

The Speed of Flourishing

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Preacher: Justin Fung

[0:00] Good afternoon, everyone. I know it's that afternoon lull, isn't it? As Dan mentioned, my name is Justin, and it's a pleasure to be here.

Way back when I first moved to D.C., I was part of the Advent community for a few months, would occasionally lead worship, but it was back when you were still meeting at the Baptist church, the other Baptist church down the road.

But it is a pleasure to be here. Tommy has been a great friend to mine over the years. And today I want to talk to you, in the time that I have available to me, I want to talk to you about the speed of flourishing.

The speed of flourishing. But I want to begin by asking, you don't have to put your hand up or anything, but I want to ask how many of you would say that your busyness seems to get in the way of your flourishing?

A few. A few that were willing to put their hands up. How many of you would say that all the things you have to do, all the things that are weighing on your time and on your mind, keep you from being and doing all that you think God has for you?

[1:06] Yeah. Well, if you said yes, you're not alone. Earlier this year at Christ City Church, where I am pastor, we meet just off of H Street in the Northeast Corridor.

And earlier this year we had a series called Everyday Battles, where we talked about, well, our everyday battles. And one of the most commonly stated barriers to flourishing, to spiritual growth, to spending time with God and with loved ones, was busyness.

It seems there are just too many things in our schedules to allow us to have the kind of quality time with God, with our family, with our friends that we'd like and we think we need.

It's hard to make space for downtime or reflection or journaling or prayer, for spending time in Scripture or for being honest, for any sort of purposeful engagement and meaningful activity.

And what happens is we can end up feeling like we're constantly living in reaction to everything. We're bouncing from one thing to the next. We're putting out fires everywhere and we never quite feel settled or stable or at peace.

[2:17] But an old professor of mine once said, we don't need more space in our schedules because space just leads to more activities. Instead, we need a vision to compel us.

He said, we don't need more space in our schedules because space just leads to more activities. Instead, we need a vision to compel us. Think about it in terms of technology. Once upon a time, and even today, we thought all of these time-saving devices were going to save us time.

At least that's how they were sold to us, right? This time-saving gadget or appliance is going to save you time so you can spend more time with your family or doing the things that you love.

Now, don't get me wrong, I love technology. But, at least in my life, the space I thought I might have ended up with turned out to be filled with more distractions. And now there's more of them and they're easier to access.

Now, on my good days, on the days when God gets a hold of me, I'm able to ask, is this what the kingdom on earth, the kingdom in my life, is supposed to look like? And on my good days, I'm able to answer yes.

[3:23] On my good days, I'm able to say, yeah, I see God everywhere and in everything. But more often than I'd like, my busyness seems to distract me from the kingdom.

Even when I think my busyness is working for the kingdom. So, I'm a pastor. I'm busy most of the time with pastory things, churchy things. You know, God things, kingdom things, meeting needs and caring for people and speaking out against injustice.

But I realized early on that if I'm doing things for God, but not with God, I might be missing the point. This is what Dutch priest and author Henry Nouwen says.

He says, in general, we are very busy people. There's seldom a period in which we do not know what to do and we move through life in such a distracted way that we do not even take the time and rest to wonder if any of the things we think, say, or do are worth thinking, saying, or doing.

So, let me begin by asking you, what are you busy with? What are you busy with? What are the things that are filling your time? What does your use of time say about what you prioritize and care about?

[4 : 40] What does your use of time say about your reality right now? Not everything is bad. Not everything can be or has to be removed from your life. I just want you to be aware of what is taking up your time.

You see, having said all of that, I don't think busyness itself is the problem. Busyness, you see, is an outward condition. I think the problem goes deeper than that.

I think the problem is hurry. Hurry is an inner condition. It's a condition of the soul. Dallas Willard said, Jesus was always busy, but he was never in a hurry.

Jesus was always busy, but he was never in a hurry. He always had things to do, right? People to heal, demons to cast out, messages to preach, kingdom to inaugurate, injustice to challenge.

Jesus had stuff to do, important stuff, life-changing stuff, soul-saving, world-changing stuff. But he was never in a hurry. He never had an anxious condition of the soul.

[5 : 46] This is how Pastor John Ortberg differentiates between the two. Being busy means having a full schedule with many activities. Being hurried means being preoccupied with an inability to be fully present.

Being busy is physically demanding. And it reminds us that we need God. Being hurried is spiritually draining and causes us to be unavailable to God.

See, Jesus shows us you can be busy without being in a hurry. So just because you're going from meeting to meeting or from class to class or job to job or kids event to kids event does not mean you have to have an anxious spirit.

Because here's the other thing. You can also have nothing on your schedule and still have a hurried soul. Anybody ever been on vacation and you can't stop yourself thinking about all the things you need to do when you get back or all the things that you're missing out on or whether the person you left in charge at work is going to screw it up while you're away.

Hurry often precludes us from rest. Not just bodily rest. Although, you know, sometimes our hurried spirits and our hurried minds can keep us up and prevent us from getting bodily rest.

[7 : 07] Not just emotional rest. Although, when our hurried selves don't ever think that we're safe enough to let our guard down, we can lose that emotional rest. But rest in our souls where we know, where we think and feel and believe and trust and act as if we're in a world made by the creator of the heavens and the earth.

As if we're indwelt by the spirit of that same creator. As if we're rescued and redeemed and loved and valued and protected and sustained and held up and covered up and lifted up by that same father, son, and spirit.

Hurry, the anxious condition of the soul, can keep us from that kind of rest. You know, psychologists have coined the term hurry sickness.

Hurry sickness. This is how it's defined. A behavior pattern characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness, an overwhelming and continual sense of urgency. Here's another definition.

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. Anybody? Here, maybe this will help.

[8 : 25] Some symptoms of hurry sickness. When you're in the grocery store moving from one checkout line to another because it looks shorter or faster. Two, when you're driving and you're counting the cars in front of you and either getting in the lane that has the fewest or is going the fastest.

Three, multitasking to the point of forgetting one of the tasks. That's the spirit speaking conviction to you right now. See, I just thought this was normal, but apparently it's a psychological condition.

We can start a support group. We'll call it church. But let's dig a little more first. Hurry, at its root, is a subconscious trust and overconfidence in ourselves.

If you think about it. It's a subconscious belief or a belief which we can infer from our actions that it's all on us. It's all on me. And as such, hurry should be an indicator light that something isn't right in our soul.

And here's why hurry is so insidious. It's because, as I said, we think it's normal. We think it's okay. We think it's just part of life. When what it does, according to Eugene Peterson, hurry diminishes our capacity to love.

[9 : 41] Love, you see, takes two things. Time and attention. And what do people in a hurry not have a lot of? Time and attention.

Let's draw this out. What did Jesus say were the greatest commandments? We heard it earlier. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. What's the common verb? Love.

What does love involve? Love. Time and attention. What do people in a hurry not have? Time and attention. Ergo, hurry, this anxious spiritual condition, this sickness of the soul, this frantic inner frenzy, it destroys our souls.

It diminishes our capacity to love. It distracts us from the important things, and it hampers our growth and our maturation in faith. There's a reason why hurry doesn't sit well with us.

There's a reason why our souls don't feel comfortable with hurry. It's because we weren't meant to live hurried lives. And yet hurry is one of the characteristics of our city.

[10 : 53] Hurry is one of the idols of our culture. An over-self-confidence. An inability to let God be God. So, now what?

What do we do with that? Well, I want to try something that I want to encourage you to take with you into the week. Just a little practice. It's called imaginative prayer.

Imaginative prayer. Our imagination, you see, it isn't just about make-believe. Our imagination is how we make sense of the world. When you think about what you're going to do for dinner, that's your imagination.

When you think about a romantic partner or a dear friend, and you wonder what they're doing, that's your imagination. When you process events and experiences, that's your imagination. When you deal with doubt and fear and anxiety, that's your imagination at work.

And when we pray, when we imagine that God is in the room with us, listening to us, speaking to us, that's our imagination lining up with true reality.

[12 : 03] Our imaginations are how we make sense of the world. They're given to us by God, so why not use them instead of making ourselves more anxious why not use them to tune into what we believe is actual reality?

So if you're up for it, this is what we're going to do. I want to invite you to sit up and sit comfortably. I want to invite you.

You can close your eyes if you'd like to, or you can just focus them loosely on a spot in front of you. And we'll begin by taking a deep breath in and hold it for a moment and let it out.

And again, a deep breath in. Hold it for a moment and let it out. And I want you, as you're able, to place one hand in the center of your chest, the symbolic core of our being.

It's the part that we cover up when we hear bad news. The heart center. And I want you to let the things that are on your heart and on your mind rise to the surface.

[13 : 26] It may be busyness. It may be all of the things that were running through your head as you were coming in this evening. It may be all the things that you know you need to do when you leave.

It may be hurry. You might not be able to name it or label it, but just a feeling of tightness. Feeling of convolutedness in your head.

It might be something completely unrelated. Just whatever God is bringing to the surface right now. Now, I want you to imagine Jesus is in the room because He is.

But He's sitting right in front of you and He's facing you. And He's looking you in the eyes. His eyes of love. His eyes of understanding.

There's no judgment there. His eyes of love. And I want you to place, as you're able, to place your other hand on top of your first hand.

[14 : 36] And I want you to imagine that Jesus placing His hand on yours as He looks you in the eye. And He says, Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and lowly in heart.

And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And I want you to come back to this space and open your eyes.

those are the words of Jesus. Speaking the promises of Jesus. Extending the invitation of life with Jesus.

The one with whom we were meant to live. The one from whom we were meant to learn. This is Jesus' answer to hurry. The anxious soul. And frankly, to any system or structure, religious or otherwise, that tells us we have to perform in order to have value.

[16:01] In order to have worth. In order to be loved. Jesus says, Come and learn the unforced rhythms of grace from Me. Take My yoke upon you. Learn to live freely and lightly.

Find rest for your souls. But I don't want us to miss this. That Jesus says, Take My yoke upon you. He's using a metaphor that would have been very familiar to His listeners of a farming tool in which two oxen would be paired together to do work.

To plow a field, for example. But it wasn't usually two oxen of the same size. Instead, it was usually one big oxen and one tiny little one.

One strong developed one and one young growing learning one. One of the two would carry the load. Do the work. While the other was learning and being carried along.

Are you seeing the image Jesus is describing? Are you understanding the invitation Jesus is offering?

[17:14] The easy life, the easy yoke, which is life in the kingdom, which is learning to live as Jesus would if He were in our place. All of that is possible. It is possible. But it is only possible because of the deep relational connection between the Father and the Son.

And it's only possible for us if we likewise pursue a deep relational connection with God. In Matthew 11, 27, right before the verses I just read, Jesus said, all things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father.

No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. This is the secret that isn't really a secret of Jesus' peace and His grace and holiness and patience, His anger and injustice, His willingness to speak up at certain moments, His love for His enemies, His practice of nonviolence.

It all came out of a deep relational connection with God, with His Father, the one whose love. Jesus was grounded and rooted in every moment, in every moment, in a reality in which God was present and at work.

Therefore, He had no need to hurry. Let me say that again. Jesus was grounded and rooted in every moment in a reality in which God was present and at work.

[18:34] Therefore, He had no need to hurry. The speed of flourishing is slow. So, slow down.

Not necessarily on the outside, but most definitely on the inside. And so, I want to invite you this week to practice that prayer exercise we tried a moment ago.

In the times and places where hurry seems to have you in its grasp, stop. Pause. Remember that Jesus is in the room with you.

Remember that the Spirit lives within you. Take a deep breath. Breathe in the Spirit. The word in both Hebrew and Greek, the word for Spirit is the same as the word for breath.

Ruach, pneuma. Take a deep breath. Remember that God is closer to us than the air that we breathe.

[19:41] And remember, because of Jesus, because He lived and died and rose again, your soul is safe in the hands of a loving God. Remember that no matter how busy you are, the peace that comes from being found in Christ is yours.

Remember that you don't have to do anything to prove anything to God. You are loved.

You are accepted. You are enough. And there's a prayer written by Ted Loader. I want to close with this.

So would you join me in praying? Now, O Lord, calm me into a quietness that heals and listens, that molds my longings and passions, my wounds and wonderings into a more holy and human shape.

Now, O Lord, calm us into a quietness that heals and listens and molds our longings and passions, our wounds and wonderings into a more holy and human shape.

[21:00] In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.