

## Crisis Management *Busyness*

### **Introduction**

This is the second message in our current series: *Crisis Management*. There are some things in our lives that if we don't manage them well, they will manage us. That is, they can have a very negative impact in our lives.

Last week we considered regrets. This week our topic is busyness. Life is busy. I suspect we would all agree with that. Work, home, school, leisure, sports, music and arts, etc. – our lives are filled with running to and from activities.

This morning I am going to fulfill part of what I believe is my job description as a pastor. That job description is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. If I do my job well, some of you might feel comforted; others of you are going to be afflicted. And I might be the target of your discomfort.

But, please hear me out. I am not sitting in judgment on you or your choices. However, some of you need to take a good look at your life – at your family's life – and consider whether or not you need to make some changes. My intent is not to produce guilt, but if God brings conviction – that's different.

Excess of busyness is a reflection of "hurry," and what some call "hurry sickness." Meyer Friedman in his book *Treating Type A Behavior – And Your Heart*, defines "hurry sickness" as

above all, a continuous struggle and unremitting attempt to accomplish or achieve more and more things or participate in more and more events in less and less time.

This struggle with time isn't anything new. In the year 200 B.C., Plautus was cursing the sundial:

The gods confound the man who first found out  
How to distinguish hours! Confound him, too,  
Who in this place set up a sun-dial,  
To cut and hack my days so wretchedly  
Into small portions.

Wouldn't you love to bring him back for just one day in our world?!

Progress has brought with it many time-saving features, devices and strategies. And yet, we seem more busy, more hurried, and consequently, more stressed. How can this be? Why are we so busy? How did we get here?

## **I. How Did We Get Here?**

There are a multitude of reasons, some more obvious than others, some more prominent than others, some more deadly than others.

One is **the increase in choices and options**. If you are an adult here today, just think back to how many fewer choices and options there were when you were growing up – from extra-curricular school activities, sports, the nature of school assignments, church activities, etc.

Notice, I did say church. Gordon MacDonald writes about a conversation with a layman in his church after a particularly long Sunday of church activity. The man said, "I'm sure glad that there is only one rest day per week. I'd burn out if we had to go through 'two days of rest' like this every seven days.

Then I think there is **the equating of activity with accomplishment**. "I must be getting something worthwhile done because I am so busy." But activity doesn't equal accomplishment. It is easy to fool oneself into thinking that just because you have put in long hours you have been productive, and if you just put in longer hours, you will be more productive. I have come to realize the folly of that reasoning.

Part of this is a sense of validation by trying to do more. We somehow think that the more things we are involved in, the more value our life has. But it can become a vicious cycle as we try to find meaning in the things we do rather than who we are.

For some, it is **the feeling you need to go faster**. You don't have to raise your hand, but how many of you when you approach the checkout line at the grocery store or Home Depot or any department store, try to calculate which line is the fastest? Have you ever calculated how much time you save on an eight mile trip by going ten miles an hour faster than you should? Does it really matter?

Carmen Renee Berry addresses another reason in her profound book titled: *When Helping You Is Hurting Me – Escaping the Messiah Trap*. She describes **the Messiah Trap** as “a two-sided lie that, on the surface, appears to be noble and godly and gracious. After all, being a caring and helpful person is something we value.” Here are the two sides:

Side 1: “If I don’t do it, it won’t get done.”

Side 2: “Everyone else’s needs take priority over mine.”

Berry identifies eight characteristics evident in most Messiahs:

1. Tries to earn a sense of worth by “acting” worthy
2. Lets others determine his or her actions
3. Needs to overachieve
4. Is attracted to helping those with similar pain
5. Experiences difficulty in establishing peer and intimate relationships
6. Is caught in a cycle of isolation
7. Is driven to endless activity
8. Stops when he or she drops

This is the trap that so many Christians fall into and use as justification for a life out of control because of busyness. We have a good example of a person wrapped up in busyness. In fact, she is somewhat known for this. Her name is Martha. Turn in your New Testament to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10.

### **Luke 10:38-42**

I think Martha gets a little bit of a bum rap. Some read this story and see Martha as uncaring, inconsiderate. But is that really correct? Let’s think of her rather this way. She wanted to serve her Lord. She was a very welcoming person. Jesus had come to her village and she wanted, more than anything else, to show him that she cared.

And so she busied herself with the task of hospitality which was very important in Middle East culture. But, as so often happens to the busy person, she saw her sister was no help at all. In fact, she was just sitting there, listening to Jesus teach. She was upset that Mary did not share her commitment to service, that she wasn’t out in the kitchen with her getting lunch ready.

So she goes to Jesus and complains. Big mistake! She assumes that Jesus would share her concern that she is meaningfully busy while her sister is just sitting around.

I find it most interesting that Jesus did not criticize Martha's service, her hard work on his behalf. Instead, he calls attention to something else, something far more important, significant and profound. I'll come back to that in a little bit.

What is the impact of busyness out of control?

## **II. How Does It Affect Us?**

Let me suggest some of the impact that busyness has in our lives.

**A. We live tired lives.** People seem so tired, so run-down. And yet, they continue on the treadmill of hurry. If you are old enough, do you remember the Ed Sullivan Show? Al Flosso was on several times – spinning plates. He had a long table with 8-10 sticks standing on end. He would start from one end, put a plate on the end of the stick and get it spinning. Then he would start another one, then another. When he got down to about the fifth or sixth plate, he had to run back and put a little more spin on the first one and the second one. Then run down to the other end to start some more. Then back to earlier ones – trying to keep them all spinning at the same time. And so it is with many of us trying to keep all our activities going, running here and there, keeping all the plates in the air. And we are exhausted.

**B. Relationships suffer.** There is diminished capacity for love. Love takes time. Tell a young couple madly in love to hurry up and get going. They don't want to! It takes time to cultivate love.

Richard Swenson writes:

We must have some room to breathe. We need freedom to think and permission to heal. Our relationships are being starved to death by velocity. No one has the time to listen, let alone love. Our children lay wounded on the ground, run over by our high-speed good intentions. Is God now pro-exhaustion? Doesn't He lead people beside the still waters anymore?

**C. We lose the enjoyment of life.** There was a 1961 Camel cigarette ad that asked: "Smoking more now...but enjoying it less?" That might describe a lot of

people. More activities than ever, but enjoying them less. There is no time to savor some of our experiences; we are running off to something else.

**D. We lose our passion for God and the things of God.** Busyness and hurry take a toll on our spiritual lives. John Ortberg in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted* writes:

As we pursue spiritual life, we must do battle with hurry. 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.

What are the things that you value as important? Does your schedule conform to those values? If you are a parent, what values do you want your kids to learn? What do you have to do to model them for your children?

Can I go back to Martha for a moment? There are so many positives about Martha. She was attentive to the needs of others. She saw a needed task and didn't wait for someone else to address them. Jesus wasn't alone when he came to Martha's home. The disciples were along and maybe other followers of Jesus who were accompanying them. They needed to be refreshed. They needed to be attended to.

Martha wasn't afraid of hard work. The Scriptures teach that when God created Adam and Eve, he gave them work to do – they were to tend to the Garden. Work is good; it is divinely ordained – in its place.

What is it that Jesus observed about Martha? It was that she had chosen the lesser things. It wasn't that her serving was unnoticed or unappreciated or even unnecessary. It was that she had missed the better thing, the more important thing, the more significant thing. Here was the Messiah in her midst and she was so busy, she missed HIM!

Here's the thing: it wasn't a heart issue; it was a priorities issue.

Is that happening to you?

### **III. How Do We Get Out of Here?**

Is there hope for the busy? What are some practical options to get a handle on our schedule, to deal with the impact that busyness has in our lives? How do we

restore time margin? Let me touch briefly on a number of ideas – maybe a few will strike you as workable in your life.

- **Learn to say “No.”** Boy, that can be hard to do. For one thing, we don’t like to disappoint people. We don’t want to say “no” to anybody. For some of us, our sense of value or worth comes from what we think people think of us. To say “no” is to risk someone not liking us – and that is too painful. So we over-commit.
  
- **Cut back on activities.** This will take some real discernment and courage. How many activities are enough? How many sports or extra-curricular activities for your children are enough? What’s the trade-off in terms of time for real family interaction, time for relaxation – down time, time for God, time for others.
  
- **Separate time from technology.** Some of you are slaves to technology. At times, turn your cell phones off. Leave your mobile phone in another room when you are eating dinner. If you are talking with a friend, and your phone rings, check to make sure it isn’t an emergency, and then hit the mute button. Finish your conversation; show your friend some courtesy.
  
- **Focus on the important, not the urgent.** Now sometimes the urgent is important. But often the urgent is just the squeakiest wheel. I am amazed at times when I review a day to see how much time I spent attending to the urgent and left the important undone.
  
- **Establish priorities.** If we do not have a sense of priorities, other things or people will determine our schedule. Stephen Covey says, “Don’t prioritize your schedule; schedule your priorities.” This is being proactive about the choices we make, the schedules we keep, the things we do. The Living Bible paraphrases Romans 12:2 this way: “Don’t allow the world to squeeze you into its mold.” If you don’t determine what God wants, what he desires, what he expects, life will simply conform to someone else’s plan for you.
  
- **Don’t lose sight of the big picture.**

Flight 401 was bound from New York to Miami with a planeload of holiday passengers. Approaching the Miami airport for its landing, a light that indicates the appropriate positioning of the landing gear failed to come on. The crew began to determine why. Was the landing gear down or not? Was there something wrong with the light bulb, or was there genuinely a serious problem?

So, as the plane circled the airport, the crew began to investigate the options. Finally, they reached the conclusion that perhaps it was the light bulb – maybe it just needed to be changed. So the flight engineer tried to remove the bulb. He couldn't get it to budge. Because he was having such a difficult time, the other members began to help him.

Believe it or not, they struggled with that light bulb so long, with no one noticing what was going on around them, no one realizing that the plane was continuing to lose altitude, that while the entire flight crew was struggling to remove that small light bulb from the instrument panel the plane literally flew into the ground. As a result, many passengers lost their lives.

Here was a highly paid, highly experienced flight crew trying to remove a small light bulb, and an entire aircraft and many lives were lost.

The same can happen to us. We get so preoccupied with the minutia of everyday life – focusing in on the ordinary routine of daily life. We need to find time to rest in the busyness of our lives.

Purposely find adequate time to be refreshed. Recharge your spiritual, emotional and physical batteries. Fill the tanks back up again. We need a change of pace, a refocus on priorities, a renewed perspective on meaning and purpose. We need to step back and allow God to renew our minds, refresh our spirits, energize our souls, and rejuvenate our bodies.

Mrs. Lettie Cowman shares an interesting story from African colonial history in her book *Springs in the Valley*, published in 1939. She writes:

In the deep jungles of Africa, a traveler was making a long trek. Coolies had been engaged from a tribe to carry the loads. The first day they marched rapidly and went far. The traveler had high hopes of a speedy journey. But the second morning these humble tribesmen refused to move. For some strange reason they just sat and rested. In inquiry as to the reason for this strange behavior, the traveler was informed that they had gone too fast the first day, and that they were now waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies.

Then Mrs. Cowman concluded with this penetrating exhortation:

This whirling rushing life which so many of us live does for us what that first march did for those poor jungle tribesmen. The difference: they knew what they needed to restore life's balance; too often we do not.

▪ **Final suggestion: imitate Jesus.** Look at his example. He knew what it was to have incredible demands made upon his life – his time, his focus, his energies, his schedule. He got tired, fatigued. But, he got away from the crowds – from the demands. Do we really think we have more strength, more stamina, more energy than Jesus? He knew where the limits were. He knew that he needed to refresh his spirit in communion with his Father. He knew he needed to renew his perspective of the Father's will and plan for his life and ministry. J.B. Phillips writes:

It is refreshing and salutary, to study the poise and quietness of Christ. His task and responsibility might well have driven a man out of his mind. But He was never in a hurry, never impressed by numbers, never a slave of the clock. He was acting, He said, as He observed God to act – never in a hurry.”

Mark Kellner writes a column in *The Washington Times* titled “Higher Ground.” This past Friday he wrote about a new devotional book comprised of writings by Samuel Logan Brengle who became the primary leader in the Salvation Army in the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>. He was also a prime mover behind the “Holiness Movement” in this country.

The book's compiler is Bob Hostetler who said this in relation to a question as to the relevance of Brengle's experience to people today.

I think the holiness of life Brengle writes about is a much rarer experience today because so much of our modern lives mitigate against it. We are slaves to schedules and technology and culture in ways that crowd out “the things that make for peace.”

Brengle's writings make it clear that there is no possible way to separate holiness from devotion to prayer and Bible reading; he fairly harps on the necessity – and primacy – of such things if one is to obtain and keep the experience of holiness. But of course that will often mean taking control of the pace and priorities of our lives, controlling technology and media instead of being controlled by them.

Well, I hope this morning you haven't felt attacked by me. Perhaps prodded by God. I don't pretend to know the circumstances of your life or the demands upon

your life. But my desire is that you are sensitive to this danger of busyness. We are not to be slackers. Neither are we to be busybodies.

In college there was a wonderful cliché often quoted as a way to encourage commitment to Jesus and the kingdom: “Rust out or Burn out.” But, you see, that was a false premise. It suggests it is one or the other. I don’t think God wants us to either rust out or burn out.

We are to be about the Master’s business. We never know when he is going to return. But what if he doesn’t return for 20 years? Will you still be able to function? You have heard it said, “Life is a marathon, not the 100-year dash.”