

# TEN PRINCIPLES FOR PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY

*Interview with John Piper, Desiring God*

---

“We recently talked about the book you just wrote, Pastor John, . . . In light of that, Brandon in Charlotte, North Carolina, writes in, ‘Pastor John, thank you for your Christ-centered precision and for the tremendous volume of your ministry output. I’m curious how you produce so much content. What time do you wake up? When do you find time to read and write, or eat your cereal? You mention your aversion to TV in *Don’t Waste Your Life*, but what advice do you have for the daily schedule-making, to make the most of life for Christ?’”

## 1. THROW OUT COMPARISONS

First, beware of wanting to be like me. You don’t know the sins of my life. You don’t know how much I have neglected. You don’t know what the costs have been. The real question is how to be the fullest, most God-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated, loving, humble, mission-advancing, justice-seeking, others-serving person you—you—can be. Don’t measure yourself by others. Measure yourself by your potential

“TEN PRINCIPLES FOR  
PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY”  
ASK PASTOR JOHN  
EPISODE 839  
APRIL 18, 2016  
INTERVIEW WITH  
JOHN PIPER  
AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

in Christ. That is the first thing that I felt I had to say, because of the way the question seemed to be posed.

## 2. FOCUS ON GREAT POSSIBILITIES

Give ten percent of your focus in life to avoiding obstacles to productivity and ninety percent of your focus to fastening onto great goals and pursuing them with all your might. Very few people become productive by avoiding obstacles to productivity. It is not a good focus. That is not where energy comes from. It is not

*John Piper is founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For more than thirty years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. He is author of more than fifty books, and his sermons, articles, books, and more are available free of charge at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org). By John Piper. © Desiring God Foundation.*

where vision comes from.

People write books about that and make a lot of money, but that is not where anybody gets anything worthwhile done. Getting things done that count come from great, glorious, wonderful future possibilities that take you captive and draw your pursuit with all your might. And then all that other stuff about getting obstacles out of your way, that is the ten percent of broom-work that you have to do.

### 3. MIND YOUR SEASONS

Life comes to us in chapters that are very different from each other. If you are married and have little children, that is a chapter that needs a great deal of focus on the children. If God wills, there may be another chapter for you with different possibilities, different potentials, and different priorities. The Lord will be pleased if you focus on the chapter you are in and live according to the demands of that chapter with all your might.

### 4. FIND YOUR LIFE GOAL

Give serious thought and prayer to what your big, all-consuming life goal is. The biblical expression of mine is found in Philippians 1:20–21. This is John Piper, not just Paul, talking: “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” So, magnifying Christ in living and dying, and spreading a passion for Christ into the lives of others—that is my goal. That is the big, overarching goal. Find yours and make it work in everything you do.

### 5. HEED THE ACCOUNT YOU’LL GIVE

Get a sense of gospel-rooted accountability before the living God. That is, understand the gospel and the spiritual dynamics of how it works. You don’t labor to get into a right relationship with God. The gospel dynamics don’t work that way. You labor morning to night with all your might because you are in a right relationship with God. Philippians 2:12–13: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for [ground, basis, foundation] it is God who works in you.” That is the gospel dynamic.

“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). The grace of God had already taken up residence in me and was at work in me, Paul says. And if you get that order out of whack, you may accomplish a lot in life and go straight to hell with all your books and all your buildings.

Let the Lord Jesus intensify this sense of accountability on the last day with the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30). He gave to one person five, gave to another person two, and gave to another person one. When he came to call account, the person with one heard those awful words: “You wicked and slothful [lazy] servant” (Matthew 25:26). I don’t want to hear that word.

I want to experience the opposite, the counterpart to those words, from Luke 12:42: “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household?” I often thought those words when I was a pastor. I was “over [a] household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time” (Luke 12:42). “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” (Luke 12:43).

I would be sitting preparing my messages or writing something or leading the family in devotions, and I would say: “Come now, Lord Jesus, and you will find me doing it.” That is the opposite of the wicked, lazy servant who buried God’s talent and didn’t do anything with it.

*See <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/ten-principles-for-personal-productivity-for-the-last-five-principles>.*