

Stop the busy \* Luke 10:38-42

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I recently picked up this book by John Mark Comer – ‘The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry’<sup>i</sup> – and in it he describes a situation we’ve all probably experienced. You run into somebody you know and you ask the customary ‘How are you?’ and they respond ‘Oh good – just busy.’ Can you identify with that? Has that ever been you? I’ve been there.

Comer goes on to say “Pay attention and you’ll find this answer everywhere – across ethnicity, gender, stage of life, even class. College students are busy. Young parents are busy. Empty nesters living on a golf course are busy. CEOs are busy; so are baristas and part-time nannies. Americans are busy, Kiwis are busy, Germans are busy – we’re all *busy*.”<sup>ii</sup>

Not only that, busyness has become a mark of status in some circles – if you’re busy, you must be important. If you’re busy, you must be leading a full and worthwhile life.<sup>iii</sup>

Our culture is very busy.

But is that the way it should be? What does it cost? Ten years ago, a family doctor wrote an op-ed in the Boston Times called ‘Busy is the new sick’ and she said -

In the past few years, I’ve observed an epidemic of sorts: patient after patient suffering from the same condition. The symptoms of this condition include fatigue, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, headaches, heartburn, bowel disturbances, back pain, and weight gain. There are no blood tests or X-rays diagnostic of this condition, and yet it’s easy to recognize. The condition is excessive busyness.<sup>iv</sup>

That was ten years ago and the pace of life has only increased since then. We live very busy lives.

But is that consistent with life in Christ? Comer points to an old Finnish proverb that says ‘God did not create hurry’<sup>v</sup> – does it make sense for us as Christians to get carried away by the busyness of the world? What does it mean to follow Jesus in the midst of a busyness epidemic?

To answer that question, I want to look with you at another familiar story – we saw the Good Samaritan last week; this week we’re going to look at the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 8. Now I have to admit that I really sympathize with Martha and so I’m going to rehabilitate her a little as we go, but I think that where we are as a culture, we really need to learn from Martha’s encounter with Jesus here.

So let’s go to Luke 10, starting at verse 38, and we’ll think together about Mary and Martha and following Jesus in the epidemic of busyness. Luke 10:38.

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village (the village of Bethany) where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Now this was very common occurrence in Jesus’ life. You’ll remember from a few weeks back; Jesus says ‘foxes have dens and birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Jesus didn’t have a home and so He really relied on the hospitality of others for food and lodging.

And here, Martha opens her home to Jesus and plans to lay out a feast fitting for someone as special as Jesus. Now right off the bat, I want you to get the 1950's housewife picture out of your head; this is first century Israel we're talking about here, so just a couple rooms – clay/stone walls. The meat's probably cooking over a fire outside, the bread is probably cooking out there too, Martha's running back and forth checking on it and preparing the olives and onions and chickpeas that will make up her meal. She is putting together a feast that would make Martha Stewart proud.

But verse 39 – she has a sister, Mary, who is not helping her with all of this 'woman's work.' Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to what He said.

Now that, in and of itself was pretty extraordinary. The culture of the time did not often give women the opportunity to listen to teachers, but here, Jesus was more than happy to share with Mary and the others there...

But Martha was not happy about it. Verse 40 -

40 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!"

Now that's a reasonable request given the gender roles of the time, but Jesus isn't having it. Verse 41, He says -

41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, (I think He really cares about her) "you are worried and upset (anxious and troubled) about many things, 42 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 NIV).

Jesus refuses to send Mary back into the kitchen (so to speak) because she has chosen the one thing that's really important here – time spent at Jesus' feet. Mary models for us here real discipleship; she is choosing to invest in her relationship with Jesus.

And this is really the central point of this passage – we need to slow down and invest in our relationships with Jesus. *We need to stop the busy and spend time at Jesus' feet.*

How many of you need to hear that today? I do. I absolutely do. Julie and I both work fulltime, we've got two kids in primary school, it's a pandemic (!); there are a million things to do, but only one is crucial – growing in relationship with Christ; getting to know Him better. It's time spent at Jesus' feet that will help me to deal with the other things that are going on, so I need to make that time, to stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet.

How do you do that? Well, first, I think, you start off with silence and solitude, finding a quiet place to be alone with the Lord. Maybe you need to cut back on the things you are committed to throughout the week. For sure, you have to turn off notifications, you get rid of distractions, turn off the radio or the TV, maybe leave your phone in another room (did you know that researchers have found that the average iPhone user touches their phones more than twenty five hundred times a day?!)<sup>vi</sup> and just slow down and focus on the Lord.

Then you read a bit of the Bible – maybe one chapter of a book at a time – and then pray based on what you've read in that chapter. Ask God to help you to apply what you've read in that chapter. Then bring

your cares and anxieties and concerns to the LORD. 'What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.'

Now my spiritual make-up tends to be more academic than contemplative or activist, so maybe your quiet time will look different – maybe you'll want to go for a walk or sit at the park – but I think that three things are really important – silence, Scripture and prayer. Maybe you feel like you're too busy to do this – you've got too many things on the go – too many people are counting on you – you have Jesus' permission to say 'no.' To take some time to stop the busy and with with silence, Scripture and prayer at Jesus' feet.

Now in a sense, I could really end the message here, because that's the point of this passage and something I think that we all need to hear, but I really think that we need to take it one step further. Because yes, absolutely, you need to stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet; but you can't spend all day there. You have legit things going on; you have responsibilities that you have to take care of. So how do we apply this 'stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet' thing when gotta go back and do the busy stuff?

Well, let's start with this. Martha was not wrong for wanting to serve. SOMEBODY had to make that meal and Martha seems to have loved being hospitable. Martha was not wrong for wanting to serve – it's just that her heart was in the wrong place. I like how David Garland puts it – "She is [not] scolded ~~not~~ for hustling and bustling but for fretting and fussing" (455).

Look back up into the text – verse 40 – Martha was DISTRACTED by all the preparations that she chose to make. Verse 41 – 'you are worried and upset, you are anxious and troubled about all these things' – paraphrase – 'You are so busy majoring in the details that you've missed out on what's truly important here – time spent learning from Jesus.' She has the Lord right there with her, eager to explain the way to abundant and eternal life and she's consumed by why her sister isn't helping her set the table. She's worried about whether there's gonna be enough food when the guy who turns bread and fishes into a meal for thousands is there, willing to invest in her.

The problem here is not the desire to serve but the act of serving with a distracted heart. She got so distracted by the details that she forgot why she was doing it – to honour the Lord!<sup>vii</sup> And so, just like us, she had to learn to stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet.

And you know what? I think she did. If you go over to John's Gospel, John 12:2, just after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, it says that Mary and Martha had another meal in Jesus' honor and guess what Martha's doing? They held a banquet and Martha served.<sup>viii</sup> That's just who she is – she loves serving her friends and family and her Lord. But what's the difference this time? I think that she has learned to stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet and then carry that centredness into what she's got to do. John 11:27 - she shows that she has more spiritual insight than all the male disciples combined<sup>ix</sup> - I think that she has spent time at Jesus' feet and then gone out to serve with a heart fixed on Christ. She's learned to stop the busy, get to know Jesus and then go out and do what she's got to do with a heart fixed on Christ.

That I think is how you apply this message and follow Jesus in an epidemic of busyness – stop the busy and sit at Jesus' feet and then go do what you do with your heart fixed on Christ. There's no hierarchy here between your 'spiritual life' and your 'work' life; this passage teaches us to invest in our relationship with Jesus and then let that shape the way that we do our work. We need to take the time to know Jesus better and then take His presence out into the world.

All of you Marthas out there, that instinct to serve is good. How many of you would identify with Martha as opposed to Mary? Marys are good, but the world needs more Marthas who have spent time at Jesus' feet and then take His presence out into the world, to be a Christ-like blessing to your community, into your family. Invest in your relationship with Jesus and then let that shape what you do the rest of the day. Stop the busy and spend time at Jesus' feet then do what you do with your heart fixed on Christ.

If you google 'busyness epidemic,' you will find thousands of articles telling you about it (601, 000 actually when I did it) and many of them will try to tell you what to do about it and as I skimmed through them, I noticed a common trend. One of the ways secular people said to combat 'busyness' was to make sure you're majoring in things that you really value. Don't get bogged down doing things that aren't really important to you; instead, major in what you value.

And I thought 'they're kind of on to something' because that's what Jesus taught 2000 years ago. Don't get hung up on the details, the extraneous stuff. Invest with your 'one thing' – that is – your relationship with Jesus and let them inform the rest of what you do. Stop the busy, sit at Jesus' feet and then go do what you gotta do with your heart fixed on Christ.

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<sup>i</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, (Waterbrook), 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> Comer, 21.

<sup>iii</sup> "It's about showing status. That if you're busy, you're important. You're leading a full and worthy life" (Sociologist Ann Burnett, quoted in <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/03/brigid-schultes-overwhelmed-and-our-epidemic-of-busyness.html>).

<sup>iv</sup> [http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/health/blog/inpractice/2013/07/busy\\_is\\_the\\_new\\_sick.html](http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/health/blog/inpractice/2013/07/busy_is_the_new_sick.html)

<sup>v</sup> Comer, 22.

<sup>vi</sup> Comer, 36.

<sup>vii</sup> "She is in danger of getting so bogged down in the details of hospitality that she forgets the whole point of the exercise, which is to enjoy the company of your guest" (Loveday Alexander, quoted in David Garland, *Luke* (ZECNT), 454).

<sup>viii</sup> 2 "Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him." (John 12:2 NIV).

<sup>ix</sup> 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (**John 11:27** NIV). It takes five more chapters before the Twelve disciples understand that! **John 16:28-31** NIV) - 28 "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." 29 Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. 30 Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." 31 "You believe at last!" Jesus answered.