

---

# rhythm



Getting Things Done  
When You Have Too Much to Do

EUGENE T.  
WILSON

by the author of *Realign* and *Seventy*

---

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	9
CHAPTER 1	
Rhythmless Living.....	11
CHAPTER 2	
Rhythm Myths.....	27
CHAPTER 3	
Identifying and Aligning with Vision .....	43
CHAPTER 4	
Creating Lists.....	63
CHAPTER 5	
Learn to Say No.....	81
CHAPTER 6	
Script Your Days.....	97
CHAPTER 7	
Fixed Weeks.....	115
CHAPTER 8	
Rest.....	135
CHAPTER 9	
A Few More Things I Strive to Do.....	153
CHAPTER 10	
The Ending.....	165
Notes.....	167



## CHAPTER ONE

---

# Rhythmless Living

Once upon a time, the world was perfect, and everything was in rhythm. This ideal world existed during the time in which the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, lived. It wasn't long, however, before Adam and Eve messed things up. Consequently, the world is no longer perfect. The way we live our lives reveals that much rhythm has been lost.

God assigned Adam tasks and responsibilities, and Adam performed them. We are to do the same. We are to work. We were also created for fellowship—fellowship with God and others. And like God, we were created to experience times of rest. The fall of man, however, changed things. Many of our relationships are fractured, work has become a burden, and the rhythm of life has been knocked off kilter.

Kevin DeYoung, in *Crazy Busy*, does not use the word *rhythm*, but his description of how we live our lives describes rhythmless people, nonetheless:

We go day after day, crazy month after crazy month: worried, upset, anxious, troubled, fussing, worked up. Every stain, every

school project, every dirty sink, every surprise guest, every surge of responsibility becomes a cause for great panic. To paraphrase Titus 3:3, we live as slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in chaos and envy, hassled by others and hassling one another.

We were not meant to live this type of life, but this is the life many of us are living.

Too many people are experiencing overly busy lives and, hence, are overly stressed. They are marching to a beat, but not the right one. They are consumed by keeping up—keeping up with the Joneses (whoever they are), keeping up with appearances, and failing miserably in doing so. It would be to their advantage to march to a better beat, a more fulfilling one, a more sustainable one. Such people are those to whom this book is written.

## **Rhythm Defined**

What is rhythm? Merriam-Webster defines *rhythm* as “a pattern of beats, sounds, activity, movements.” Having a sense of rhythm is to be able to stay on beat. It is also defined as “movement, fluctuation, or variation marked by the regular recurrence or natural flow of related elements.” Hence, throughout this book, you will see *rhythm* used in reference to a beat whereby a person is enabled to maneuver through the ebbs and flows of life successfully. Rhythm is about achieving things; it is not about busyness. It is about movement, not meaningless and mindless activity, but progress in

a balanced manner, a move that yields results without unnecessary stress or burden.

## **Rhythm Described**

Solomon describes a world of rhythm in Ecclesiastes 1:5–7 (NIV):

The sun rises and the sun sets,  
and hurries back to where it rises.  
The wind blows to the south  
and turns to the north;  
round and round it goes,  
ever returning on its course.  
All streams flow into the sea,  
yet the sea is never full.  
To the place the streams come from,  
there they return again.

Stop and think about it—rhythm seems to describe much of our world. Bruce Miller, in *Your Life in Rhythm*, builds on Solomon’s words:

The phases of the moon, the tides of the sea, the seasons of the earth—nature is filled with cycles and seasons. Bears hibernate and birds migrate as winter descends. Trees flower and plants bloom as spring arrives. The stars mark time as they march across the sky. Throughout recorded history, the zodiac has been used to track the orbital paths of the planets in their annual (and

longer) rhythms. Days and years carry with them their own rhythms, no matter who you are or where you live. You cannot break the cycle of day and night. The sun will rise, and the sun will set.

### **The Loss of Rhythm**

Rhythm, whether or not we recognize it, exists all around us. That doesn't mean, however, that we don't overrule or live outside it. Miller writes of the difference in how our ancestors interacted with rhythm and how we interact:

Sunrise and sunset once bounded our daily lives. Now when it gets dark, we just turn on the lights and keep doing what we're doing. We don't have to rely on animals, with their natural rhythms and limitations, or on the natural growing seasons of plants. The kinds of foods we ate once varied by season. Now we eat grapes from California in the summer and grapes from Chile in the winter. And anything else we want can probably be ordered somewhere online, 24/7/365. In premodern cultures, ordinary people in every part of the world followed the rhythms established by the sun and the moon in relation to the earth. In our day and age, we've lost touch with life's natural rhythms.

While eating grapes out of season may not cause any harmful repercussions, our consistent insistence at overriding rhythm does. We can see its negative impact in our broken relationships as well as our overall physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Ascertaining rhythm is challenging; it often changes its beat. Sometimes slow, sometimes fast. Staying on beat is important. Most of us, however, struggle in adjusting accordingly. We tend to override rhythm in at least one or more areas of our lives and do so on a fairly consistent basis.

Recognizing changes in the beat is essential to living a life of rhythm. King Solomon uses the word *time* twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, while describing the variances in the beat:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Solomon shows that God gives us rhythms in which our lives are to be lived—each of them different from the others, yet appropriate for the circumstance at hand. None of them represent a loss of rhythm, just a difference in the beat.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for *time* suggests an occasion or a season of time. In Greek, it is known as a *kairos* moment. Solomon, therefore, is challenging us to love when it is time to love, to hate injustice when injustice is on display. When it is time to mourn, Solomon is saying that we should mourn in its fullness, and when it is time to dance, we should give it everything we've got. Solomon is speaking of rhythm. He is saying that the only way to live life to its fullest is to live a life of rhythm.

Rhythm, maintains Solomon, enables us to handle difficult times the right way. In contrast, living outside of rhythm can make even the best of times a drudgery. Sadly, life outside of rhythm is the life that many have chosen to live. Yes, to a large extent, you get to decide whether you will live your life with rhythm or without rhythm. I hope you choose the former; it is a much better way to live.

## **Busyness versus Rhythm**

Being busy is not the same as being on beat. Maintaining a rhythm in life is not about filling one's life with multiple activities. Rhythm isn't about doing more things; rhythm is about being centered on doing the right thing. Productivity will ultimately lose its luster if a person does not live a life of rhythm.



Much of life's satisfaction is found in developing a life rhythm. Unfortunately, as Stephan Rechtschaffen, author of *Timeshifting*, notes, "The ambient rhythm in modern life is so fast that even in our leisure time, instead of relaxing, we tend to take on activities that keep us in this fast rhythm."<sup>1</sup> It appears we have lost the ability to slow down. We have lost the ability to adjust to different beats.

Rhythm isn't about speed. Rhythm isn't about living in a constant state of go. Speed is one thing; rhythm is another. Rhythm is about getting a handle on one's busyness; it isn't about increasing one's busyness.

Luke 10 records an interesting scenario regarding two people, one of whom understood rhythm; the other did not. Luke reveals that Martha was upset with her sister. While Martha was busy preparing things for their guest, Mary was busy being with the guest. Martha was offended that her sister had negated her responsibilities and had left her doing all the work in preparing a meal for Jesus. She even accused Jesus of not caring and instructed Him to tell Mary to help her. Jesus, however, refused to correct Mary. Instead, He corrected Martha. He said, "Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41). The problem wasn't that her work was evil. The problem was her focus. She had become so busy serving her guest she didn't have time to be with her guest. Not that Martha was doing a wrong thing; it was a good thing. It was just that Mary had chosen "the better thing."

Doing the right thing, not merely good things, is essential to developing a rhythm. Most of us struggle with this concept; we fill our lives with good things. Few

of us focus on the best thing. We are busy, but we aren't living a life of rhythm. We need to learn how to march to a better beat.

## **Pressure and Rhythm**

Am I saying that by focusing on the best thing a person can develop a rhythm? That by focusing on the best thing a person can remove unnecessary pressure? Not necessarily. Concentrating on what is best as opposed to what is good is a step in the right direction. However, that alone does not eradicate unnecessary pressure.

Consider Jesus. He experienced pressure in His alignment with God's plan. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane gives us some insight into challenges He faced. Matthew 26:37 states that Jesus was "sorrowful and deeply distressed." Jesus even said, in Matthew 26:38, that His soul was "exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." Although He had accepted His fate and had repeatedly stated He would die, when it came time to do so, He prayed, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Jesus' alignment with God's plan and purpose created great anguish. Luke 22:44 states that Jesus, "being in agony . . . prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." If Jesus, the Son of God, experienced pressure aligning with God's plan and purpose, it is likely we will too.

In another example, consider the apostle Paul. In II Corinthians 11, Paul gives a glimpse of the trouble he was experiencing. He doesn't sugarcoat it; he is

transparent in stating that his alignment with God's plan and purpose resulted in him going through some things. He says, "I have been jailed for preaching Jesus, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time and time again. I've been shipwrecked, fought off robbers, and exposed to all sorts of dangers" (paraphrase of II Corinthians 11:23–26, *The Message*). Paul then adds in verse 28, "besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches" (NKJV).

We shouldn't be surprised that Paul, author of much of the New Testament, church planter, and mentor to church leaders, experienced pressure.

His work never seemed to let up. He had letters to write, visits to make, a collection to gather for the church in Jerusalem. He had to send people here and there and manage the affairs of his churches from a distance. He had to respond to a myriad of criticisms, often conflicting criticisms. Some people thought he was too harsh. Others said he was too weak. Some people in his churches were ascetics and thought Paul was worldly. Others were licentious and thought Paul was too ethically demanding. They complained about his teaching. They questioned his credentials. They compared him negatively to the original apostles. They thought him lame compared to the false apostles. They didn't like the way he handled money. They didn't like his preaching style. They didn't like the way he arranged his travel plans. They didn't like his discipline. On some days they just didn't like Paul anymore. All this for the man who led them to Christ, loved them like a father, planted their church, refused their money, and risked his neck

for their spiritual good. There was no weight for Paul like the weight of caring for God's people.<sup>2</sup>

You may not have the same calling as the apostle Paul, but that doesn't mean that you can't identify with him. You have things you want to accomplish. Your responsibilities demand much from you. It is likely that not everyone "gets" or understands you. It is probable that some have sought to thwart your efforts. The weight and pressure you face are enormous. However, that doesn't mean that you have to live outside of rhythm.

## **Rhythm Can Be Attained**

You can attain rhythm. The pressure of life needn't stop you from fulfilling your dreams and desires; you can learn to march to a better beat. You can experience rhythm despite what is happening around you. Regardless of the situation in which you might find yourself, you can march to a better beat. If you are like most people, your biggest challenge to rhythm is your work.

Work, a place where most people spend a considerable amount of time, often reveals the lack of rhythm in people's lives. A *Forbes* article, written by Stephen Covey, states, "The challenge of work/life balance is without question one of the most significant struggles faced by modern man. I've surveyed thousands of audiences about their greatest personal and professional challenges. Life balance is always at or near the top." Although Covey uses the word *balance*, much of what he is advocating is rhythm.

Despite the loss of rhythm across humanity, it is not entirely evasive. Rhythm can be attained. A person can

learn how to march to a better beat. Bruce Miller writes of his pursuit of rhythm and of the moment he began to experience a breakthrough:

I put my hand on my chest and felt my heart beating in rhythm. I listened to the natural rhythm of my breathing: inhale and exhale. I knew from science classes in my growing-up years that our bodies are filled with natural rhythms. Brain waves, for example, are not supposed to be flat. In fact, that would be a bad sign. We want oscillation: up and down. Again, it seemed so obvious. Human bodies are rhythmic, and so is life.

Rhythm can be had. But it doesn't happen by chance. Rhythm must be intentionally pursued.

Consider the sweep of oars in a racing shell. Rowing, perhaps more than any other Olympic sport, requires members of the team to be on the same page. Even the smallest deviations from a rowing pattern can ruin a boat's Olympic hopes. Rowers, according to Luke McGee, coach of the US men's eight-boat, must act as one both mentally and physically; the men must be in rhythm. "If you don't have that, then you're not even in the contest," says McGee. Those who do it the best, win; those who don't, lose. Hence, rhythm leads to success; the lack of rhythm does not. To achieve rhythm, one must intentionally pursue it.

## **Rhythm Is a Personal Thing**

To some extent, rhythm is impacted by one's personality. While some are big-picture-oriented, others are detail-oriented. While some are people-oriented, others are task-oriented. The differences in perspective impact how a person deals with things and, consequently, rhythm.

The good thing about rhythm, though, is that there is no one-size-fits-all. History shows that some of the most productive people in the world use a variety of methods and techniques largely depending upon circumstances, personalities, and energy levels. If there is such a variety among productive people, it stands to reason that there is a vast variety among people of rhythm.

Rhythm is about the individual. What works for one person may not work for another. C. S. Lewis kept a tight daily schedule with activities such as walking, eating, and socializing down to the very hour in which they should be held. Winston Churchill was able to work late into the night by taking a nap during the day. Benjamin Franklin awakened each day at 4:00 AM, but did not start working until 8:00 AM. Between 4:00 AM and 8:00 AM he would get cleaned up, eat breakfast, and think about what he would accomplish that day. After taking an hour for lunch (from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM), he would work until 5:00 PM.

Author John Grisham offers another example. When he first began writing, he still had his day job as a lawyer. Grisham would arise at 5:00 AM, shower, and then head to his office, just five minutes from home. By 5:30 AM, he would be sitting at his desk with a cup of coffee. His goal was to write one page per day before giving attention to his job.

The good thing about rhythm is that it is not about a specific tool or way of doing something. Rhythm is more significant than that. Principles are at the center of rhythm, not a particular process. Although much of this book focuses on practical application, grasping the principle behind such use is crucial. Implementation varies from individual to individual; principles remain consistent.

Most people want to do more, accomplish more, and improve more. There is nothing inherently wrong with desiring to do so. However, we can become so focused on “doing” that we can fill our lives with unnecessary busyness and even feel guilty when we are not busy. This is a real struggle for many. But doing good things is not always the essential thing or even the right thing. There is a difference.

Don’t get the wrong idea, though. Being busy is not necessarily wrong. In life, there are times in which we will be busy, and sometimes more than others. Kevin DeYoung says it well; I concur:

I don’t want you to think the best thing we can do for ourselves and for the world is to take a pass on every difficult request, live for leisure, and throw ourselves a giant “me party.” I don’t want you to think that hard work is the problem, or that sacrificing for others is the problem, or that suffering is necessarily the problem. If you have creativity, ambition, and love, you will be busy.

The solution is not to rid your life of activity, to rid yourself of busyness. The answer is to develop a rhythm.

## **My Confession**

I haven't always lived as I do now. My dreams and desires existed long before I understood how to turn them into reality. Today, things are much different. I am a different person than I used to be, and many of my dreams have come to fruition. My productivity has increased dramatically, to where I am often asked how I do what I do—that is, how I accomplish so much with the time I am given.

Don't get the wrong impression, though. I am still on a journey. My dreams have increased; there is a great deal I want to achieve. I say this as an encouragement to you. I have not conquered rhythm. Instead, I am a student. I am continually striving to march to a better beat.

I believe you can grow in your ability to achieve rhythm. I can attest that the difference is worth the effort. I know the difference between living a life of rhythm and living outside of it. I would much rather live with rhythm. Each time I have purposely pursued rhythm, it has rewarded me.

Also, I fully understand that I will never accomplish the things I dream of doing if I remain as I am. I will have to continue to change and be changed. I will have to learn new tools and incorporate new practices.

You can grow too. There is no telling where you will be seven years from now if you increase your ability to march to a better beat.

## **Conclusion**

This book does not cover all there is to be said about rhythm. Doing so is an impossibility. Instead, this book



offers a glimpse of the picture, a piece of the puzzle. This book is about gaining new insights. It is about learning new tools. It is about engaging in daily activities that turn dreams into realities.

Such things—insights, tools, and daily activities—can enhance a person’s ability to achieve rhythm in life. Such things can also, if not applied with a proper mindset or right understanding, cause additional and unnecessary activity, thereby increasing stress. No one wants that. Instead, we all want, or at least should want, to live a life of rhythm.