

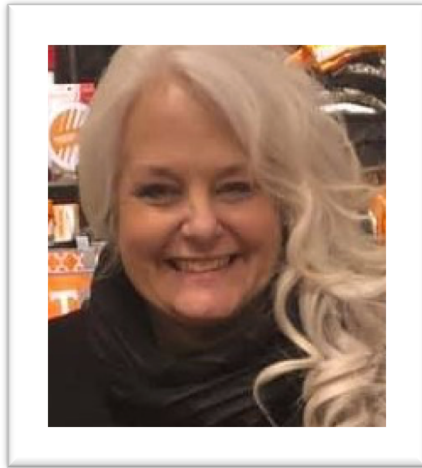
The Ultimate *Productivity* Challenge

“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end - it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.” -
Habakkuk 2:2-3

By Cindy Rushton

Ultimate Productivity Challenge Action Guide Week 2

Welcome!



I am Cindy Rushton, your hostess for the month of April as we take the challenge to work together for ULTIMATE PRODUCTIVITY!

This is it! This is about to be your best year ever! This is the year for massive action.

During this challenge, you will be surrounded by some of the most amazing and talented and blessed ladies and men on the planet. First, those in this tribe have a heart for God, their families and helping others. I cannot wait to introduce them to you in this challenge. By the end you will see what I mean and you too will call them friends.

A challenge is not to make you feel guilty about what you have or have not done in the past. A challenge is not to make you stressed about what the future holds.

A challenge is for right now, for such a time as this.

A challenge is as much or as little as you want to put into it - and the choices are varied and will fit the most advanced to the beginner.

Are you ready to roll up your sleeves and see what God has in store for you? I am and the best news, we will be beside you all the way!

Let's do this!

Ultimate Productivity Challenge...

A 31 Day Challenge to Support You As You Step Up to Your Calling and Life Purpose!

31 days from now your home, life, homeschool, business or ministry can look radically different. In fact, commit just one hour a day to work on your challenge and you will never be the same. This will be a month of taking **massive action**. It will be a month of **stretching yourself and your capabilities**. It will be a month of **impact and influence**. It will be a month where you make time to do the things that will impact your bottom lines, your influence, your outreach, and your impact for this year and years to come.

Ultimate Productivity Challenge is a 31 Day Challenge where you will commit to work on your home, life, homeschool, business or ministry every day with our community.

It may be planning. It may be brain dumping. It may be working on your calendar or your schedule. It may be working on a list of things to do. It may be rewriting or revising old content or copy. It may be taking steps to do something very new that takes you outside of your comfort zone. It may be working on a project that has bottlenecked your progress. Each day you will take massive action. As you do, you will post your progress in our group where you will find accountability, encouragement, and great ideas that will take you even further than working on this by yourself.

That is not all!

Private Group Sessions

We have live group sessions each week on Zoom. These sessions will feature a quick topic then we will open the mic for group coaching to help you as you work through your challenges. You can bring your questions to the group where our team and fellow group members will help you. You will find support, encouragement, and practical ideas from one another. You will develop relationships that will forever impact your business. We want for you to join us live for every session, but we also understand the demands of your busy lives. We will have replays available of every session. Now, do note that missing the live sessions and listening to the replays will only give one credit for your challenge points. Also, it will limit your ability to access the benefit of group coaching. Make plans to join as many live sessions as possible. This 31 Day challenge is FOR YOU. Set aside this time for you and your business or ministry.

Our Zoom Room can be found here:

<http://www.CindyRushton.com/Zoom>.

Private Pop-up Sessions

We are planning surprise pop-up sessions on topics that are going to be a big help for you as you work on your challenges. These will be available only to our challenge members. We will

offer replays for a few of these sessions, but we really want for you to join us live so not everything will be available for replay.

Bonus Challenges

This is where we will have even more fun. We will have bonus challenges that can help you earn extra challenge points. Of course, these bonus challenges also help you to get things done and take massive action and help others take massive action.

Facebook Group

Get even more support and more awesome ideas on our Facebook Group. Here is where you go to join us:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall/>

For our challenge, you will receive points by submitting daily updates of three things:

1. What you accomplished during the day to work on your challenges.
2. Your big takeaway from our daily group sessions, pop-up sessions, or session replays.
3. Updates on any special bonus challenges.

Prizes

Not only will you have your home, family, business or ministry benefit from taking massive action, we have **fun prizes that you can earn as well**. Every person who completes the challenge as a finisher, will earn a prize. Completing the challenge requires that you finish one challenge of your own (counts as 10 points), plus earn a total of 50 points by the end of the challenge. Not only do you “win” by taking massive action toward ultimate productivity, but you also win a great prize!

For those who hit 150 points, you get the first prize PLUS you can earn a private coaching session with Cindy Rushton. The top 5 people with the highest points will receive access to an online event of their choice with Cindy. That is not all! Our challenge members will also be added to teams who will be competing against each other for a chance to win access to a special one-day “Intensive” with Cindy Rushton.

Points:

- 2 points per day for being live in the live sessions and posting a takeaway in our Facebook group.
- 1 point for listening to a replay and posting a takeaway in our Facebook group.
- 1 point for posting in the group what was accomplished each day.
- 10 points for each challenge that you complete and post a video in our group.
- PLUS! Weekly Bonus Challenges!

Ready to dig in?

This guide will provide you with a self-study plan for working on your challenges. The best way to get started is to read the next couple chapters and work through the journals, brain dumping, and planning in those. Then, take a look at the various challenges. Just pick one. Find the one that will make the biggest difference in your business or ministry this year. Perhaps choose the one that is your “next step” or something that has been nagging you for a while. Let’s work on that one first. If you get it done before the challenge is over, you may want to look through others and pick another. You can use this guide throughout the year to challenge yourself after this challenge is over. And...we will have a guide for you each week of this challenge.

Our goal for you is to help remove any obstacles, hindrances, lids, or limitations that have kept you from taking massive action. We want to see you step into this year fully prepared for your very best year ever! Let’s do this!

Spring Clean Your Commitments

Ok...here we turn to a biggie. Let's face it. So many of us are far too busy on the go and with demands coming from all directions. Our calendars are jammed full of so much. The only thing ***not*** on the calendar is **margin**. Relate?

What does your calendar look like?

Are you just too busy--What is on your calendar right now?

Want to change things, but have no idea what *could* go? Jot down your typical day?

Jot down weekly things that are on your calendar...

What are some things that are not making it to your calendar?

Thinking through what is on your schedule and what you want on your schedule, is it time to prune? What is past its season and needs to go?

There is something about spring that requires that we cut out the extras and gear up the things that really matter. If we don't, there are ramifications. We get...

Tired
Weary
Stressed out
Pushed to our limits
Pulled in too many directions
Edgy
Snippy
Irritable
OK...angry and downright bitter.

Relate?

It is time to "Spring Clean" our commitments. It is time to look at all that we have on our calendar and really evaluate:

- ☐ Is it necessary?
- ☐ Is it essential?
- ☐ Is it stressing us out?
- ☐ Is it pushing and pulling?
- ☐ Is it worth it?
- ☐ Is it the very best...or just another GOOD thing?

It is far too easy to just get in our ruts and let things that really matter sit on the back-burner. You know the end result--a year that is a bit disappointing. A year filled with regrets. A year that doesn't seem to count.

My sweet friend, 2020 is a year that we get a new beginning. TODAY is a new beginning. Why not join me "spring cleaning" our commitments.

Let's roll up our sleeves and dig into those messy commitments.
Let's pull every commitment out and really look at all of our commitments.
Let's evaluate, prune, organize, clean out and clean up.

We can do it together. Then, we can reach for ultimate productivity and a year that really counts!

Ready? Let's dig in...

Too Much In A Day...

Yep! This is one of my greatest struggles and one of my greatest strengths. It is just a fine-line!

I am one of those people who hopelessly plan too much into my life. I want to DO IT ALL! And, the sad thing is that I try to.

Recently, one of my personal studies has been (don't laugh!), "How to Manage My Time." Why? Well, because I want to eliminate any possible hindrance so I can do **MORE!** Hehe!

I know motives may not necessarily be great here. Actually, they may signal a blaring warning that tells you that this is one area that I personally struggle with **RIGHT NOW**. True, but I have to share some of what I am finding (and applying) in my study. Who knows? It may help you to tame your schedule so you can busy doing the things that God has called you to do too!

For one thing, it really helps to **sit down and really look at your day**. What DOES get done in a typical day?

I have found that I do get a lot done in a day. I will never be accused of being idle. I really do seize every moment I can. But, at the end of most days, I still have the same complaint, "I need MORE hours in my day!"

We are only allotted 24 hours a day. One prayer request that we can be sure will not be answered is the request for 85 hours in a day! Why? Because it would still not be enough for people like me! So, how do we make more hours in our day?

- ☐ **Make a list of what IS being done in a day.**

- **Make another list of what you would REALLY like to see included in your day or week that you are not getting around to. What would you like to see included in your day or week?**

See if what you are doing and if what you would like to do fits into what God has placed on your heart as your priorities. Make sure that they help you to reach toward the mark. For me, when we began homeschooling I struggled for a while with distractions and hindrances that are so common in a busy home. After, well, a whole year (I am very slow on some things!) the Lord showed me the value in looking over my typical day to see how I could fit in the things that were most important and those little things that are always going to pop up. I found that there were categories that most everything could fit into: Quiet Times, Chores, Table Time, Family Time, Productive Free Time, Ministry/Business, and Family Read Alouds. Actually, this is the basic order for my day every day (well, now the kids are both graduated and out of the nest--so that time is now set aside for getting fit/healthy and even more business/ministry). It is possible at home. It is possible on the road. It is possible when we have company. It is possible when things go a bit hay-wire—which has always happened from time-to-time. These are the priorities for the day, but there are still things even with ME that never seem to get done unless they are part of the schedule for the day.

For example, this past summer, my doctor prescribed that I go to the Wellness Center for exercise daily. I had wanted more time to actually get around to exercising. But, it just seemed that if I had another 55 hours in my day that then I could have time to devote to exercise—not joking or exaggerating here. Instead of asking for the impossible while neglecting such an important area of my life, I opted to fit this time into my daily schedule FIRST each day. I have committed to one-hour a day for it. Setting aside one-hour a day is doable if it is first thing. That is how I got my business/ministry back into my schedule. One hour a day is powerful when it is intentional. Setting it first holds me accountable in areas that I really want to bring into my life yet are not habits, much less a lifestyle, yet. Just getting started has had an amazing impact. It is amazing how much better everything else is running. Not only do I feel better, but I also have more energy and focus. Plus, my conscience is clear instead of being plagued with guilt,

condemnation, and frustration. Yes. Make your list and see what you are doing AND not doing.

□ **Making a List, Checking it Twice (or FIFTEEN TIMES!!)...**

I made my list. Then, it was easier to see the holes in my life that were not being filled. Sure, I was accomplishing a lot with my family and our ministry. But, there were still glaring holes beaming out at me and plaguing me with guilt and condemnation. Yes, I wanted to exercise. I love running and hiking. I have stacks of wonderful audios and audio books that I would love to hear. I want more time to sit back and relax, even if it is occasionally. I wanted more time to make memories with the children. Of course, I also wanted to be more productive. Those are the things that seem to give me the “feeling” that I am not accomplishing as much in my day as I really wanted. Of course, I was accomplishing the “work” in each day. On many days that was ALL that was accomplished. No wonder there was a feeling of frustration! We are geared to do more than just work day-in-day-out. So, what to do?

□ **Look At Your Typical Day**

First, I had to take an honest look at all those things that were included in a typical day. Many were right down the line with the vision God has placed in my heart. Yet, there were still things that God had placed on my heart that were not ever making it into my days. Plus, there were other things that were very questionable. I had to look at every single thing in my day to really evaluate them all. Let's look at your typical day and evaluate...

- Were there things that could be combined so I could accomplish more tasks at one time? Write those down...

- Were there things that can be delegated to others so I could have more time for things that only I could do? Write those down...

- Were there things that simply needed to go? Were they past their season? Did they need to be eliminated because they were really not that essential to what we were about? Write them down...

I am not saying that I was doing anything bad. I don't think that is how the enemy typically hits some of us. Think about it. If you were given a temptation to do something downright wrong, would it really be a temptation to you? The way that the enemy prefers to hit people like you and me is through the **GOOD THINGS**.

You know--those things that no one else will or can do at church.
Those little things that have "sweet" motives.
Those little things that don't look too hard, but end up zapping us.

You know them. Just evaluating them has helped me sooo much. Everything that we do cost us in our two greatest commodities:

TIME
ENERGY

We have to make sure that what we are doing really matters. If we don't, we will just stay busy, busy, busy. We will stay on the go. At the end, whether it is this year or at the end of our lives, we will look back with regrets.

I don't want that. I know that today it is tough to let go of "our babies" whether they are activities or positions or systems that we have had in place for years or methods we have been using successfully or commitments. However, it is sooo worth it. Let's evaluate every single thing we do, every single thing on our calendars and be ready to let go of anything that hinders or distracts us. It is sooo worth the hard work.

- **Combine Tasks**

Yep! This may help you too. It is one way that I get **a lot** of things done. I don't waste one minute even if I am doing something else. Let me explain.

See if there can be things that can be combined. For me, exercise and listening to those teaching audios or audio books gets two things done. Neither fit into my schedule before because I felt that exercise was just frivolous--looking at this body obviously shows I was not right! Listening to my teaching audios or audio books seemed to not fit in reliably outside of school assignments. I had to concentrate when I write or answer email, my family did not really appreciate hearing my tapes, and there was really no time other than that! However, fitting them together is the perfect answer! That 30-60 minutes a day is life-giving. It makes the other 23 hours a whole lot better!

There were many other adjustments and changes. Not too easy, but definitely helpful! Things like cooking in the crockpot overnight so we are at home while it is cooking, but not having to stand over a stove during the day going through the

mail as we walk back from the mailbox and dumping the junk-mail into the trash before we walk in the house (our can is right outside the door!) rather than do a big clean-out during the year. Doing more things at one time really helps to use the time I have to the fullest!

What are some things that you can combine to make the most of your time and get things done...

- **Delegate! OUCH!**

Delegate! Yep! Talk about another toughie for me! How about you? Are you delegating to others? What does that look like...

I have worked on this one year-after-year for three decades. I suspect that this one will always need a conscientious effort by me. It is too easy for me to jump in and try to do it all.

The first time I ever delegated stands out in my mind as a turning point for me. My children were 7 and 4 at the time. We were living in our camper in Selma, AL while my husband was in the State Trooper Academy there. Living in the camper was probably one of my most life-changing experiences because I learned how

much of my life at that time was “fluff” and wasted. Living in the camper forced me to only have my most essential belongings with me.

We made more memories than ever. Each day we had plenty of time for me to just mother, keep my home, homeschool, and even play games at the end of the day!

Life was simple. Homemaking was easy. I made easy meals. Cleanup of the whole camper was usually 5-10 minutes or at most 25 minutes (big change from my 10-12 hour cleaning days before!)! The hardest part was the small space and taking laundry out to the laundry-mat every few days. The good part was that in Selma the laundry-mat was at the pool. The children could play and I could enjoy watching over them while I read, did laundry AND tanned! (had the best tan and read more that 6 months than ever in my life!) However, in the midst of this easier life there were still struggles.

How could it be? Well, I could clean up, but while I was cleaning my children were idle arguing (yep, these **PERFECT** children were acting like other children!), messing up the other side of the room (EEK!), and dirtying up their clothes EVERY DAY.

One day in particular, a Monday (Could I find a better word to give you a “picture” of this scene?) to be completely accurate, I had so much pressing in that day. I was standing at my 1 ft X 1ft X 4inch deep sink (it still felt like Mt. Everest!) full of dishes. The children were behind me just finishing their breakfast. And, they had the audacity to begin fussing over who could watch their movie and WE homeschool. And, it was Monday.

The quarreling was getting on my nerves--the really touchy ones! There I was washing dishes...the laundry was there needing for me to fold it...the toilets needed cleaning...we needed to begin our lessons for the day... and here they were arguing. I snapped. I admit it! I simply snapped. I told them, actually screamed at them, to stop arguing and just fold those clothes if they had that much energy. Still washing my dishes...silence permeated the room for several minutes until giggly-giggles took over. I turned around to find that almost ALL of the laundry was folded and they were **LIKING IT!** Tears filled my eyes. The Lord spoke to my heart. I did not have to do it all myself! **MY** children **COULD** help me!

Oh yea! And so can your children! What can be delegated?

What can be delegated? My sweet friend, anything! Anything can be delegated. Soak that in.

Well, there are a few things that **only you** can do. Find those things that only you can do and delegate the rest! Oh, it may not immediately be the same standard that you do things yourself, but who looks in the dresser anyway? Plus, think of how valuable it is for children to learn from an early age to pitch in and be a “part” of something bigger than themselves--part of the family. So, take a look at your list of things that YOU are doing each day. Look at what can be delegated. Then, delegate to your little ones!

- **Eliminate!!**

Finally, go back to your trusty list.

What can be eliminated? Be ruthless. Even if you are in doubt, write it down and make a note to evaluate that one.

This is where you may experience anxiety. But, really look at all you do in a day. Are those things really important? Can they be done in another way that can give you more time?

Let me take you home with me again. I love to have healthy, homemade meals. But, reality says that if I want to save time, this was one of those areas that really could be simplified down so much that much of the time spent in the kitchen on a daily basis could actually be eliminated. Gasping? Well, so did I--at first!

I took an honest look at our meals. We could eliminate so much that I could gain hours each week. How? Well, I decided to do more bulk cooking, buy more “ready-made” meals, like Lasagna from Sam’s, Baked Chicken (heat and serve) from Sam’s, Pizza (yep, and my children LOVE it!), and even Heavenly Ham.

What may seem like an extravagance is really a great way to save precious TIME and have great meals whether using the Ham as the meat for a meal or as sandwich meat. One big ham lasts our family for several weeks. In addition to tasting great and saving me time that would be spent in cooking and preparing the ham, we also cut at least an hour of cooking each day for lunch for those two weeks. All I have to do is add vegetables (we have a freezer full of vegetables from the garden that just have to be de-frosted and warmed!) and bread! A typical meal can come together in 15-30 minutes! We can also use food like the Heavenly Ham for lunch. We just make sandwiches and either eat just the sandwich or have a sandwich and homemade soup, that also can be made in a big pot. Easy. Saves time for other more important things in my schedule, like enjoying the family I am feeding.

Now, you may not feel that cooking can be eliminated in your daily schedule. Each of our families are so very different. This is where only God can help you to decide what can be combined, delegated, eliminated OR done by you each day! Hear HIM and He is guaranteed not to fail you!

- **Too Much Going...**

Hummm...well, here we get a little personal, huh? This is an area that God restricted for me. It was just not as clear-cut as DO, COMBINE, DELEGATE, OR ELIMINATE. Instead, my “going” has to be decided each and every day during my daily time with God. Each instance must be thrown up on that altar for God to classify for us!

What about you? Do you struggle with all of the going? Does it get to be too much? What are we to do?

Beloved, **first slow down!** Watch out for too much going. Oh, it may not even be for “bad” stuff. It just keeps us from having what we really want! Think about it...

Is this a hindrance for you?

Think through your day. How much going are you doing and for what?

Let's get a little more personal. Do you go so much (even for good things) that you sometimes find that you cannot truly enjoy your home? When was the last time you had TIME to leisurely relax and enjoy your home? What is the Lord telling you as you think about this...

For me, this is a constant struggle. A daily struggle! There are so many “to-do’s” that press in that I get too busy, going too many directions before I even know it. Then, it is very hard to simplify again.

- **Testing**

I have had a test for years that I periodically do to evaluate my lifestyle and schedule. Let’s do this test together...

- Can I spend one entire week at home without feeling as though I am not getting to do all I need to do? (Yep, I am squirming a bit here too!)
- Is my home supplied well enough that I can stay home without having to “run” to get more things that I “need” to cook, teach my children, manage my home? (Gasp! EEK!)
- Is a quiet, peaceful home-life impossible because I am too busy going to activities? (OUCH!)
- Are all those activities truly God’s will for me in this season? (Sniff, sniff!)
- Would all those same activities go on just as well without ME? (Well, uh, how would I know if I am not there?)
- What can I eliminate to give us more time at home as a family? (Ok! Ok!)
- Does my husband feel that all I am doing is essential? (Well, uh, that one takes things to another level.)

It is amazing how much CAN GO! Just last week, I noticed that we were losing time with errands on almost a daily basis. Oh, and almost the SAME errands every single day. My reasons were simple, I wanted for to be a good steward of the money, not buying anything that could go to waste. But, as a result, our time was being wasted...gas going and coming was being wasted. I was not as prepared for each day as I could have been, and the atmosphere of our home was interrupted every day with “to-do’s.”

This is not the only area that gets out of control easy at our home. Our schedule is just as wild. I must manage our outside activities or very quickly we become their servants.

I know what you are saying. I say the same thing, "Oh! But This is GOOD!" Yep! I am like so many of you. I have a lot of things on my schedule. Actually, a whole lot of things that are very good. However, I have to intentionally eliminate many **GOOD** things from our schedule. Naturally, I am just as much of a "clutter-bug" with TIME as I am with books, papers, etc. Loosening my grip on those "good things" is so, SO hard! Yet, there is no way to truly do exactly what God has called us to do, except to prune. Oh, yea! That hard word.

Cutting back.

Slowing down.

Getting back to the core.

Keeping only what is bearing super big, good fruit, so all of the nutrients (energy) can go into bearing more fruit! Truly, the person was "right on" who said that if satan can't get us to do **WRONG** things, then he will keep us busy doing a lot of **GOOD** things which ultimately hinder us from doing God's **VERY BEST**. That person must have been JUST like me! What about you?

Think through all that you currently "do" in your life. Write down each thing and rate it good or very best.

Too busy “going” to build your home, your ministry, your business? Got too much going on to be ALL THERE, to do what really matters, to do what counts? What will you cut out so you can live out the life God is calling you to?

Ready to make some changes?
Ready to move into ultimate productivity?

Then, slow down.
Slow down to enjoy your home.
Slow down to make your home special, a fortress.
Slow down to make some time to fulfill your resolutions, goals, calling, your life purpose.

It is time to SPRING CLEAN those commitments!

But, How *DO* You Do It?

Have no idea how to even begin? Have no idea what you genuinely could let go? Is it just too confusing? Afraid you or your family will miss something?

- **Go to God with your schedule.** Place all activities on the altar. Wait on Him. I promise that God will lead you, direct you and teach you. He will not leave you in the midst of confusion. He will come alongside of you and help you whether it is big or little choices that need to be made. Just take it all to Him and turn Him loose!

- **Share your heart with your husband.** Let your husband help you to set your schedule. Husbands really do have a gift for seeing through activities. They can see straight through all of the sugar-coating all the way to a vision for how it will really look in our homes and how it will feel as we live it out. They have a keen eye for things that we SHOULD "go for" and for the things that are going to be a trap and get us off track. It is not always easy to follow, but when we dare to listen and follow, it is amazing how much better things go. Get your sweetheart's true insights before adding anything into your schedule. Lay everything out today before him. Ask him what needs to go, what needs to stay, what is missing. You will love the results!
- **Look over all of the activities very carefully, evaluating them honestly.**

Do they work toward the call that God has for your family? How?

Are they necessary? Or do they compete for "down-time" that your family really needs to fellowship, rest, and develop a lifestyle of learning?

Have you been in a rut, not getting things done, with no idea WHY? Let's really look at everything with the "pruning sheers" in hand. Let's be willing to let go of all of the good things so we can reach for the very best things, the things that COUNT!

- **Be on guard!** Titus 2: 3-5 instructs the older women to teach the younger women several very important lessons. One in particular applies here-- **to be keepers of their homes.** A keeper is a "guard" or "one entrusted to guard." Godly women are called to be a guard over their homes. We must constantly guard our home. This is more than just a fun "spring cleaning" that we might want to do, rather it is essential that we come back to a place regularly where we check to

see how we are doing, where we reinforce "the gates" and repair any breaches. We must constantly evaluate whether our homes are in conformity with the vision God has given us for our family. We must constantly check our "gardens" and uproot any weeds or overgrown plants that hinder the growth of our most precious "plants," our children! We have to constantly make sure to have time with God, time with our husbands, time with our children, time within our homes, time to minister to those within our sphere of influence, and time left so we can take care of ourselves. **We have to be all there all of the time. We have to be our very best every single day.** That means that this is not an extra--when-we-get-around-to-it option. This is an essential. We need to set aside time to make sure that everything we do really counts. We need to be on guard against those things that have a way of easing into our lives to our detriment.

Sweet friends, what does it look like? Are there things that need to go? Are there things that are very good, but they are keeping you from the very best? Today, roll up your sleeves and dare to spring clean. Dig in and really do that hard work. It is so worth it! Choose those commitments that are the very best and let go of all of the rest--even the good stuff.

The Bible says that there are works set from the foundation of the world. There are things that really count--and things that do not count. Be faithful in YOUR works!

Seek God's wisdom for your commitments--EVEN your lifestyle and schedule. Don't let the enemy distract you by what is out there somewhere else. Stick to the main thing--that thing that cannot be taken away from you.

- **Don't feel guilty about letting great things go.** Do ALL you can to preserve that home atmosphere from all distractions that are out there. Don't get too busy to build your home for truly you have much to look forward to. Just look at Proverbs 24: 3-4:

Through skillful and godly wisdom is a house (a life, a home, a family) built, and by understanding it is established [on a sound and good foundation], and by knowledge shall its chambers [of every area] be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. Proverbs 24: 3-4

Ah, yes! Build your home! As you do, you will move forward, making this year really count! Roll up those sleeves. Dig in and do the hard work. Let's get busy spring cleaning our commitments for ultimate productivity.

Challenge #8: Spring Clean Your Commitments.

1. Pull out your "Daytimer" or "Brain-in-a-Binder." Take a good honest look at the past month, two months, four months, year.

What does it look like?

Have you been TOO BUSY?

Are you doing what really matters?

Are you getting everything that you want done?

2. Do you have any of the ramifications of a life that needs to "spring clean commitments..."

- ☐ Tired?
- ☐ Weary?
- ☐ Stressed out?
- ☐ Pushed to your limits?
- ☐ Pulled in too many directions?
- ☐ Edgy?
- ☐ Snippy?
- ☐ Irritable?
- ☐ Angry?
- ☐ Bitter?
- ☐ Burned out?

3. Pull out your calendar. Look at all of your commitments. Write them down here:

Go back over each commitment. Ask the following:

Is it necessary?

Is it essential?

Is it stressing us out?

Is it pushing and pulling?

Is it worth it?

Is it the very best...or just another GOOD thing?

4. Got too much in your day? Always struggling with getting things done? It is time to spring clean!

Take a good look at your schedule

What DOES get done each day? If you are not sure, take a regular day to jot down everything you do in a day--even the little things. It will be very informative.

What would you REALLY like to see included each day that you are not getting around to--quiet times? Exercise? Family read-alouds? Family dinner?

Are you doing things that really do not count? Do you see any time wasters? Are there things that may be very good, but are taking the time needed to do what really matters to you?

What will you DO? Not do?

5. Look at your typical day...

Are there things that could be combined so you can accomplish more tasks at one time? What would work for you?

Which things can be delegated to others so you can have more time for things that only YOU can do?

Are there things that simply need to go? Are they past their season? Do they need to be eliminated because they are really not that essential to what you are all about? What are you leaning toward?

6. Count the costs. Go back to that list of what is being done. List them again below. Then, really count the cost. What are they costing you and your family in terms of time and energy?

Are they worth it? Some will be, but also some will not be. We have to see this. When we do, our choices are easier to make. Really count the cost!

7. What can you combine with other tasks and do at the same time?

8. Look back over all that you are doing. Can any of those things be delegated? To whom?

Why not make arrangements today to delegate those things? No excuses. Today is the day!

9. Eliminate! Go back to your list again. What can be eliminated?

Again, really look at all you do in a day. Are those things really important?

Can they be done in another way that can give you more time—How?

Take it all to God. Let Him loose to show you what can be combined, delegated, eliminated or done by you each day! Hear Him and He is guaranteed not to fail you!

10. Do you struggle with all of the going? Does it get to be too much? Are you going a bit too much?

Is it a hindrance to getting things done?

Is it taking away from your family life?

Why not test your life?

- ☐ Can I spend one entire week at home without feeling as though I my home supplied well enough that I can stay home without having to “run” to get more things that I “need” to cook, teach my children, manage my home?
- ☐ Is a quiet, peaceful home-life or ministry/biz life impossible because I am too busy going to activities?
- ☐ Are all those activities truly God’s will?
- ☐ Would all those same activities go on just as well without ME?

- ☐ What CAN I eliminate to give us more time at home as a family?
- ☐ Does my husband feel that all I am doing is essential? God's will?

10. What will you take away from this challenge? Share prepare a live video each day that captures your process. Have fun! See our group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall>

Pruning to Take Your Business UPLEVEL!

Pruning. Yep! Pruning your business? Absolutely! Pruning EVERYTHING to go uplevel?

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Absolutely essential! Stick with me.

Some of you have been following me for years and years. You have probably seen times when I "pruned" things and other times when God obviously did it because I was a bit reluctant or downright resistant (He is exceptional at pruning because He knows how much is on the horizon and how sweet, fulfilling, life-changing, purpose-living that it is!).

I don't know about you, but I have found that either way, whether *I* prune or God prunes, it is so heart-wrenching.

I LOVE WHAT I DO!

I love the projects. I love the "to-do's." I love the ministry opportunities. I love the tools I use.

Pruning hits THOSE just as hard as it hits the things I am really sick of doing. That is never easy!

Pruning is always tough. It requires that we prune back "branches" that we may have grown to love intensely. It requires that we even prune branches that are producing some fruit, but nonetheless still taking sap, energy, and focus from other branches that need to grow and can truly produce bigger, sweeter, better, and more nutritious fruit.

I want the bigger, sweeter, more nutritious, and better fruit. My big problem is that my tendency is to really want the small fruit too. I don't want to "lose" it in the process. However, that is NOT how pruning works. You can't have it all. You have to choose. Lots of little fruit or prune for the big fruit, the better fruit.

Ever had to prune? Then, you know how tough it is. Haven't been there yet? Pruning always comes if you want to bear good, nutritious, big fruit.

I really endeavor to surrender my life on a daily basis so that if there is anything in me, my life, my home, my business/ministry that needs pruning then I won't just fall to pieces when God pulls out the pruning shears. Get it myself before HE gets it! ha!

Well, for the past year (well, seven years), I have seen Him prune some pretty big things, precious things, profitable things--my "babies" that I had grown to be part of ME.

I knew that big things were on the horizon, but I just could not tell what exactly. I thought (twice) it was a national TV show. It still may be, but it was not the one that I *thought* it was going to be. Even after that I still felt change and NEW in the air. I knew that I was moving into a new season of my life and OH! have I. Getting here was not fun, but I love this season of my life already. It is the very best ever but it is demanding **NEW THINGS** of me daily.

I also knew that there were a few things in my life that needed to be removed personally to set me free to go for all that Christ died to give me in this new season of life. And, I am thrilled to see some open doors that are already a result of letting God loose in those areas, and I am already 20lbs lighter physically to boot! (This time that is staying off!)

What does this mean?

It means that pruning can take on several faces. Pruning may affect any and all areas of your business...

- Your projects
- Your to-do's
- Your tools
- Your commitments
- Your ministries
- Your websites
- Your ezines
- Your products
- Your services
- Your ecourses
- Your coaching services
- Your opportunities

BUT! That may not be ALL that God is after! :) He may want to prune even deeper, even more aggressively...

- Your schedule
- Your habits
- Your lifestyle
- Your relationships
- Your relationship with HIM
- Your spirit
- Your body

Your mind
Your emotions (and that attitude)
Your will

Yep! He just might be pruning in any or all of that because there is something HUGE that He wants for you.

Pruning #1...

During my first time of pruning, I was very active at my church and in my community. I had known for almost a decade that I was called into ministry. Well, actually, I had known for two decades. When God moved on my heart during a church service, I did not question the call. I knew it was just time to step up to the call.

This call required a pruning. I had to let go of a lot of things that I was doing in church, in my local support group, and in my community. I will never forget the pain, strain, and struggle that ensued. I read around that time that when a tree is pruned it actually “bleeds.” I felt like I was “bleeding” from my core. I was a hot mess. I really loved everything that I was doing at the time (even if I cannot remember everything now). There was simply not enough capacity, energy, or resources to continue those responsibilities and step into what was ahead.

Now, I really had no idea of what was ahead. At that time, I did not have any idea that God was about to do what He did in and through me. There was no room for the things of the past. There was no time or margin to try to work them in. There was no need for me to hold on—the new was so much more fulfilling. I simply could not hold on to the past and the present, much less the future. When I stepped out and surrendered to the call of ministry/business, everything opened up and shifted.

During that season, I wrote my first book, followed by almost 150 other books. I traveled every week except for 4 weeks a year to minister at events and conferences around the United States. I produced hundreds of audios, wrote hundreds of articles and blog posts. I was published in magazines that wanted my writing—without any query letters or proposals. I participated in best-selling book launches. I spoke on radio, television, and online podcasts/broadcasts. I even published my own books and two magazines. I am certain that I am forgetting things, but my point is that there was literally no room for me to keep the old in my life. I had too much to do during those years to add even one more thing. My life consisted of my marriage, my children, my ministry, and my church and support group. It was perfect for me.

Pruning #2...

Pruning #2 came with a few new twists that I did not expect. Even though the first pruning “taught” me to trust the pruning, it could not prevent or prepare me for how hard

it is to prune branches that are producing big fruit after their season. It also could not fully prepare me for the changes when God wants to add in a different orchard for me to care for. Also, it could not prepare me for when complete "trees" were no longer mine to care for.

I left for church with one prayer on my heart. I had missed church for two weeks while we were out of the country in Italy. I had SOOoo missed my church. I wanted for God to speak anew yesterday. I came home from Italy renewed, revived, re-charged and with a new fire under my tail. Back-up and I will give you a glimpse in "short-story" over my past year leading up to our trip to Italy....

I mentioned earlier that I was given an opportunity to be on a national TV Show. I was jazzed! I have had a vision for television for years, but could not see how it could happen. It was the last thing that I wanted—I hated to see myself on video (still really struggle with it). I had a few barriers and the biggest was that I was battling with my weight (I call it my final frontier! ha!). This show was a weight loss show. Talk about looking perfect. NOT. I got down to a week before flying out, got the call to go, and never heard another thing. TWICE. Well, never heard anything but that the networks went a different direction--TWICE! Pruned!

In getting ready for the show, I had streamlined everything so my family could run all of my affairs while I would be gone for up to 9 months--my home, my daily life, my business, my social commitments, and even my pets (which were my biggest concern! In doing this, I simplified (aka--pruned back as many "branches" to manageable as possible without cutting them totally off) and God even showed some things that were past their season and ready to prune completely or pass the torch to others. Yep, I pruned some little things and some "big babies."

As the year went by, God pruned even more. I found myself in a position that I have been in two other times--both times when my "life" season was changing and when God was ruthless with pruning. I say two times because I remember the call one other time as a little girl as well. God was moving me to live a life of absolute surrender so I could go to a place in my life that I could not **see**--the place of promise. Each and every season, He has required total surrender and total trust. I am talking about surrender and trust that requires radical faith. That radical faith that comes when everything is stripped away and you cannot see how you are going to get to the place where you are believing God to go. You know—that journey great men and women, like Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Joshua, and Jesus were called to step into. The good news is that this time I knew that He is about to do something huge. I knew the feeling of the season shifting. I knew that as precious as these things were, if He was pruning THEM then He had something awesome on the horizon!

So, fast-forward through that year with me. I was sooo ready for God to get moving with the NEW THING. I felt all throughout the year like a child who is helping their mom get

ready for a rummage sale--seeing all of my old-time favs and many of my newest "trinkets" being gathered up and moved out some for sale and some for trash. (THAT is pruning on a different level). I know that "room" HAD to be made that time--I had too many things going on to add **ANYTHING** to my day--there was **NO ROOM** in this "Inn" for anything else. I am glad to say that I was OK with letting things go since I had absolute confidence in God. He had never failed me even one time before--it has always been better, sweeter, and bigger. He always moved me into a place where I can do more for His glory. It has always been good and kept me on the cutting edge.

BUT! This time has been a bit different.

How? He was pruning, pruning, pruning. I wish I could say it was easy and happened fast. It was soul-wrenching. It was full of loss and heartache. It shook everything in my life. It took 36 more months. I was stripped back to literally only a few possessions and a ministry/business that was on hold.

All during this time, God was so sweet. He was everything that I needed. He was my everything. He went in deep and brought me a healing that forever changed my trajectory in life.

During one of the quiet times of this season, I remember that the only Word I heard from Him was to just BE STILL and wait on Him. That is all I have heard for 12 straight months! BE STILL! Really? If you think this isn't maddening, then just get on edge, ready to jump, and hear the words, "BE STILL!" UGH! Of course, this is where it gets sweet!

One day He woke me up and almost verbally told me it was almost time to move out and get moving toward my ultimate calling that was going to be established in that season of my life. Even though I thought I knew what I was all about and I thought I knew my calling, I was about to have an amazing breakthrough where everything changed.

After that morning, we left for a trip to Italy. I worked for months to prepare for our trip. I planned to make that time count. I had outlines, quotes, brainstorm--everything I needed--ready to go. I even had a very generous schedule to make some big things happen. And, guess what? I didn't do **ANY OF IT!** Nope! Between the internet being very in and out and having limited electricity (trying keeping all of my gadgets charged with what I had), **I finally surrendered to just rest, relax, renew, and re-charge** while I was in Italy.

THAT is where everything began to break loose...

The stress that I didn't even realize that I had been carrying around. It was literally falling off of me!

The ties were cut and thrown away to so many of my "precious projects" that I could not see were binding me and holding me back from my next steps. Before that, I remember thinking that I was surrendered, but I was holding on to things. Things that were not "bad" things. For example, there was an intense grief over those things passing away in spite of the fact that they were holding me back from moving forward. I had no idea how little was truly surrendered. I was a hot mess anytime that my plans did not work out. I was able to make almost all of the things that I was doing work in my own strength and in my own budget. I did not see it at the time, but I was in a big funk. I thought I was out there walking on water like Peter. I was about to see what that really meant!

Speaking of grief, I was breaking loose of my grief that I didn't know I had over the "loss" of my past season of life. I **loved** having teens and young adults in my home. As I was moved into that new season of life, the empty nest, I was bombarded by a grief that really surprised me. I never realized that I could be so happy and so sad at the same time. It was a shifting of seasons from a very precious season into the "next" season that would be even more precious. However, the transition was the hardest part. Back to my story...

Italy is a super trip for anyone. I think EVERYONE should plan a trip to Italy. In fact, one aspiration that I have is to go back regularly just for the getaway. I am even brainstorming whether to purchase another home there. REALLY! Wonder why? Because it was the perfect getaway for me to pull away, unplug, and let God loose to really re-charge me. There was something about being half the world away that gave me a clarity in my vision of what is really important and what is not. I could see clearly the WHOLE of my life so far mixed with where I want to be when I take my final breath. The whole trip was fantastic--checking off 3 biggies of my big "Bucket List," enjoying a really romantic time, meeting so many incredible people, and getting out of my little old world. However, want to know what made it all spectacular? It was meeting God there and HEARING HIM for my next few steps. I got MOVING again!

Ok...why tell you all of this?

IF you are not reaching for your dreams, stepping up to your call, writing that book, or producing that product that is on your heart, ask yourself, "IS THERE SOMETHING TO PRUNE?" Maybe as you read my story, God was bringing to your mind some of your "babies" that need to be surrendered, laid down, and given wholly to Him. Maybe as you read my story, God was moving on your heart that you have been here, in this place, for long enough and it is time to get moving again. My sweet friend, I KNOW with complete faith that....

1. You can trust God wholly! He has only **GOOD THINGS** on the horizon for you. Don't believe ME? Just look at Jeremiah 29:11...

For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Check it out in ***The Message Bible***:

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.

You may have had a very bad and disastrous past. You may even be struggling right this moment with disappointments and brokenness. But my sweet friend, the good news today is that **God has a very, very good future for you. The future you could only HOPE for.**

Today, the question is whether we will "yoke up" with Him and choose THAT future or if we will keep on drifting through every day, settling for what the day just gives us. Oh! Today is the day to get up and get moving toward your future, your hope!

Well, before I get too excited, let me share one other thing that I KNOW.

2. Surrender leads us to TRUE LIFE. There is something in each of us that just holds on to things long after their time, their season. Want to know what that is? It is **eternity**. It is the eternity inside of us. Take a peek at Ecclesiastes 3: 11...

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy], yet so that men cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

This passage is a continuation of the beloved passage about time and seasons. Right on topic, huh?

I SO see this clearly. There is a time and a season for everything and for every purpose under heaven. I know that it is hard to move away from the times and seasons that we love, maybe not so difficult to move from the times and seasons where we suffer or struggle, but I do know that it is often very difficult to lift up everything to God in loving surrender. I battle it just like you. However as difficult as it is, it is worth it! The "Promised Land" before you is completely worth it. The "fruit" in the next season is worth it all. If you just step out, you will find that it is sweet, it is incredible, it is fulfilling, and it is satisfying. It is **really living**. It is living that life that Christ died to give you--full, abundant, lavish, meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying. Living. Really living. Living true life.

So today, sweet friend, have you been wandering in the desert for far too long? Have you sensed that God wanted you to get ready to move out, but you have been sitting, sitting, sitting still for far too long? Have you seen Him pruning in your life and I mean pruning you to the core? Wondering, "What MORE does He want before He gets my life in motion again?"

Today, join me in surrender to the pruning shears. Full surrender. Is there something yet to prune? What needs pruning?

Is there something that you have been holding on to that was really good, but past its season? Or somethings? What comes to mind?

Have you been resisting Him, even in a little way?

Today lay it down in full surrender. Lay it down regardless of what you think it will cost you or others--remember that God would not ask that of you if it was not going to be very good! And, step out there moving toward the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ. Will you join me?

Restoring Balance To Completely Overloaded Lives!

Ever had an “unbalanced tire?”

Recently, I had a tire that was driving me crazy! It made the ride horribly rough. I was wore-out just from trying to drive to town because it kept pulling me off the road— obviously in the wrong direction. Just a simple trip to town was completely stressful. My hands were blistered from trying to hold on to the steering wheel the whole way to town and back. I was certain that my car was about to blow up...that something was permanently wrong. Imagine my relief to find that my problem was from one tire that was out of balance. Easy to fix. **The smooth ride only took a few moments to restore.**

Ever had an “unbalanced life?” Well, the similarities are unbelievable! Talk about a rough ride. Talk about a pull in the wrong direction. Talk about stress. Sure, it is easy to fix—but, oh so hard to do.

We are overloaded. Every area of our lives suffers from overload: commitments... possessions... work... information...relationships.

We are a culture that can be characterized as overloaded. We are busy. Hurried. Overworked. Stressed. Rushed. We exceed our limits. We take on way too much. As my pastor says, **“We write checks that our body and mind cannot cash!”** Our productivity suffers. Our bodies suffer. Our vital relationships suffer. We no longer can hear God as He whispers direction, encouragement, and wisdom along our path. We miss the best! We wonder why we end our days empty and without meaning or accomplishment.

We forget what is most important—or at minimum, put it off for another day. The important seldom screams for attention, but the urgent, often insignificant, constantly screams for MORE and more! We get so busy and distracted doing the urgent and demanding in life that we lose the opportunity to impact the important, that in which we are given to leave a legacy!

So, how on earth do we get out of this rat race? How are we to restore balance? If we could restore balance, how could we maintain balance? How could we make life really count for something? Here are some things that the Lord has been teaching me this

year as He has pulled me back from so many GOOD things to restore balance and keep me on the path to leaving a legacy!

SLOW DOWN!

Does that one hurt or what? We are so fast paced! We live on the “fast track!” Think of the rat race we live in: one-hour print...ten-minute oil changes...instant cameras...instant potatoes...instant MICROWAVE meals! Our homes have dishwashers, slow-cookers (don’t be fooled by the name—turn them on as you run out the door for work and have a healthy meal ready to serve at the end of the day!), microwaves, and computers! Oh, and the computer thing! Yep, I am on my computer now (at our local coffee shop—yep, priorities are nice at times!) enjoying the benefits of my blessed computer complete with its battery, cd-writer, and all of the other MUSTS that I am so spoiled with! BUT! For heavens’ sake...think of how spoiled we REALLY are! The computer age has taken over sweet little country stores! We have the Internet (which has faced the demand to have MORE instant connections—remember all of those ads this summer?), E-mail (to instantly communicate!), E-books (to instantly receive our products so we don’t have to wait for the dreaded postal service to deliver!!), E-zines, Auto-responders (didn’t REALLY think those were REAL people there all hours of the day and night??!!), Auto-processing of orders/credit cards, and don’t forget Instant Messenger—for those who find Email to be too slow! We have “Drive-Thru’s” for EVERYTHING—food, cleaners, pharmacies, oil changes, and even (PLEASE GASP WITH ME!) funeral homes! Well...that is where I drew the line! Drive-thru funeral homes! Where are we as a culture? On the fast track!

What do we do? Why not Sllllloooooowwwww DDDDoooooowwnnnnn??? I am not advocating that we STOP using technology. Rather, we should use those tools to make life easier and to make the most of our time. HOWEVER, where it really matters—relationships, home, family, homeschooling, our witness, life...where it REALLY matters, we must slow down! Restoring balance and eliminating overload is simply not possible without slowing down!

Ephesians 5: 15-16 says, **“Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as the wise (sensible, intelligent people), Making the very most of the time [buying up each opportunity], because the days are evil.”** What does this look like? Well, let’s go back to Genesis 33 for a look at the life of Jacob after he completely surrendered his entire life to the Lord. **“My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I WILL LEAD ON SOFTLY, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children**

BE ABLE TO ENDURE, until I come unto my lord at Seir.” Want to slow down, but how? Where do we begin? What can really make a significant difference? Try these:

→ **Decide what is MOST important!** Think over life for a little while! What is it that only YOU can do in this life? Why did God create YOU? What is your life purpose? What is it that God created YOU to do? What can go? Just as our house cannot be cleaned without getting rid of the clutter—otherwise all we are doing is shuffling the clutter around—likewise, we must take an occasional inventory to de-clutter our life! I find this to be a battle JUST as many of you probably do and trust me, this is a life principle that I really stick to! Long ago, God impressed upon my heart that if I were going to be able to truly fulfill my calling that He had for my life, I would HAVE to only do the things that *ONLY I* could do—if it were something that anyone else on earth could do, it would have to go! Still, I will go through periods of my life and begin to get overloaded again only to find when I evaluate the value of all that I do, there are things that sneak into my schedule that vie for my focus and energy! Usually that requires that I take out those really tough pruning shears again to cut back—either by delegating the tasks to someone else so I can be more productive at what ONLY I can do—or even more difficult, get rid of what is overloading me! I know that this is hard, but it is SO key! Take a deep look now at what you are doing. Is it really eternal? Is it the “main thing?” Is it essential? Can anyone else do it? Is it hindering you from the very best? Decide what is most important. You won’t be sorry!

→ **Examine Your Lifestyle!** Take a little while to jot down a journal of what makes up your day? Your week? Your month? Your year? REALLY BE HONEST! Do those things count? What are the days filled with: things that are really important...or lots of fires to put out? Take a bit longer to write out what you would REALLY like to be accomplishing. What do you think that a “perfect day,” if it were possible, would look like? How can you change your day to really slow it down so your life really counts?

→ **Examine Your Motives!** Motives will fool us in a heartbeat! Scripture is so very true as it warns us to beware of our heart. We simply cannot trust our hearts. They will lead us astray every time! What really motivates us? What drives us? If we can determine this, we can evaluate activities and obligations much more effectively! So, what drives you? Ambition? Your life call? The desire to be in control? Don’t trust others to do things? Passion? Guilt? Ego? Insecurity (Can’t say “no?” Afraid that you have no value unless you are “seen” busy?) Constantly trying to please others? Revenge? Money? Oh, I could go on and on...motives are so very deceptive and there are so many. What is your motive? What drives you to do all you do?

Busyness does not mean that we are accomplishing. Nor does busyness guarantee fulfillment. Often, busyness is the very thing that keeps us from the very things that will

bring us satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment. Busyness, given the chance, will keep us from fulfilling our life purpose!

It is all up to us! We can choose which way to go! Enjoy the journey or wait to enjoy the brief delight of the destination? A wasted, bitter, defeated life or a life full of purpose and meaning? Burn out or real accomplishment? Deep, passionate relationships or very real regrets?

Why not slow down? Relax? Enjoy the whole journey—the process getting there AND the destination! Build deep relationships! Stick to those priorities! Simplify life so you reach for the very best! Seize each moment!

REDEEM THE TIME!

Time! Friend or foe? Have enough time in your day? Or are you a truly kindred spirit, asking God for just a few good 80-hour days and the energy to use them to the fullest? Ha! I have a good feeling that if your prayer is for that one, that you will also find that God will whisper sweetly in your ear to say that the problem is not that we do not have enough time...or that we are using time to the fullest...or even that we waste time. Rather, He would say that we need to make it our ambition to redeem the time—each and every moment we are given!

A few months back, my pastor taught a series of messages entitled ***From Burnout to Balance***. In his series, he challenged us to look at time as a great big “bank account.” He said that this account is one that we are guaranteed to have daily deposits made on our behalf by God each and every day. We each get our fair share. No one gets more. No one gets less.

Think of this awesome gift! Each and every day we are given a gift that can impact all of eternity—or be squandered away into oblivion. Each day we are given this gift without any regard to our stewardship from the day before! TWENTY-FOUR HOURS! ONE-THOUSAND, FOUR HUNDRED, FORTY MINUTES! EIGHTY-SIX THOUSAND, FOUR HUNDRED SECONDS! Deposited in our “account” each and every day!

And...with this gift, we are free to use it in any way we choose. We can waste it or use it wisely. We can make a difference—or misuse it! But! One thing is guaranteed each day with all that is deposited on our behalf—it must be used up before the end of the day...it cannot be carried into tomorrow!

We all have 24 hours put into our spending account each and every day. What we do with that time is in our hands! Will we be faithful? Will we use it wisely? Will we make it

count for eternity? Will we use our gift to the fullest? Will we use our gift for what really counts?

What are your thoughts?

If we want to live a life of balance, we must guard this precious gift! We must measure our time as one of our greatest resources we have to invest in this life! This requires that we go back to our precious Giver and seek HIM for how we can most faithfully invest each moment! We must let Him be the Lord of our schedule, our to-do's, our calendar. We must commit our way—ALL OF OUR WAY—to Him from our work to our studies that we pursue to our commitments to our books that we read to the activities that we participate.

We must be careful to set a guard on our time to be sure that we do not flippantly do without thinking or take on too much that we forfeit the best! We need to purpose to really do those things that are "NEEDFUL" (remember Luke 10: 38-42?) and not just the "stuff" that we think MUST be done! We need to constantly evaluate our choices and weigh them to see if they are truly those things that help us to reach our life call.

Time...what do you think? Redeem this precious gift so our lives can be balanced? You bet!

So, what do you think?

SELL OUT COMPLETELY TO GOD'S WILL!

Does this scare you to death? Are you seeing visions of little grass huts...no electricity...bugs...complete with the stench of underarm odor? What do you think it means to "sell out completely to God's will?"

Oh, beloved! My first image of total surrender to God admittedly envisioned life on a continent that was far, far away from all of the comforts of home. Still have no idea if there is a continent that could be as disgusting as my visions were. Sure, I trusted God for eternity, but never thought of heaven in the same way that I thought of my life on earth totally surrendered to Him!

Now, as we move into our 34th year as a ministry, I have to tell you that God has a very, very good plan for us! I have seen it by experience. I absolutely believe it is the same for you as it is for me.

He does not call us, equip us, and then send us to an assignment that forfeits our trust and confidence in Him. In fact, one thing that I am thrilled to say is that although there IS work in our calling, there is delight and fulfillment that cannot be found in anything

else under the sun. Seeing His provision is unbelievable. Watching His anointing fall is indescribable. Plus! No grass huts so far!

Give your ALL to God! Sell out. Don't hold anything in reserve. Abandon ALL for the call.

Scared? What are your concerns?

Just give Him a try! Take a look at Jeremiah 29 in ***The Message Bible***. Look it up and copy it here:

God says to us:

“I know what I’m doing, I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I’ll listen. When you come looking for me, you’ll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I’ll make sure you won’t be disappointed.”

In that passage, what jumps out to you?

Oh, beloved, not only will you never, ever be disappointed, but you will find that His good plan will be truly good—satisfactory for you, satisfying, fulfilling, completely sufficient!

Wonder just what could YOU do? Too young? Too old? Too poor? Not qualified—or so you think? Well, beloved! Know that God has called each and every one of us to function in His Body. We are the mouthpieces here on earth for Him. We are the feet for Him. We are the hands here in our community for Him! He has called and equipped each and every one of us to be a part of His Body here on earth! We each have talents, spiritual gifts, natural bents and interests, and experiences that can minister to those that are growing in the Body AND those that need to join the Body of Christ! God needs all of us working and functioning properly if His Kingdom—His way of doing things—will come to earth! He needs for us to be that light that shines in the darkness to bring others to Him. Just go into a dark, dark room... Light one candle... See what a difference you can make right where you are!

Have no idea what His plan is for you? Take a look at Romans 12: 1-2.

Copy the verse from your favorite version:

He promises in verse two that YOU can know His good, perfect, and acceptable will for you! Yes, YOU can know that plan! How? Going back through this passage, we see how:

- **Become a living sacrifice—EVERYDAY!** Completely yielded. Completely dedicated. Completely committed to Him and His Way! Giving Him our ALL! All that we are: our plans...gifts...bents...talents... ambitions... ideas... methods... techniques... fears... delights...concerns... all presented to God as a living sacrifice EVERY SINGLE DAY! If we truly desire to know the good, acceptable, perfect will of God for ourselves or our children, we must first obediently present ourselves as a complete, living sacrifice. There may be things in our lives (things that are very precious and difficult to get rid of) that must be burnt up as a sacrifice for us to be prepared to receive God's very best OR we may find that what we bring to sacrifice before the Lord is acceptable in His sight and can return home with us (like Abraham as he willingly prepared to sacrifice his beloved Isaac). However, the key is not in what God does with our sacrifice, it is in our heart coming before Him daily, presenting ourselves and all that we have before His throne!
- **Don't not conform to the world; but conform to Christ!!** Yep! We either conform to the world or to Christ! We cannot live for one without forsaking the other! Want to know God's plan? Let go of the world's standards, the world's ways, the world's requirements, the world's traditions, and the world's bondage.

Let go of the lies of the world! We must stop serving the world at the expense of becoming ALL that God wants for us to become! If we want to live an abundant life—a balanced life—the world's way will never work! Only God's way brings balance, freedom, and true, abundant LIFE that we are really searching for! As we grow in relationship with Christ, daily become LIKE HIM, we find security and LIFE! We find peace! We find hope! We find the direction that we have been looking for all along the way! We find freedom to become ALL that God designed for us to become! Talk about LIFE! We move beyond balance to abundant life!

- **Be transformed by the daily renewal of your mind!** The last key to getting to know God's plan! However, this one is SO VITAL! If we truly want to live a balanced, abundant life, we must sell out to God's will. BUT, however much we want to sell out, unless we truly let Him change our life, we will just spin our wheels in the same ruts, never becoming all that God wants for us to become! How is our mind transformed? Life changed? This life transformation begins as we sit at the feet of Jesus. As we daily immerse ourselves in His Word, we will begin to be transformed. Then, we will soon have different priorities... different beliefs... different ambitions... and soon, we will be able to prove what is good, acceptable, and perfectly in the will of God. If we never experience this transformation, we will always find ourselves burdened under a yoke of bondage. We will always find ourselves looking in all the wrong places for direction, approval, meaning, purpose, and rest! We will constantly battle overload. We will find life bumpy and pulling us into life's "ditches!"

God has a precious plan EVEN for you. Surrender ALL to Him. Let Him have it all. Let Him do His work in you. Don't rush. Don't drag around. Don't run from it. Live each day letting Him have your all, your everything, in complete abandonment! Balance will come—but, beloved there is so much more that will rush into your life. Purpose, meaning, abundant life. Go for it!

BUILD MARGIN—BREATHING ROOM—INTO YOUR LIFE!

Ever been at rock bottom? We see many of our favorite Bible characters that we get to know during good times, but I think my favorites are those that we get to see when they are rock bottom, with no breathing room, at the point that my mother would have said, "I've had it!" Ever just "HAD-IT?" What gets you there?

Imagine for yourself the grief and utter pain that Job was experiencing as he cried out in Job 3:26, “I have NO peace, NO rest, NO quiet!”

Drop into the conversation with Paul as he declared that he got to his “breaking point” in 2 Corinthians 1: 8-9. Copy it from your favorite version:

Here is mine:

“For we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about the affliction and oppressing distress which befell us in the province of Asia, how we were so utterly and unbearably weighed down and crushed that we despaired even of life itself. Indeed, we felt within ourselves that we had received the very sentence of death, but that was to keep us from trusting in and depending on ourselves instead of on God Who raises the dead.”

Finally, journey back to 1 Samuel as we are first introduced to Hannah at the point of utter desperation—you probably know a bit about her story. Barren. Broken. Taunted (by her husband’s other wife! Who had NO problem bearing children!).

Empty. Crushed in soul. Oh, let’s join her at the point that she had “had it!”...

“Crushed in soul, Hannah prayed to God and cried and cried—inconsolably. Then, she made a vow: Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, If you’ll take a good, hard look at my pain, if you’ll quit neglecting me and go into action for me by giving me a son, I’ll give him completely, unreservedly to you. I’ll set him apart for a life of holy discipline...”

As she was praying, she sunk even lower as she was completely misunderstood by the priest, who thought she was drunk! We hear more of her heart in her reply to him...

“Oh no, sir—please! I’m a woman hard used. I haven’t been drinking. Not a drop of wine or beer. The only thing I’ve been pouring out is my heart, pouring it out to God. Don’t for a minute think I’m a bad woman. It’s because I’m so desperately unhappy and in such pain that I’ve stayed here so long!”

Relate? I know that these precious vessels were crying out in the midst of trials and life events that were too much. However, I don’t think that we find ourselves at the point of desperation without first pushing limits for quite some time! We haven’t got margin to deal with the daily-ness of life—much less those life struggles, crisis situations, losses, and persecutions that inevitably knock most of us off our “rocker” into despair!

Think about it...if you are the average person in our society today, you live on fast-food, crazy hours, no sleep. You are chronically rushed (or late), overworked, exhausted, overloaded! What is the solution? Build margin. Build some breathing room. Simplify life so there is room for change...space for disruptions. How? Here are some suggestions that I am trying to implement in my own life:

Accept HUMAN Limitations! Can you sense how hard that is for me to type? Oh, here it where it gets harder, it is not my idea, it is the Word of God too: “I have seen that everything human has its limits and end no matter how extensive, noble, and excellent.” (Psalm 119: 96a) Ouch! If there is a battle for balance (and you know there is!), this is one of the biggies. We all have limits. But, where we need more margin is that we don’t say “NO” when we face limitations. As I shared above, we “write checks our body and mind cannot cash!” The world says, “You can have it all!” “You can do it all!” Even the church gives the illusion that “I can do all things through Jesus Christ.” However, the Bible is very clear that we can only do those things that are His things—His will. We have limits. We have space limits. We have body limits. We have emotional limits. Jesus does not give us a blank check to do all things. Much less, Jesus will not empower us to do all things. He only empowers us to do those things that He calls us to do. He never gives us anything that is beyond our abilities and resources to do. One clear way to judge what we are called to do from those things that we are not called to do is to look at our limitations: our red lights, shut downs, overloads, crashes. We need to look at those warning signs: pain, fatigue, stress, irritability, frustrations. Our human limitations are God’s boundaries in our lives that help us to know that we are overextended and writing checks our bodies and minds cannot cash. Respecting human limitations will restore balance to even the most overloaded life.

Ok, let’s get very real, very transparent. Where do you run out, all out?

In what ways are you, “writing checks that your body cannot cash” in your everyday life?

What does it look like to accept your limitations? What difference does this make?

Expect Interruptions! Proverbs 22:3 says, “**A prudent man sees trouble coming and ducks—a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered!**” If there is one thing in life that is FOR SURE, we can be sure that life seldom goes as planned. Life cannot be predicted. Just think about it...what truly messes up your schedule? Traffic? Car trouble? Delays? Crisis situations? Special needs along the way? We must plan for interruptions or our lives will constantly be out of balance, our schedules will never work, and much of life will be squandered! Expect interruptions and plan room for them into every day!

Delays, crisis situations, interruptions are inevitable. How do those rock your boat?

How do delay, crisis, interruptions currently hold you back from what God is calling you to do?

How can you “overcome” delay, crisis, and interruptions so they no longer hold you back?

Put SPACE Into Your Schedule! Ever had your PDA/Planner/Calendar/ Briefcase complain about an overstuffed schedule? Actually, my planner looks so much more “professional” when it is packed out. Only I don’t handle it so well. For the last few years, I have really evaluated what I was doing that was causing me to get off my schedule and not get around to all of my to-do’s. Now, granted, some days it is ME or my darling little ones. But, overall, 95% of my schedule woes are also the culprit behind life getting just way too busy—over-scheduling. Schedules, like daily life, only work when there is space in each day. Just like we see with the life of Christ (see Matthew 5-10), our life is filled with distractions, interruptions, crisis situations. We can battle against these or we can add margin (space) into our lives that gives us room to use these as the main thing—opportunities for ministry, opportunities for the very best lessons, teachable moments, hands-on discipleship, Not only are we able to step up to the call as it beckons us, but we are less likely to spin out of balance constantly,

Ok...here we go. What needs to GO?

I know how tough this is! I love everything that I do. However, the truth is that I do not like letting go of the things that are on my schedule. I truly love everything that I do. However, if I do not let go of things that are beyond their season or reason, I cannot make time for what really matters. Relate? So, what does this look like in your life?

Prune Life To Yield MORE Fruit! Several years ago, one of my dearest friends bought her dream land. Every time that I go to visit her, our family laughs because just driving up her driveway I begin to see a view that rivals that of the gorgeous view on ***The Sound of Music***, thus tempting me to begin to sing—"The HILLS ARE ALIVE...with the sound of music..." The land is gorgeous. But it is more than that. It is also productive. However, at first it wasn't. Rhea bought the land, complete with an orchard. Sound ready to go? Well, not exactly! Needing a bit of help with her fruit trees, she called in a professional. To her shock, she looked outside to find her precious orchard looking like a bunch of sticks in the dirt. Pruning began to have a whole new meaning. What looked like devastation actually was the key to those best fruit ever. Bigger fruit. Sweeter fruit. More fruit.

I remember the year that Rhea was getting her first fruits after the pruning. It was a year that I needed that practical example of pruning just so I would have the nerve to let God loose with His pruning shears. I can't say it was easy! It was probably one of the most challenging times in my entire life.

I had lived my life pretty much just without much thought. However, God was wanting for me to yield up everything so He could prune back all that was diseased...all that was broken...all that was zapping my strength...all that was causing double-vision...all that was keeping me from bearing the fruit He had planned from the foundation of the earth. 1 Corinthians 6: 12a says,

"Everything is permissible (allowable and lawful) for me; but not all things are helpful (good for me to do, expedient and profitable when considered with other things)."

There are many good things that God would not have a problem if I were to do them. However, those good things can keep me from producing all of the fruit that I can bear. It becomes a choice thing for me. I can choose whether I will allow Him total control of my entire life—even the schedule... commitments... my going... my doing. I am the one who can sit down, yield to the shears, and stay ready to bear more and more fruit. Likewise, I can also resist. But...I don't really like that alternative!

At the end? At your limit constantly? "had it?" Take a good look at your life. Check for margin. Not enough? What IS there?

Ready to prune? What will you cut away in order to see your biggest, best fruit?

Build margin. Create space. Watch what happens.

DE-STRESS!

Yep! Gulp. De-stress. This one got you out of whack before too? You are not alone, beloved!

Want to know the #1 complaint in our culture? The booger behind despair? The reason that most quit? The reason that many never begin? You have got it. **The stress. The chaos. The mess. The lack of organization or ability to “keep it together.”** Want to battle for balance? This little devil will give you quite a challenge.

Yep! If there is a need among the body of Christ, this just might be it. But, how? Here are some quick tips for restoring balance when it all gets bumpy from the stresses of life...

Find Your Stressors. What throws you for a loop? What takes you into a “nose-dive?” What “stalls” your flight? What are your biggest stressors? What causes your stress? Identify the real culprit—HINT: it is not your husband (!!) or your children (!!) or God (!!). Look at your life honestly. What really stresses you out? Holding onto your stress? Carrying a burden that you do not have to carry? Anxiousness? Discontent? Strife? Expectations? Willfulness instead of willingness and total surrender and total abandonment? Find your stressors! Know what really “punches” your buttons!

PLAN. Plan ahead. Well in advance. One saying that always pops into my head when I think of the word plan is, “If we fail to plan, we really plan to fail.” Nothing brings more stress than living life without direction, without a plan, always under “crisis” management, making decisions on a moment-by-moment basis. If this is stressing you out, try to plan ahead. Plan out your goals. Plan out your schedule. Even the mundane things—plan out those daily routines, even going so far as to write them out. How does this help? Well, decisions are made, saving those precious brain-cells for other uses. Trust me this works wonders. So, plan. Plan well. Don’t wait until the last minute. Plan...then, you can settle in to go a slow pace.

Write it DOWN. Give your brain a rest. Talk about stressing out—our brains will stress out if we are keeping all of our to-do’s...plans...goals...heartbeats...EVERYTHING on our brain. Write it down. Not only will it help to keep things from slipping between the cracks, but it will also help us to evaluate where we have come from and where we have to go. Plus, the best yet. We will have a sense of accomplishment when we look back.

Watch that attitude. There are going to be some life-stresses that quite honestly cannot be changed. However, we need not walk in a life of defeat and stress. Instead, when we recognize life-stresses that cannot change, that is the time to sit right down at the feet of Jesus. Ask Him to show the purpose. At minimum, KNOW that victory is guaranteed. There is no temptation or trial that is original with any of us. Nor is there anything that we are allowed to walk in that is not first filtered through the loving hands of God. He always guarantees victory. So, watch that attitude. When things cannot change, change what can—that perspective...that attitude.

Delegate. What is it that makes it so hard for moms to get help? Our children LOVE to be Mommy's helpers. We really steal their blessings when we do not delegate to them. Even toddlers can help fold a load of laundry. Don't try to do it all by yourself. Delegate and you will find some of the stress dissipating.

Get enough rest. Oh! This one is soooo tough for me. But, let's honestly look at what happens in our families when we get tired: don't get enough sleep>get cranky>don't enjoy life>not too great to be around> others get cranky> irritates you more>get more tired... Why not simply get that rest?? Sleep AND that rest in body, spirit, and soul.

Self-control. Hummmm... Such a challenge! However, we will find ourselves constantly stressed out until we learn to say "no" to those activities, commitments, all that stuff. Bit-by-bit, they wear us down. Saying, "no" eliminates the whole threat of stress from the onset.

Keep it simple. Don't overload! We already know we cannot do everything, but we have to remember this when choices are there to be made. Always look at anything new, whether an activity or a possession, judging its importance by what you are willing to swap for it. This works for everything—shoes, books, activities, commitments. Keep it simple. You can't do or have everything, so go for the very best.

Give yourself a break. Don't pick yourself to death nor let others pick you to death either. It is so easy to focus on the negative, get overwhelmed by the weaknesses and inadequacies, and get frustrated about how far you have to go. Then, people sure do not help. Let another person loose in your life with the license to critique you or your situation and you will be ready for the nut-farm. Give yourself a break. See this thing as a process—you will not arrive until it is all over but the shoutin' so relax, enjoy life, and give yourself a break.

Find ways to fill your cup. We are each wired so very different. Certain things stress some of us that do not bother others. Likewise, certain things just fill our cup. Stop! Step back. Shift into low gear –or reverse. Do what it takes to de-stress. Rest. Relax. Rejuvenate. Renew. Refill. Whatever it takes, find those things that fill you back up. Oh!

The benefits go beyond de-stressing and restoring balance—you finally have living water to pour forth into the lives of others.

Make the most of EVERY minute! Cherish this time. Make sweet memories. Take time for the most important—the best things. Your husband. Your children. Your family life. Don't let life just slip by! Look at life and decide what you would do if this were your last year...last month...last week...last day? Would you go to the park to enjoy watching them play? Would you cuddle up and read a great book? Would you take off to the beach? Why not make those things YOUR thing? Oh, and probably find that education can be easy along the way too.

De-stress. Crawl up into the great big comfy arms of our loving Heavenly Father. Let Him hold you during the most turbulent or trivial stresses of life. Let Him restore your spirit. What you are doing is vital. Your enemy wants you stressed out, overloaded, out of balance. He is defeated. When he snarls, throws forth his darts, and lies to you, just snuggle up closer to your Lord. Give Him the struggles. Give Him expectations. Give Him every single burden. You won't be sorry!

Let's take a minute to talk about stress. What stresses you out?

God gives us strategies that work only for us. As you read through this section, what did God speak to you about how to handle your own stress?

The best way to overcome stress is to have a plan before it hits. What are some things that always work to help you destress? List them:

GET BACK TO THE MAIN THING--RELATIONSHIPS!

Remember Matthew 22: 37-40? Jesus was asked, “What IS the most important thing? The bottom line? The main thing?” I love Jesus’ ability to summarize all of life in one response. He summed up the main thing in three commands: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and body...to love others as ourselves...and obviously, to love ourselves. Do you see this? The main thing...the bottom line...the most important thing was relationships. However, when we get overloaded, the very first thing that we skimp on is relationships.

Want to restore balance and get rid of all of that overload? Take a deep look at the main thing. Anytime things are out of balance, take a look to see how relationships are doing? Are they being “put off” until the pressures go away? Are they quiet while the rest of the “stuff” screams, demands, and pulls you to pieces?

Ask God to constantly keep you attuned to relationships in which you are charged with ministry. Ask God to show you ways that you can love and minister to Him. Ask Him to quicken you all along the way with ideas and precious opportunities for ministering to those you are called to minister to—your husband, your children, your parents, your

siblings, those that come within your sphere of influence. Cry out to Him to help you guard your time so moments do not slip away leaving a hole in this vital area of life.

Ready to get real again? 😊 Let's talk about relationships for a bit. How are your relationships right now?

Relationships are our number one ministry. They are our greatest work. They are the call. What are some practical ways that you can get back to the main thing—relationships?

SO...WHAT DO YOU THINK???

Ready to get out of this rat race? Ready to restore balance? Make life really count? Sit at the feet of Jesus. Snuggle up close. Listen for each beat of His heart. Let Him pull you back from that “stuff.” Let Him show you how to let go of those GOOD things and grab onto the very best. Give Him a chance to restore balance and set us on the path to leaving a legacy.

What is your main takeaway from this section?

Challenge #9: Restoring Balance to Completely Overloaded Lives

In this challenge, work through the chapter and implement. Then, prepare a live video that captures what your original struggle was, your plan for restoring balance, and how it is going. Have fun! See our group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall>

Create Margin!

Oh! Yes! If we really want to make this year count, we are going to need margin.

What is margin?

Margin is room and space in your life and schedule and your projects so that you can do what really matters.

With margin, we have space to enjoy the journey. We have space to minister to the little and big needs that pop up. We have room in our schedule and our day to make the most of the opportunities that have a way of typically interrupting our big plans--when they are probably the real plan all along. But, how do we do it? That is where it gets tricky! Here are some things that I do:

- **Cut the stuff.** There are so many nonessentials that we bring into our life. Sure, they may be good things, but just as I mentioned before, good things will cause us to miss the very best. We have to be willing to cut the stuff, even the good stuff, if we are going to live a life that counts.

Think about your life. What “stuff” needs to go?

Is it hard to let those things go? Why?

If you let go of those things, how would your life look?

- **Only allow the eternal--not the temporal.** This is a big test for everything that we do. Typically, the temporal screams, squeals, and pitches a fit if we push it aside. It blares out its demands. It pushes. It presses. The eternal quietly waits for you to do it. It is that thing that we would love to do, but we put off. It is that thing that is on our list of resolutions, probably been there for 10 years, but we never get it done because there are so many other things that are squeaking, squealing, and demanding our attention. Funny thing, the eternal is really the only thing that counts. If we look back at last year, it was the thing that we knew we were supposed to do, but it was one of the only things that did not get done. At this minute, it is that “thing” that you know you need to do, but you were hoping I would not ask you about it. It is the eternal. It is what really matters. Without the eternal, we live a mediocre life when we all want a life that counts. That begins with a year that counts. And, that begins by only allowing the eternal, not the temporal each day. Let's do it and make this year really count!

Thinking over the things in your day and your life. What is eternal? What is temporal?

Temporal:

Eternal:

- **Create space in your day.** One sure-fire clue that we are doing a lot of stuff and not really doing what counts in when we have a day that is full to overflowing without any space. It is a warning sign! This is why we need margin. Margin brings extra space. That extra space helps us to do the things that really matter. If there is not enough space and every day just keeps flying by, it is time to do some "surgery" on our daily schedule so that we can get rid of the "fat" that is weighing us down. Cut back. Eliminate. Cut out. Get down to what really matters and surround that with lots of space!

Now, this is a tough question. We cannot create space in our lives without being very careful about what we include in our daily schedule. So, let's look at everything right now. What can be cut back?

What can be completely eliminated?

- **Choose the best and let go of the rest.** Be picky! We all have the same amount of time each and every day. Everyone has to make a choice of what is going to be done. Those who are "making things happen" and living a life that counts are the ones who have made a big choice--they have chosen the very best and they have let go of all of the rest. Every choice costs us something. It takes time, energy, money. Either we spend it with something that matters or we waste it away on things that just fritter our days away. Want for this year to count? Be picky! Choose the best. Let go of all of the rest.

When thinking about things under the categories as best, good, the rest, what is your very best?

What truly needs to go?

Is there something that is “best” that you need to choose right now?

- **Be reasonable.** Don't push your limits! Oh! I see this all of the time. Perhaps it is a symptom of a culture that does not value margin as much as functioning on overload. Let's face it--we have so many amazing tools at our fingertips. But, what do we do with it all? More and more and more and more! The typical Christian woman pushes her limits, burning the candle on both ends, then wonders why she has nothing left over. There is nothing more to give. More is not better. We have got to learn to be reasonable. We have got to learn how to do the things that matter and not push to the point of collapse. This year, let's make every choice count. Then, we will let go of all of the excess that pushes us past our limits.

Ok, here is where I struggle. How about you—do you struggle with being reasonable with the load that you carry? How are you doing in this area?

- **Remember strength comes from focus** not from how much is in your day. I guess you are seeing by now how important focus is, but here it is again. Far too many people equate the big long list as the thing. I have my big long lists too. But, the real strength behind doing the right things--the things that count -- is in doing the thing that God has called us to do with laser sharp focus. Giving it our all. Not comparing to others. Not throwing it aside in order to chase the next shiny object. Not trying to be super-mom. If we want to get things done that really matter, we are going to have to learn the importance of focused attention to the main thing. That is real strength. That clears away the stuff. That helps us to live a life that really matters. That helps us make this year count.

How is your focus? Are you able to focus? Why or why not?

- **Know that you don't come this way again**--these are the days that you will remember. Talk about a great way to weigh out the value of things that fill our day. What do we want to remember? What will really matter? Keep those things. Let go of the rest. That will bring the margin needed to make this year count!

Getaway and Get a Plan!

I remember years ago listening to a ***Focus on the Family*** broadcast with James Dobson. He was talking about a getaway that he took to "finish" a book. It sounded dreamy---however, TOTALLY mythological, impossible, and unattainable. I remember thinking how nice that "would" be one day, but at that time I could not even go to the bathroom without little ones knocking on the door NEEDING ME. I couldn't even get a bath at the end of the day in peace. If *I* got away, disaster happened.

Are you thinking the same thing?

Well, sweet friends, you are HERE! This IS your getaway to get a plan. Today is very, very important. We all need regular times to getaway...

Time to get a good look at ourselves

our lives

our businesses

our calendars

our schedules

our ideas

our goals and dreams

our plans

our projects

our systems

our vision

our motivation

our hindrances

and even our spiritual state--OURSELVES!

This is definitely NOT your typical "planning" workshop. This is not your typical "planning" or "implementation" challenge. This is a time to truly "getaway and get a plan of action" to take your life, home, business, ministry, heart where God wants for you to be.

My goal is to inspire, encourage, and equip you in such a way that I help you to be even more productive, prolific, profitable, and successful than ever before.

Hold on tight! We are going to dig in and dig in deep!

This section loaded with information--

NOT to overwhelm you

NOT to confuse you

BUT! To meet you wherever you are--some of you have mentored ME and some of you have been mentored by me for years, some of you have been in business or ministry all of your life and some of you are still trying to decide if this is your time, some of you have had immense success and some of you are in a place where you feel like you are going under and need a lifeline.

Today is FOR YOU!

The information is here for you to pick up what God leads you to pick up....spit out the bones of the things that are NOT for you today....and even hold on to some of the information until later when you need that step, that information (we DO live on!)

So, relax

Retreat

Recharge

Refuel

This is your time to pull away, retreat (getaway) and get a plan!

Let's dig in.....

Getaway and Get Yourself in Gear!

I mentioned in the last section that I remember years ago listening to a ***Focus on the Family*** broadcast with James Dobson. He was talking about a getaway that he took to "finish" a book. It sounded dreamy---however, totally mythological, impossible, and unattainable. I remember thinking how nice that "would" be one day, but at that time I could not even go to the bathroom without little ones knocking on the door needing me. I couldn't even get a bath at the end of the day in peace. If *I* got away, disaster happened.

What were you thinking?

Well, sweet friends, you are HERE!

This IS your getaway to get a plan--

Of course, this is not and should not be the only time you getaway to get a plan. If you want to stay motivated through it all, through the years. If you want to be productive--doing what really matters and getting it done even with your family and your life. If you want to truly be prolific--producing products that really matter and meet the needs of those you are called to serve. If you want success--true success.

YOU MUST HAVE REGULAR TIMES TO GETAWAY!

It may not be to an exotic location

It may not be to a cabin for a month

BUT--We all need regular getaways.

How about--

1. An afternoon at the park? Kick back under a big welcoming tree and work while your little ones scamper about?

2. A morning breakfast with God? On your deck? At a restaurant? At the dining table? In your own bed?

3. A time away at a coffee shop?

4. A hotel for the weekend or night?

5. A vacation cabin/condo

What would work great for you?

ESSENTIAL NOT AN EXTRA!

1. Make the time. It is ESSENTIAL, NOT AN EXTRA!

2. Invest. Your business will ONLY be as great as what you invest into it--into yourself, into your tools, into your technology, into your continued learning, into coaching, into your project.

3. FOCUS. Leave all of the STUFF behind. Work on ONE THING--planning, working on a project, hearing God, etc.

4. ENJOY

5. Getaway. To hear God. To plan. To brainstorm. To work with focus. To get it done/ Getaway regularly.

GET YOURSELF IN GEAR!

Take Time to Plan! To fail to plan is to really plan to fail. Many who get frustrated and quit along the way seem to have one major common denominator, ***they do not plan.*** Sure, they learn stuff--but, like the Bible says, "They are ever learning" and not getting anywhere! Want success? Of course! Then, to grasp on to ultimate success, you **MUST** getaway and get your plan—regularly.

WHY?

- **Without a vision, people PERISH!**
- **Without a plan, we will not have** clarity on what needs to be done, what to do each day to get there, how to fit it into our already busy lives (and navigate around the distractions, interruptions, melt downs, and chaos situations) or even when we are success.
- **We won't have that excitement, fulfillment, and contentment that comes from seeing it or knowing when we are done.**
- **Without a vision and a plan, you just get up and exist--putting your goals, resolutions, ideas, and dreams on hold--collecting dust!**

We need to PLAN!

To Take Time to Get a Vision. A CLEAR vision of what we want and where we want to be! Do you see it? What does it look like?

Get a vision!

Challenge #10: Get the Vision!

Set aside time to really pull aside with God to get the vision that you need for your life, your home, your homeschool, your business, your ministry. Write it out. Write it out so clear that you can truly “see” what you are all about and where you are going. Share your vision in a video for our Facebook Group. Share how this will make a difference in your life, business or ministry. See our group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall/>

Set goals!

Goals are the stepping stones toward the vision.

Once you have a vision, you need to brainstorm--all of the steps. All that is included to get where you are going. Put it all on paper! This works for your big vision, your dreams, your business, your life, your commitments, your to-do's---down to the smallest task.

So, set goals. BAD NEWS--1/2 of those who have yearly goals quit by June. GOOD NEWS--1/2 of those who write them down reach them. Of course, it is one thing to set goals and quite another to reach them---we all know that. But there are keys. Make sure that they are:

- **REALISTIC**--Otherwise, they will frustrate you and discourage you. You will LOSE your motivation!
- **MEASURABLE**--You need to be EXACT and VERY SPECIFIC about what you want! You need to be able to measure it!
- **SPECIFIC**--What, why, and by when? Describe it? Be specific about what you want, why you want it, when you want it done! BE SPECIFIC--the more specific the more likely you will be to reach it!
- **WRITTEN**--Write it out! *"Goals not in writing are just wishes."* So, write them down. Brain dump. Put them into writing on your calendar. Put on goals (projects, commitments, to-do's) per month Plan it out--with lots of margin. Put one phase per week. Put to-do's per day. Focus on each task until done.
- **CLEAR**-- Make sure that your goals are very realistic, measurable, specific, and clearly understood.
- **DEFINITIVE**--Set a deadline.

Challenge #11: Set Goals

So, you have got the vision, let's set goals or steps to reach your goals. Take some time to get alone and think through what it is going to take to get things done that reach for your vision. What will you work on first? Brain dump first. Get everything out of your brain and on to paper. Write it out. Write it out so clear that you can truly "see" what you are all about and where you are going. Put it on your calendar—deadlines. Share your vision, goals, and calendar in a video for our Facebook Group. Share how this will make a difference in your life, business or ministry. See our group here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall/>

WRITE IT ALL OUT--Brain-Dump!

Get Everything out of your head and onto paper! EVERYTHING!

- ☐ Your Vision!
- ☐ Your Goals
- ☐ Your Wishes
- ☐ Your Needs
- ☐ Your Projects
- ☐ Your Things To Do
- ☐ Your Ideas--project ideas/ideas for your business/ideas for your homeschool/ideas for your family

How?

1. Grab a Notebook
2. Pull apart to braindump. Dump it out--EVERYTHING!
3. Keep it with you. So you can add to it all along the way. So you can work it all along the way! I get more done each year by squeezing in my things in my Brain-in-a-Binder. Give it a try and see how you can snag those bits of time. You will get so much more done in a year. Big stuff.
4. Have a plan to work it.
 - Yearly--choose the biggest projects for your calendar
 - Monthly--Sit down and plan a project out.
 - Weekly--Plan your daily tasks toward finishing your project.
5. Regularly Evaluate--Hold yourself accountable. Set a deadline. Meet it.

Challenge #12: Brain-dump!

This challenge works hand-in-hand with #11 and #12 or completely on its own. Regardless of what else is needed, this is an essential for ultimate productivity. So, get out a notebook or journal that is fresh and clean, ready to go. Take time to get everything out of your head and onto paper. EVERYTHING—that vision, your goals toward the vision, your wishes, your needs, your project ideas, your project brainstorm, your things to do, your ideas, etc. Brain dump. Get everything out of your brain and on to paper. Write it out. Share an update on what you did and how it feels on our Facebook Group. Share how this will make a difference in your life, business or ministry. See our group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall/>

TAKE TIME TO CREATE TOOLS

Your tools that you develop will determine your productivity. Taking time to create tools that support you makes everything easier and much more productive. Invest in yourself:

- ☐ **To-Do Lists.** Brain dump everything that needs to be done. Make a big long list that you can use as a Master “To-Do List” and make lists of each project. Make daily to-do's (Post-it Notes).
- ☐ **Checklists**—Take the pressure off of your brain and put what works into a checklist. Keep these to make the process easier in the future. As you find something that needs to be tweaked, tweak your checklist.
- ☐ **Set Up Systems/Routines**—Take away all of the stress of decision making each day. Write down your steps. Work them until they become systems or routines. Keep for times that you need to get back to basics.
- ☐ **Other....**What helpful tools can you think of? What would help you be more productive?

Challenge #13: Create Support Tools

What would help you to be more productive? Which tools would help you? Take time to work on developing some support tools. Keep them in your planner. Use them. Share an update on what you did and how it feels on our Facebook Group. Share how this will make a difference in your life, business or ministry. See our group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SteppingUpToYourCall/>

SET DEADLINES.

I mentioned deadlines a few times already, but they really need their own point. They are so vital! We need deadlines to be productive. Deadlines will...

Keep you on task

Keep you focused

Keep you moving forward

Keep you motivated

Keep you productive!

Of course, IF we use them properly!

Deadlines MUST BE...

Clear--Set the date

Reasonable--Allow plenty of time!

Firm--Nothing can put fire under you like making it happen!

Rewarded--Of course--countdown to a real reward!

Speaking of making it happen, how do we do that? How?

1. Brainstorm/Brain-dump. Put all steps/ideas on paper
2. Get a vision. Get it clear in your head. Get it clear on paper.
3. Put each step/idea on the calendar.
4. Set aside time each day to work on it. Non-negotiable time. Set apart.
5. Check for progress. Decide on a set time to evaluate and check for progress. If you are behind--catch up. Not moving--check to see if you need a clearer vision or more specific tasks or to fire yourself up.
6. Keep on moving. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. Productivity happens one step, one bite, at a time. Keep on moving.

7. Reward Yourself. Reward yourself well. Think through how you can reward yourself along the way. Give yourself a treat.

Invest that time planning. Plan, plan, plan! Pre-plan everything. Think it out. Write it down.

This is a big, big secret to ultimate productivity!

Are you setting deadlines? How are you determining the deadlines?

What rewards are you setting?

GET *YOURSELF* IN GEAR!

We can do ALL of the planning the world and still have a disconnect. Yes! I see it all of the time. If you have been a part of my coaching programs or seminars, you have probably heard me harp on this one--in fact, you probably think that I am harping on it. :) But, this is probably the most important, transformative, essential, and pivotal point you will hear this whole course.

This is the most neglected area in typical business courses and coaching programs. Well, except MINE. It has been the pivotal difference that has set me apart from my "competitors" or moved me into a place where I do not have "competitors." It keeps me on the cutting edge. It keeps me productive, prolific and very successful.

Some of you will think that this is a big, big waste of time and that you can skip this one, but this one is what separates businesses, especially NOW.

Getaway and let's get YOURSELF in gear. It is essential. It is non-negotiable. Let's work through this one together.

Who are you?

WHO ARE YOU???

Sure, you may have lots and lots of ideas floating around in your mind. You may have many options and have no clarity of which way to go. You may be working hard, but still struggle to see how things come together...

How do you pull it together so that you are clear about what you are to be doing? How do you clarify so your customers are clear about what you provide--so much so that you become the "GO TO" person for that topic? How do you stay focused so you can get things done, rather than chasing after all of the options, ideas, opportunities? What do you do with all of these ideas so you know that you are choosing the best project to work on? How do you know what to do first? How do I get unstuck? Here it is....

PULL ASIDE AND GET TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE!

If you don't know who you are, you will never uncover your message. If you don't know who you are, it is going to be almost impossible to get to know who your ideal customer or client should be. It will be very difficult to create products that are of great worth for others. Without this next step, it will be a big struggle to find your voice, to find your niche, to find your next project.

It is so important. This one thing can change everything. Without it, you can work to the bone and not see anything change--not see your progress.

Getaway, pull back and get to know who you are. So many pull back and study publishing, marketing, trends--but, want to set yourself apart? Want to get on track for great success? Want to know what you really need to be all about right now? Want to know what you need to focus upon right now? Want to know what your next project should be? This is where you begin. Take time to get to know who you are, what you are to be all about, your message for the world.

How do you know?

1. What do you know? Enough to be an authority. Enough to share great content. Enough to have contacts/relationships in that field.

What do you know? List things that others come to you to learn about....

What are your special abilities that set you apart?

2. What do you love?

Your passion?

Your heartbeat?

Your hobbies?

Your job?

3. What are your gifts?

Your talents?

Your bents?

Your interests?

4. What is your message or topic or your usually messages and topics that are on your heart?

Your favorite topic?

Your heartbeat?

Your most pressing topic--your heart cry?

What is the topic that everyone asks YOU about?

5. What do people need or want – what do you keep hearing them ask for?

What questions are they asking?

What is missing?

What do people ask you?

6. What are YOU all about? Vision/goals/dreams/heartbeats/calling/experiences/ purpose?

7. What trials/struggles have you overcome?

8. In what have you succeeded where others have failed?

9. What is in your library--at home/on the computer?

What do YOU love learning?

10. What is your dream?

What is that dream that you have put on the shelf?

What is your LIFE message?

What do you think is your life purpose or life story?

Sweet friend, you MUST start here

...or you will lose yourself.

...you will bounce around from one thing to another thing to another thing.

...what you do will just be stuff--no power, no anointing,

...you won't have focus

...you will just sit "spinning your wheels"

...you will get stuck and have a hard time getting moving again

...you won't have focus

...you won't get things done or at least the things that really matter to you.

I know that you want to make your life count. I know that you want to produce the best products available! I know that you want a business filled with the best products available. I know that you want to be productive, prolific, and very, very successful.

SO START HERE!

Take time to pull back, get to know who you are and what you are going to be all about.

- **Dare to be yourself.** Don't try to compete with others. Don't try to keep up with others. Be yourself. Go your pace. Be Yourself in all areas--

Your Message--Share your message! Don't follow trends, Keep your message before you at all times--clear to the world, as the foundation of your business/ministry

Your Business--Make your business all about you--not the concepts, not the techniques for delivery, not the ideas--these can all be duplicated. But you are original! You cannot be duplicated! Only you can be you! Build your business around you--then, there is no competition. No competition can deliver you. You will always be on the cutting edge. You will be established firmly.

DANGER: Designing around a topic--topics go in and out. People lose interest in topics. Build your business around you and they will keep up with you. Build your business around you!

Your LIFESTYLE! Live your dream! Now. Live it today. Don't put living on hold. No matter what you do--the world wants the real you. They want to see your life, what works for you, what you really do.

Be yourself!

Build your name!

Build your business!

It all starts with the foundation of your business--getting to know who you are. Oh! God is calling you. He has a special call for you and only you. He has a special purpose for your life. He has a very special purpose for you. Step up to the call. Let Him put His message in your mouth. Let Him flow through your pen.

Wondering, "WHAT MESSAGE?"

Again, this is another reason that we getaway and get a plan. We need to getaway and hear God for our message. Pull back. Getaway with God. Listen to His still, small voice. Ask yourself some questions....

Who are YOU?

What are your:

Spiritual Gifts

What are your abilities?

What is your personality? (DISC)

What are your experiences? (Gates, Losses, Struggles, Legacy)

How does it all converge?

What is on YOUR HEART? (heartbeats, Heartaches, Heart cry?)

What is in YOUR Hand? (What is just easy for you to do? What can you do right now?)

Where is YOUR anointing?

Where is YOUR call? (Go back to that moment where God first called you. Look at that. Describe it here)

Your message is where you will find your sweet spot and your anointing. THIS is what you pour yourself into. THIS is what you are to be all about.

So, KNOW who you are and KNOW your message—Then...

GET YOURSELF IN GEAR!

As we wrap up for this week, I want to ask you to make a commitment today and over the course of this week....

Will you take this time to getaway and to get a plan—your plan?

Will you invest the time to really look honestly at your life, your business, your current plans, your projects, and even your dreams so we can troubleshoot any areas that have been holding you back?

Will you dare to take each lesson, even if you already know some of this, and let God go over it again with you? I really believe that He wants for this to be a time when we pull back away from the frenzy of the world and hear Him for our plans. Will you do this hard work?

I am SO excited about what He is going to do in our midst.