three (3) characteristics of “our main thing”?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

2. We should group activities into four (4) categories. What are they? Briefly explain each.

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4) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What are three (3) things Cecil Murphy encourages pastors to do?

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2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How can one best focus on the main things that advance the mission? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Identify and briefly explain the three (3) gauges mentioned by Bill Hybels.

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6. Explain how doing the main thing provides strength. \_\_\_\_\_

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