

The Key to Overcoming Busyness

By Dave Butts

There is an epidemic that is rampant throughout our society and culture today. No part of the country is immune from this plague. Little children suffer from it, as well as the elderly and those in-between. There is no quick cure and many people never recover from it. It breaks up homes, incapacitates people, and contributes to many other diseases. It is busyness!

We live in a busy society. Never have there been so many choices concerning what to do or so many pressures that stem from our schedules. Even the youngest are not immune. One of the concerns of the media in America over the past few years has been the grueling schedules of children whose parents have enrolled them in so many special activities and events that they seem to have lost their childhood.

Nancy Leigh DeMoss shared about a women's weekend conference she taught in which she asked the attendees, "Where does God find you as we start this weekend?" Here are some of the responses:

"I feel I'm out of control sometimes with so many pressures."

"I face too much stress and responsibility."

"I often get overly busy and find my day gone without having done the things I most wanted to do."

"I've left a whirlwind at home, and need a renewed spirit to

face all that these coming weeks will hold.”

“I want to slow down. I feel as if I’m on a speeding treadmill, and if I try to jump off I will stumble and fall.”

“My busyness has robbed me of my joy.”

Though our generation seems to have perfected busyness, it is not a problem unique to our day. American church reformer, Alexander Campbell wrote 150 years ago, “This present age is not an age given to devotion. Men have not the time to meditate, to pray, to examine themselves. They have too many newspapers to read, too many political questions to discuss, too much business to transact.”

Christian author Philip Patterson wrote, “Historian Will Durant once observed that ‘no man who is in a hurry is quite civilized.’ You need only to observe human behavior on a crowded freeway or a rush hour subway station to agree to that. But I’m more concerned with the possibility that no one who is constantly in a hurry can be fully Christian, either. How do I balance the demands of a Christian life with the command to ‘Be still’?”

That’s my concern. In an age known for busyness, how can the Christians live counter-culturally? In the midst of a hectic lifestyle, can we learn to wait on the Lord? Is it possible that even while serving God, we can miss the joy of intimacy with Christ?

Have we all become Martha, busy in the kitchen fixing a meal for Jesus, while missing out on the joy of sitting at Jesus’ feet?

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked,

'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

“‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:38-42).

Most of us identify more with Martha than with Mary. We'd rather be up doing something for Jesus than simply sitting at His feet. That mindset directs us into a busy lifestyle that often leads to exhaustion and burnout.

Please understand that serving Jesus is good . . . desirable . . . a worthy thing to devote one's life to. But serving must be balanced with sitting at Jesus' feet . . . spending time with our Lord in loving intimacy . . . waiting upon Him.

Do you remember the words of Jesus to Martha as she complained about her sister's lack of help? He told her (and us) that only one thing is needed. Can you imagine that? In our busy world today, someone comes along and tells us there is only one essential thing that must be done. That's almost hard to take. Yet, how freeing it is when we realize it is our Lord and Master who is speaking with His perfect wisdom as He says to us today, "Only one thing is needed." And that one thing is to sit at His feet . . . to enjoy His presence...to hear His voice.

The solution to busyness is not laziness. It is not a shirking of responsibilities or a giving of oneself to recreation. It is to put first what Jesus said is first. It is a realignment of priorities in which we put the one thing that is needed in the very center of our lives, allowing everything else to flow from it. As we learn to sit at Jesus' feet, we find the rest of our day more orderly and less hectic. Rather than trying to accomplish everything we think we need to do during a day, we listen to His still small voice directing us to do that which

comes from Him.

Jesus has modeled this lifestyle for us. He said in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." He set about doing the will of His Father with dogged determination, but never in a hectic, busy, out-of-control way. You never see Jesus in a hurry. And at the end of a remarkable life, with just over three years of public ministry, He was able to say, "It is finished."

Jesus gave us the key to accomplishing all the Father had given Him to do in John 14:10: "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." As Jesus walked in close intimacy with His Father, He was able to focus only on that which was needed and not be distracted by the tremendous needs around him.

We forget that, and in our attempt to help and serve, throw ourselves into every problem and situation without first checking to see if this is something that God has for us. So Jesus teaches us that we must put first things first. Sit at His feet first of all...and then you will be ready to serve. There is a cure for busyness...it is found as we develop a life of intimacy with Christ.

—Dave Butts was president of Harvest Prayer Ministries from 1993 until his death in 2022.