

The Blocked Calendar

A self-directed exercise for building a month and a week around what matters most

COMPLETED BY

DATE

Before You Begin

This exercise helps you build a calendar that protects the work only you can do. Most pastors do not lose their best hours to one large interruption. They lose them to a hundred small, reasonable requests, each easy to say yes to, that together leave no room for prayer, study, planning, or the slow work of raising leaders.

The aim here is simple. We name everything you carry in a typical month, find the handful of responsibilities that genuinely require you, give those an honest amount of time, and put them on the calendar first, before meetings and needs and good ideas fill the space. The blocks come first. Everything else arranges itself around them.

KEY INSIGHT

Stephen Covey called this the principle of the big rocks. If you put the sand and pebbles in the jar first, the big rocks never fit. If you place the big rocks first, the smaller things settle into the gaps around them. Your sermon prep, your prayer, your leadership development: these are big rocks. They go in first or they do not go in at all.

Work through the seven steps in order. Write directly in this worksheet. Be honest rather than aspirational. A calendar built on the hours you wish you had will not survive contact with a real week. A calendar built on the hours you actually have will hold.

ACTION STEP

Set aside about ninety minutes, somewhere quiet, with your current calendar in front of you. Open with a few minutes of prayer, asking for honesty about your limits and clarity about your priorities. Then begin.

Which responsibility were you most reluctant to mark as shareable, and why?

Who in your church or team could grow by carrying something you have been holding alone?

4 Build an Ideal Monthly Rhythm

Now shape the month. Some of your core work happens every week. Some happens once or twice a month and gets crowded out precisely because it is not weekly. Vision and future planning, longer prayer and retreat time, leadership development conversations: these need a named place in the month or they quietly disappear.

Decide what recurs weekly, and assign the less-frequent work to specific weeks. Think of the month as having a shape, not just thirty undifferentiated days.

WEEKLY ANCHORS (HAPPEN EVERY WEEK)

MONTHLY ANCHORS (ASSIGN EACH TO A WEEK)

Responsibility	Which week (1 / 2 / 3 / 4)

What is one responsibility that keeps slipping because it has no fixed place in the month?

5**Build an Ideal Weekly Rhythm**

Translate your anchors into a week. Place your core, only-I-can-do work first, in the parts of the week when you are genuinely at your best. Protect your sharpest hours for your hardest thinking. Study and sermon work belong in your strongest block, not whatever is left after the meetings.

Block in your sabbath and your protected rest before you add anything else. Rest is not what remains after the work. It is one of the big rocks.

Use the grid below to draft your ideal week. Write the responsibility, not just busy, into each block you want to protect.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

EXAMPLE: A BLOCKED WEEK FOR A LEAD PASTOR

One simple version of a protected week. Yours will look different, but notice how the big rocks are placed first, the sharpest hours go to study, and rest is blocked rather than hoped for.

Day	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	Prayer and study (sermon deep block)	Leadership development, staff 1:1s	Protected: family and rest
Tuesday	Team meeting	Service planning, message build	Open for meetings and care
Wednesday	Vision and future planning (monthly anchor)	Pastoral care and people	Midweek gathering
Thursday	Personal leadership development (reading, coaching)	Sermon finalize and run-through	Protected: family and rest
Friday	Sabbath begins, day off	Sabbath, day off	Sabbath, day off
Saturday	Light margin and prep	Family	Prepare heart for Sunday
Sunday	Worship and preaching	Presence and connection	Rest

KEY INSIGHT

Notice what is protected: the strongest morning of the week goes to study, not administration. Vision planning has a fixed home. Two evenings and a full sabbath day are blocked for rest before any meeting is allowed in. The week is built around the big rocks, and the sand fills in around them.

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Identify What Gets Protected First

Some blocks are negotiable. Some are not. Name the handful that must hold no matter what the week throws at them. These are the blocks you defend, the ones that do not move for a meeting that could have been an email or a request that feels urgent only because it is loud.

Here is the freeing part. Once a block is genuinely protected, the calendar can be the one who says no. You do not have to personally decline every good request and carry the awkwardness of it. You can simply say that the time is already committed, because it is. Let the calendar be the jerk so you do not have to be.

“A calendar that protects nothing will be filled by everyone. A calendar that protects the right things serves everyone, including the people it occasionally has to disappoint.”

Name your protected blocks. For each, write the simple sentence you will use when something tries to take it.

Protected block	What I will say when something competes for it

CAUTION

Watch the margins. The most important work rarely gets cut all at once. It gets nibbled. Fifteen minutes borrowed here, a block moved there, until the big rocks have quietly been pushed to the

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Reflection: Adjustment and Sustainability

A blocked calendar is a living thing, not a monument. Seasons change, the church changes, and you change. The goal is not a perfect calendar you build once and obey forever. The goal is a rhythm honest enough to hold for a season and flexible enough to be revised when the season turns.

ACTION STEP

Revisit this worksheet every six months. Twice a year, sit down with your actual calendar from the past season and ask what held, what slipped, and what no longer fits. Adjust the blocks. Then protect the new version with the same seriousness.

Sit with these questions before you close. Answer honestly rather than tidily.

Looking at the week you built, where are you still being unrealistic about your time or your limits?

Which protected block, if it actually held for the next three months, would change the most about your leadership and your soul?

What will make this hard to sustain, and who can help you hold the line when it gets hard?

What is one thing you can stop doing entirely, not delegate, simply stop, to make room for what matters most?

A Closing Word

You were not made to carry everything, and you were never asked to. The work of building a calendar like this is not about doing more. It is about giving your best and most prayerful attention to the few things that genuinely need you, and trusting God and your people with the rest.

May you have the courage to protect what matters, the humility to release what others can carry, and the rest your soul actually needs. The God who called you to lead is not anxious about your limits. He built them in on purpose.