

From Busyness to Focus

Last week we worked on moving from consumerism to intimacy in our prayers—to learn to spend more time praying about the things that really matter.

We began by writing down what we value, from possession, accomplishments, attributes of God and people.

→ Then we started taking things away.

Sometimes **we** took something **away**, sometimes **someone** else did, at the end we were faced with **three things that mattered most to us** and then we had to give up two of them.

I know that last week's exercise was **difficult**, especially at the **end**. How did you make the decision you did? **If you feel comfortable doing so, please tell your neighbor what you ended up keeping and why.**

It does us good to **remember** last week as we begin this week. Last week I urged you to spend the **Lion's share of your prayer time** developing your **intimacy** with God—to know Him and to spend time with him. This week, I want to **build** on that progress we made to **encourage** you to spend your time on the **things that matter most**--to move from **busyness to focus**.

→ **Barbara Brown Taylor** says, "it does seem to me that at least some of us have made an idol of exhaustion. The only time we know we have done enough is when we are running on empty and when the ones we love most are the ones we see the least. When we lie down to sleep at night, we offer our full appointment calendars to God in lieu of prayer, believing that God--who is as busy as we are--will surely understand."

(Divine Subtraction, in The Christian Century, 11/3/99, p. 3.)

→ I am not using the word **busy** to mean occupying **yourself living out your calling**. I'm using it to refer to *a relationship--destroying, constant stream of endless activity*.

Everybody gets busy, **the problem isn't getting busy it is staying busy, needing to be busy and choosing busyness as a lifestyle**. Instead of staying busy living out their purpose, some people seem to make being busy their purpose.

→ Focus is a single-minded devotion to and enduring pursuit of God. It involves eliminating things and activities from your life that distract you from being who God created you to be and redirecting your energy toward accomplishing His will for your life.

p. 77

All of us will have **seasons** of busyness in our lives, but we shouldn't spend our days out of **focus** running from one appointment to the next. → **Today we're going to discuss some practical things everyone can do to move the slider bar away from busyness towards focus.**

Before we work on moving that slider, let's spend a little time considering what busyness robs us of.

→ Busyness robs us of Spiritual Vitality

→ In his book *Seeking the Face of God: The Path to a More Intimate Relationship with Him*, Gary L Thomas writes, "The sin many of us fall into is not that we shake our fists at God and defy Him to His face; that is the sin of unbelievers. Our sin is that we passively rebel against God, filling our lives with so much noise and busyness that God's voice cannot, or will not, penetrate." Gary L Thomas, *Seeking the Face of God: The Path to a More Intimate Relationship with Him* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1999), 104 & 105

→ In his book, *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality*, Glenn McDonald writes, "Busyness masquerades as the business of heaven." Glenn McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality*, (Grand Haven, MI, FaithWalk Publishing, 2007), xvi.

The Obstacles to Growth Survey polled 20,000 believers from the age of 15 to 88, across 139 countries and found that busyness gets in the way of developing believer's relationship with God. The five-year study found that on average, 62 % of Christian women and 61% of Christian men say that busyness gets in the way of them developing their relationship with God. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/survey.christians.too.busy.for.god/11977.htm>

Discuss around your tables, "How has busyness adversely affected your spiritual life?"

→ Busyness robs us of intentionality.

→ Being busy seems like the polar opposite of laziness, but a busy person is not so much active as lost. A lazy person does little to nothing while a busy person does almost everything, but the similarity is that both refuse to be intentional. Busyness is the moral equivalent of laziness. (Leading with a Limp, P. 128)

React to this quote, do you agree or disagree with it?

If you are a busy person, can you admit that your problem is as bad as laziness? In both cases, the person lacks focus.

→ Busyness robs us of opportunity

→ In *Sacred Pathways*, Gary Thomas writes, “Any number of deeply felt crises are going on in people’s lives, but in our busyness, out lack of expectancy, we miss opportunities to minister to people in supernatural ways.”

Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 161

Let’s have one person at each table read from the last two lines ton page 73 to the bottom of page 74 until you get to the section “Maintaining Focus.” After you’ve read the section, discussion the questions in the book.

→ Busyness robs us of life.

→ The Chinese character for busyness has two parts. → The part on the left symbolizes “heart” → the part on the right symbolizes “dead.” In the Chinese culture, busyness is the equivalence of a dead heart.

Small Group discussion. Why are we so busy? Why do we allow a constant stream of endless activity rob us of life.

→ Unplug and/or Diversion

A recent survey of the messages found on the social networking site “**Twitter**” indicated a **majority** of the statements are not very important. “**Tweets**” are **140 character long text messages routed to subscriber’s phones and/or computer**. Pear Analytics from Texas randomly sampled **2,000 messages** from the public stream of Twitter and separated them into six categories. The categories were news, spam, self-promotion, conversational; pass along value, and pointless babble.

The largest percentage of sampled messages was categorized as “pointless babble.” This type of tweet was similar to “I am eating a sandwich”, or “I am driving home.” The Pear survey found slightly less than half of the messages, **40 percent, fell into this category**. Pear says they plan to revisit the study every quarter to look for continuing trends.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hWc7Vo-6dXa6xTGsUv_EnHOEnwVA

Why would anyone want constant interruptions of “pointless babble?”

Unplugging doesn’t mean you have to sit in a corner by yourself—this isn’t time out. I’m simply suggesting that you take a break from a “**constant stream of information.**” When you unplug, you might want to go on a diversion of some kind.

→ Silence and/or Discussion

Notice that I define **“silence as more than an absence of noise. It is removing distractions to recalibrate your soul to God’s heartbeat.”** p. 79

For some, that might require a **total** absence of noise. For others, it might be **discussing a passage of scripture or reflecting on life with a close friend over a cup of tea**. The point isn’t how you practice it, it is that you **find a way to remove the distractions that keep you from dancing to the rhythm of God’s heartbeat**.

Take some time to discuss around your table how you can remove distractions so you can recalibrate your soul to God’s heartbeat.

→ Rest and/or Exercise

After LifeWay contacted me about writing this book, I made out a **production** schedule and set **deadlines** for each chapter’s completion. I wanted to be **done with the draft three months** before the **due date** so I would have time to **refine** the manuscript. Because the editor wanted me to take a **new approach to the doctrinal study book**, it was also important to me to get feedback from my editors **incrementally**. While I was writing this chapter, my **life got unusually busy**. It was at that time that the **Director** in our department **resigned** and the Dean asked me to develop a **transition plan** and then step into the leadership position temporarily until the trustees could find someone who could **move to Mill Valley** and head up the department. My **Friday deadline** for this chapter passed and I wasn’t quite finished, so I told Susan on **Saturday morning that I would need to write** during the morning and that I’d be available for family activities in the **afternoon**. She understood—she always understands. I **sat in my favorite writing** chair, fired up my **laptop** to see what I needed to **write** that morning—it was the material you find on **page 85 and following under the heading “Maintaining Focus Through Rest.”** My hands hovered above the keyboard for a moment, then I shut the lid and went into the other room. “Susan,” I said, “I’ve changed my mind, let’s do something together today.”

It was easier to adjust my **production schedule** to include realities that were beyond my control that it would be **to live with being a hypocrite and write from my head and not my heart**.

Tell the people around your table how you answered the questions on page 86.

“Do you set aside one day a week to cease from labor and rest? If so, how has that practice benefited you? If not, why not?”

Notice that I wrote, **rest and/or exercise**. I don't mean inactivity by rest, a true Sabbath rest is "remembering what life's purpose is and renewing a spirit of trust in God; a conscious choice to submit to God." p. 87

If you are like me, you struggle with allowing busyness rob you of your focus. I pray that you will learn to practice these disciplines and participate with God as He shapes you into the image of Christ. I know they've helped me, I pray they will help you.