

Busyness

What, in your opinion, is the biggest *enemy* to following Jesus? When you think of the things that often *threaten* people's life and joy in God, what would you say is the most *significant* threat of them all? I think different people would probably answer that question a lot of different ways. *Maybe some of us would say the biggest threat is secularism. Others might say it's legalism and self-righteousness. Others might say it's theological liberalism (however you personally choose to define that). Maybe we'd say it's the attempt by some to merge together nationalism and faith in Jesus. Others still might say the sexual revolution and all the ideologies that come along with that. Or maybe something else.* All sorts of different answers, but what would *you* say it is? What is the biggest *threat* to a person's relationship with Jesus?

Now obviously the answer to that question is, at *some* level, **fairly subjective**. There's not really an empirical way to say "here's the biggest threat, right here." But at the same time, I'll tell you that in a little over ten years of being a pastor, I have seen a handful of things crop up time and time again. One relatively small list of things that tend to crowd out people's joy more than they don't. So today, we begin a new series we've called **Killjoys**. For the next couple months, we're going to look at seven things that especially threaten people's joy—particularly as it relates to following Jesus. We're going to talk about how to *identify* those things in our lives where they exist, and then (perhaps most importantly) what to do about them.

Over the next seven weeks, we'll cover the following topics: **busyness, apathy, lust,** living for the **approval** of others, **cynicism, anxiety,** and **pride**. Those are **some of the things I have seen** be *most disruptive* and *destructive* for followers of Jesus in the 21st century. Now to *you*, some of those may seem like they belong on that list, and some may seem like they *don't*. But I can tell you they *all*—if left *unchecked*—take a real toll on people's life and joy. In other words, **if you currently are not very excited about Jesus or following Jesus, there's a decent chance that one or more of the items on that list have something to do with it.** So we're going to discuss them all.

But today, we're going to kick things off by talking about **busyness**. Now, here's why I wanted to begin with *this* one. *Busyness*, on the surface, may not feel like that big of a threat. But in *some* ways, *busyness* may actually be the *most* dangerous of them all. Because **if you are overbusy, you may never even recognize any of the other things on that list are a problem.** You may never *slow down* long enough to see that there are things in your life stealing away your joy. That make sense? **So if we are going to be able to overcome the variety of things in our life standing in the way of our joy, we'll need to ratchet down our pace of life to where that actually becomes**

possible. To where we have the *margin* required to think *about* our life, and not just live *within* it. Are you following me on that?

Here's how Dallas Willard once said it. Some of you may have heard of Willard—we tend to quote him fairly often around here. He was once asked a question similar to the one I asked you a moment ago: “what is the biggest *threat* to a person’s relationship with Jesus?” Here’s how *he* responded:

Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.

According to Willard, *hurry* (i.e. the frantic pace of life derived from *busyness*) might be the biggest *threat* to our relationship with Jesus. I’m not gonna lie: the first time I read that, I honestly thought he was joking. And yet, the more I think about it, and the more I observe *my* life and the life of *others*, the more I understand exactly what he meant. As a pastor, I can tell you, anytime I talk to someone about their life with Jesus—say I ask them about how their time in the *Scriptures* has been recently. Or how their *prayer* life is going lately. Or how they’re doing at *discipleship* (regularly pouring into other followers of Jesus). Most anytime I ask people about any of those things, and they say they’re not going so great: do you know what by far the #1 reason I hear for *why* those things aren’t going well? Almost always, it is something like “I’ve just been so *busy*.” “I’ve just got too much going on.”

And just think about it: when you ask most anyone you know how they’re doing, what is the most *common* answer given? People tend to say something like, “I’m good, just *what? Busy*.” I’m just *busy*. So I’m *beginning* to think that maybe Dallas Willard was onto something. It is entirely possible that *hurry* (or *constant busyness*) is one of the biggest enemies to us living the type of life we could be living with God. Here’s how California pastor John Ortberg articulated it:

For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.

Micheal Zigarelli, a professor at Messiah University, once did some *research* on busyness in the lives of followers of Jesus.¹ Here was his analysis.

¹ Research findings available [here](#).

*It may be the case that (1) Christians are **assimilating** to a **culture of busyness**, **hurry and overload**, which leads to (2) God becoming more **marginalized** in Christians' lives, which leads to (3) a **deteriorating** relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming **even more vulnerable** to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) **more conformity** to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again.*

Catholic writer **Ronald Rolheiser** called this problem “*pathological busyness*.”² I think that’s a very descriptive term. Some of us aren’t just *busy*; we’re *pathologically busy*. We’re *chronically busy*. And **for a lot of us, this pathological busyness is what’s keeping us from a vibrant relationship with Jesus. It is incredibly difficult to live in the kingdom of Jesus with a perpetually busy soul.**³

So **this morning**, I want us to **learn from Jesus** about what **causes this kind of “pathological busyness,”** and then what to do about it. So if you have a bible, turn with me to **Luke 10**. We’re going to look at a passage this morning that is probably familiar to at least a lot of us that grew up around church. It’s a fairly *brief* passage, but I think it has absolute *gold* in it when it comes to understanding this phenomenon of busyness in our lives. Pick it up with me in **Luke 10**, starting in v. 38:

*[38] As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named **Martha** opened her home to him. [39] She had a sister called **Mary**, who **sat** at the Lord’s feet **listening** to what he said.*

That’s an **important detail to remember** about Mary—we’re going to come back around to her in a bit. For now, I want us to focus on the *other* character in the story: *Martha*. Keep reading in v. 40:

*[40] But **Martha** was **distracted** by all the **preparations** that had to be made.*

So the ESV translation there just says that Martha was “distracted with much *serving*.” Now, question for you: **is serving a bad thing?** Easy answer: for followers of Jesus, *no*. Not at all. In fact, according to Jesus himself, serving is a *great* thing. Jesus wants *all* of his disciples to have a default *posture* of serving. So the problem *isn’t* that Martha is *serving*. But at the same time, Jesus is *about* to offer a loving *critique* of what Martha is doing. *Something* about what she’s doing *is off*. So if the problem *isn’t* that she’s *serving*, that tells me that the problem *must* have something to do with the word “*distracted*” and

² Found in his book, *Holy Longing*.

³ This is another paraphrase of a quote from John Ortberg.

the word “*much*.” **The problem with Martha wasn’t that she was *servicing*—it was that she was *distracted* with *much* serving.**

And similarly, **when we are chronically busy**, I would imagine that most of the things we are busy *with aren’t* bad things. Many of them are *neutral* or even *good* things. *Noble* things. Things that *need doing*. In fact, **I would imagine that one of the most difficult things about overcoming busyness in our lives is that becoming *less busy* requires saying *no* to some very good things.** But evidently, as we’re going to see, sometimes that is what has to happen.

So I would imagine, based on this story, that **Martha is the type of person** who was always consumed with what needed to get *done next*. I’m sure if she were around today, she would toss out phrases like “time is of the essence,” and “the devil never takes a day off” or “the early bird gets the worm.” She’d say things like “I’m not too busy—I’m just really *productive*.” “I’m just really *efficient*.” “I’m just *high capacity*.” “I’m all about the *hustle*.” You see, the reality is that “*Marthas*” are *everywhere* in our world. Our society tends to *crank out* people like *Martha*. We *celebrate* them. We give them raises. We hold them up as prime examples of what it means to be contributing members of society. **This is what many of us think it *means* to be *human*: living a life of constant, unceasing, *activity*.**

Which helps **explain *Martha’s attitude*** towards the *Marys* in the world, found in the rest of v. 40. Take a look there with me:

*She (Martha) came to him (Jesus) and asked, “Lord, don’t you **care** that my **sister** has left **me** to do the work by **myself**? Tell her to **help** me!”*

Another characteristic of people like Martha is that **they tend to hold a little bit of grudge towards those that aren’t as “productive” as they are.** They often are keenly aware of all the people that get *less* done than they do, and tend to look at those people with anything from mild frustration to outright *contempt*. Martha says, essentially, “*Jesus—tell Mary to make herself *useful*. Tell her to *do something* with her life. Tell her to stop being so lazy and unproductive!*” But Jesus feels differently about Mary. Take a look at Jesus’ *response* to Martha, v. 41:

*[41] “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are **worried** and **upset** about **many things**, [42] but **few things** are **needed**—or indeed **only one**. Mary has **chosen** what is **better**, and it will not be **taken away** from her.”*

Let's stop there. So there's **the diagnosis from Jesus**: that Martha is "worried and upset about *many* things." The problem isn't that she's *servicing*, and it's not that she's *productive*. The problem is that she is so concerned with a dozen *different* things, that she has forgotten about the things that matter *most*. **Has anybody found themselves there before? Put simply, Martha is hurried and overbusy: she is anxious and troubled and preoccupied with many things, to the neglect of things that matter most.**

And her experience, as we've already highlighted, **is something of an epidemic in the 21st century.** Almost *literally*. Such that mental health professionals have actually given a *label* to this problem: they call it "**hurry sickness.**" As in, a type of *illness*. Here's one way they **define** it:

(Hurry sickness is...) ...a malaise in which a person feels chronically short of time, and so tends to perform every task faster and to get flustered when encountering any kind of delay.⁴

That **sounds a lot like Martha** in the passage, doesn't it? And I think **when many of us say we're "busy," this is actually what we usually mean. We're saying we have more things to do than we have time to do them.** Or at least that it *feels* that way. We mean we are running on *overload*. **We're trying to keep more plates spinning than we know how to.** We often mean that we are, to quote Jesus in our passage, "worried and upset about many things." **The problem isn't that we have a lot to do—the problem is that we have too much to do, and we feel like the only way to get it all done is to do everything in a hurry.**

Now, **obviously, there are seasons and situations** in life when we *should* be hurried. If you or your spouse goes into labor and you need to get to the hospital quickly, *hurry* is a *correct* response. You *better* be in a hurry. If there's an emergency of some sort, *hurry* is good and needed. If you're running late to class one day and you need to get there on time, *hurry* might be *necessary*. There are situations where hurry is basically *unavoidable*—I'm not talking about *that*.

I'm talking about **when our default posture** in life is that of hurry. I'm talking about when we are in a hurry far more often than we're *not*. I'm talking about when we *stay* in a hurry, even when we don't really have any good reason to be. It's like the country music band *Alabama* put it (which just for the record, is an absolutely *horrible* name for a band):

⁴ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-time-cure/201302/hurry-sickness>

I'm in a hurry to get things done, oh I'm rushing and rushing until life's no fun. All I've really gotta do is live and die, but I'm in a hurry and don't know why.

Anybody else hear the song playing in their head right now? Yep, we'll all just bear that together. But that kinda sums it up. Sometimes the Spirit *speaks* through quasi-country music from the 90's.

So, question for all of us: **how do we know if we struggle** with this type of busyness? How do we know if we are "pathologically busy"? Well aside from those of us that knew the second I started talking about it, let me just give you some common **symptoms**. These are mostly taken from a book called *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer. Are you ready? **Signs you may struggle with chronic busyness:**

- **Irritability:** You are very easily irritated at anyone who takes just a little longer than they should to do something. Think of Martha in our story: "Jesus, I'm trying to do all this stuff and Mary is making it take longer because she's not helping."
- **Restlessness & Workaholism:** Meaning, anytime you *try* to slow down, take a day off, take a couple *hours* off—you can't do it. You don't know how to just *stop*.
- **Escapist behaviors.** The rare moments in your life that *do* seem "restful" are actually just distractions and escape and entertainment: Netflix, video games, porn. Ways to *escape* from the world instead of living peaceably in it.
- **Lack of care for your body.** You often don't get around to the basics of physical health: eight hours of sleep at night, daily exercise, a moderately healthy diet.
- **Emotional numbness.** You start to lose the capacity to regularly empathize with other people, or even with your own pain and disappointments. Caring for other people is difficult for you because if you were completely honest, it feels like it just takes too long and too much effort.
- And lastly, **isolation.** Hurry makes us feel disconnected from God, others, and even ourselves. Even when you hang out with friends (if you can find the time to do it), you're not fully *present* with them because you're thinking about all the other stuff you *could be* getting done instead of hanging out.

So not to state it too *strongly*, but I'm pretty sure a large portion of us—maybe **most of us**—struggle with this. And just to be abundantly clear, that **includes me**. I am a self-diagnosed *busyness* addict. I am fairly type-A, driven—I'm an Enneagram 1 if you know what that is (basically, a perfectionist). So in my mind, there is never a shortage of things to do, accomplish, or improve upon. *I frequently* find myself irritated at anybody who doesn't move as quickly as I want them to. *I frequently* find myself thinking I need to get things done, even when I really don't. *I frequently* look like Martha in the story,

frustrated and irritable at anyone who doesn't seem to work as hard as I do (or at least doesn't look like they do in the moment). Candidly, some of the ugliest, most sinful moments in my life have something to do with me being in a hurry for no particular reason at all.

So, there are **times** where I as a pastor get to **teach out of my strengths**—where the Holy Spirit has really done a work in my life, has really *grown* me in a particular area, and then I get to lead you guys through it *afterwards*, and teach you what I've learned. This teaching is *not* one of those teachings. This one is a time where I am very much in the process of realizing how much of a *problem* this stuff is in *my* life, and am still in the weeds of setting things back to where they need to be. And I just wanted to bring you guys along for the ride, so that I wouldn't be the *only* one being convicted. :) Fair?

So all of that brings us **back to Mary and Martha**. Take a look back with me at the passage, and let's read v. 41-42 again:

[41] "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are **worried and upset about many things**, [42] but **few things are needed**—or indeed **only one**. Mary has **chosen what is better**, and it will not be **taken away from her**."

So question: what is the one "needed" thing, that *Mary was doing*, and that Martha *should* have been doing? Well, if you look back at the passage, it's fairly simple. Mary was "sitting at Jesus' feet" and "listening to his teaching." **Sitting with Jesus, and listening to Jesus**. *That*, according to Jesus, is what's "needed." And listen: **not only is it the necessary thing—it is also the primary antidote to a hurried, overbusy life.**

You see, **a lifestyle of chronic busyness is never just a logistical problem**. It's never *simply* an issue of how many things you have to do and how much *time* you have to do them. For instance, just think of Jesus: *Jesus* had plenty of things to get done, he was only on earth for 33 years, he didn't have an *app* to help him do anything, and yet he never *once* seemed hurried or overbusy. In *fact*, Jesus is often *interrupted* by people, and he usually treats the interruptions as if they're just as important as whatever he was doing before the interruption.⁵ But he was **able to do that because** he knew busyness is never primarily a *logistical* problem. It's not just a matter of how much we have to get done. **The reason we live overbusy lives is because we are actually seeking something from the busyness itself**. There are things that our souls are *longing* for that we think we can find through busyness. Generally it's one of two things, sometimes it's both: **significance & distraction**.

⁵ See, for example, Matthew 9:18-24

We often choose to stay busy because we're seeking *significance. Importance. Value. Worth. Desirability.* We often believe, even subconsciously, that *if we are perpetually busy, that must mean that we matter.* If we are constantly getting things done, that *must* mean that we're important. If our schedule is overloaded, that *must* mean that we're valuable. We're *in demand.* Right?

Or, **it might be** that we're just seeking *distraction.* Some of us don't want to slow down because we're low-key *terrified* of what we might discover about ourselves if we did. A life of constant busyness and noise keeps us *distracted* enough that we don't have to risk hearing that quiet voice telling us that parts of us are not okay. "What? What do you mean I'm not okay? I'm so okay. Could a person who's not okay be getting this much stuff done all the time? I don't think so! Look at how okay I am, as proved by my never-ceasing activity!" Some of us are seeking *distraction* out of the busyness.

But **sitting with Jesus and listening to Jesus is actually the better solution to both of those things.** First, it's spending time with Jesus where we realize that *significance isn't something we have to achieve; it's something we are given.* In Jesus, we are *already* significant. *We do matter, we are valuable, we are significant, we are wanted.* But we don't have to run ourselves into the ground to know those things are true. In the kingdom of Jesus, those things are a reality, regardless of what or how much we get done. **One of the most liberating truths for a follower of Jesus is that our worth and our activity have nothing to do with each other.** For followers of Jesus, our worth and value were locked in, set in stone the moment Jesus died on the cross. And so any *scrambling, any striving, to try and establish a significance on our own through busyness* is unnecessary effort. **It's an attempt to secure for ourselves what has already been freely given at the cross.**

Author **John Koessler** says it this way:

Silence and solitude (just another way to say "sitting with Jesus and listening to Jesus") *are countermeasures for a world that tries to persuade us that our worth is measured by our usefulness. These experiences remind us that we have intrinsic value to God. We do not have to produce to be loved and accepted by him.*⁶

Sitting with Jesus and listening to him are **how we fight the tendency** to find *significance* in our busyness. Because it's in *that* space with Jesus that we can clearly hear him speaking, proclaiming that *better* reality over us. It's *there* that we can hear him say to

⁶ From his book, *The Radical Pursuit of Rest.*

us, “you *matter*, but not because of how productive or busy you are.” “You matter,” Jesus says, “because of who *I* am, what *I’ve* done, and who I’ve made *you* to be. Because you’re my son, my daughter, made in my image, and ransomed by my blood.”

And...time with Jesus is how we fight the tendency to find *distraction* in our busyness. Because here’s the difficult truth. Sometimes, as weird as this might sound, we *actually need* that little voice telling us we’re not okay. Sometimes, we actually need to *realize* we’re *not* okay, so that we can own it and do something *about* it. So that we can allow *God* do something about it. I’ll put it a slightly different way: sometimes, that voice telling us we’re not okay is actually the **Holy Spirit**. And he’s wanting to lead us into a more sustainable, more lasting, more joy-filled type of life than we can *achieve* through pathological busyness.

And **it’s in that place** (sitting with Jesus), that we can *allow* him to *point out* places where we aren’t okay. It’s there that we can both admit that we aren’t okay, *and* be reminded that Jesus’ affections for us are not hindered in the *least* by that reality. Quite the contrary: it’s that he is *near* to us in our brokenness and desires to lead us into something far better. It’s with him that we can hear the still, small voice that desires to lead us towards what Jesus calls “life and life to the full.” But if we *want* that kind of life, we’re going to have to occasionally slow down enough to *hear* to what he has to say.

///

So as it turns out, Jesus was *right*: **the only real antidote** to an over-busy life is to find time to sit with him and learn *from* him. **Whether your busyness is motivated by a quest for *significance*, or by a need for *distraction*, or *both*...the answer is in finding the time to sit with Jesus, and listen to Jesus. **Just like Mary in the story: she sat at Jesus’ feet, and listened to him.** //**

Now, through the years, **followers of Jesus have called this practice** (of “sitting” and “listening”) a number of different things. Some people call it “silence and solitude,” like the quote we read a moment ago. Other people call it a “quiet time,” which is by far the most youth groupy name for it. Other people call it their “devotional.” Honestly, **I couldn’t care less what we call it; I care most about what we *do during that time***. Namely, that we find somewhere relatively quiet—away from noise and distractions and tasks and “to do” lists—and take time to *sit* and *listen* to the voice of God. *That’s* the goal. *That’s* the way to combat an overbusy life.

Now, **actually doing this**—creating space for silence and solitude in your life—it might **look a number of different ways**, depending on your life stage and season of life. **For some of you, there might be very little keeping you** from taking even an hour or two a day to do this. Maybe you’re single or married with no kids, and your schedule is fairly flexible.

Really all it would take is blocking out some time on your schedule to do it. For others of us, it's going to take a little more effort and creativity. Maybe you work a demanding job, or have a demanding schedule. So for you, it looks more like a fifteen minute chunk of time in the morning, and then a really solid Sabbath on one of your days off.

Maybe you have younger kids like I do, and they need you at what seems like every hour of the day. So maybe for you it looks like piecing together 10 minutes before they get up, 15 minutes while they nap, and so on. If you parent with someone else, maybe you take the kids in the morning so the other person can have some quiet, and then they take the kids towards the end of the day so you can. If you parent alone, ask LifeGroup if they can help you brainstorm solutions or provide solutions for you.

One of the most freeing things, I think, is that the bible doesn't prescribe a certain time of day or frequency or length of time for this. It can look different pending your age and stage of life and season of life and schedule. It can be in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening. It can be one good chunk of time per day or multiple small periods of time throughout the day. It can be all sorts of things.

But I do want you to hear me on this: the one thing it can't be, is optional. The one thing it can't be is "yeah, when I get around to it." It can't be "yeah, one day I'll figure out how to work it in." I want you to remember Jesus' words to Martha in the passage: he says sitting with him and listening to him is, quote, "needed." It is necessary to find time in your day to press pause on productivity and sit and be with Jesus. Because it's the only way that we remember who we really are.

I think of Jesus' words in John 15, v. 5-6:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

I can't help but think that the reason many of us feel like we're withering away is because we've chosen a life of constant activity instead of a life of constantly abiding with Jesus. So the invitation today, with the cross before us and the Holy Spirit within us, is to abide. To sit with Jesus, and listen to Jesus. Let him proclaim over you who you really are. Let him speak to you about ways you're not okay, but that you could be with the help of the Holy Spirit. And let him slow you down enough to experience the life that is truly life.

So I want us to **do something right now** as we wrap up that's gonna be a little different. I am aware that you and I operate in a world that hardly *ever* makes silence, quiet, and stillness even *possible*, much less a priority. So this morning, I want to just grant us all a few moments of quiet. In just a second I'm gonna stop talking, the band's not even gonna come up yet, we're not going to play any music—none of that. I'm just gonna give all of us a few moments of complete *quiet*.

And I'll go ahead and prepare all of us: it's **going to be awkward**. But that's kind of the point: it's awkward because we don't ever do this without filling it up with *something*. So this morning, if necessary, I want us to let it *be* awkward, together. For some of us, this might be the best shot we've got at complete quiet all week. So let's not let it pass by. Let's take this time to *sit* with Jesus, and listen to Jesus. You can use a journal or a bible, or just sit still and close your eyes. Whatever you need to do. But this is your time with him. You ready? Let's do it.

[Silence]

[Pray]

[Intro Communion]