

How Busy Should the Pastor Be?

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Busyness is endemic to leadership. Since most leaders are goal-oriented, type A, driven personalities, they have a propensity to pile too much on their plate, and then get sick trying to stuff it all down. Pastors are not exempt from the busy leader syndrome. Pastors have more than enough to keep them busy—preparing the Sunday sermon, making hospital visits, running staff meetings, planning the new building project, answering an irate email, fixing the church coffee maker, creating the PowerPoint display, and...oh yeah...he has a family, too. In general, pastors are overworked—trying to save the universe from perdition, and doing so while extremely busy.

Most of those who are busy will readily acknowledge it. They are, without a doubt, *too* busy. But few of actually do anything about it. In fact, there is something painfully pleasurable about the fact that we are too busy, stressed out, or have way too much on our plate. As Dave Kraft of the Resurgence so poignantly wrote in an [article](#), “busyness is the new spirituality.”

Busyness as a Mark of Spirituality

Somehow, we’ve arrived at a point where we think that the more we do, the more spiritual we are. If we’re doing more for God, we must somehow be making God happier with us. After all, how could God be *displeased* with someone who is running around frantically trying to get more done for Him and His glory? Of course, few of us would actually verbalize it like that, but many of us *live* that way. Our calendars, our schedules, our families, and our health can all attest to the fact that we’re probably trying to do too much. Yet in spite of the frenetic pace and the frazzled nerves is a this tenuous self-assurance: “It’s ok. I’m doing this for God. It’s what I must do. It’s the cross I must bear.” How easy it is to slap some spiritual verbiage on something to make it seem legit. However, it does not justify being too busy.

A Case Study in Busyness

Here’s why this too-busy thing concerns me. Jesus’ friends Mary and Martha provide an insightful case study on this point. Martha was a go-getter. Apparently, she was always doing

stuff—serving, cleaning, preparing, situating, and attending to the myriad tasks that were constantly clamoring for her attention (Luke 10:40). And she did it all for Jesus. Her sister Mary, on the other hand, seemed to be disinterested in *servicing* and *doing*. Instead, she occupied herself by sitting—just sitting at the Lord’s feet to hear him teach (Luke 10:38). From a busy-is-spiritual vantage point, we would automatically hold up *Martha* as a trophy of godliness and spirituality. She was so busy serving! Jesus thinks otherwise. In fact, he gently rebukes Martha saying, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

How to Know if You’re Too Busy

Jesus does not commend sloth, nor condemn service. He commands devotion. We don’t want to import too much into the text, but there is one lesson that we should walk away with. If your busyness cuts into your devotion to Jesus, you’re too busy. I know from experience what it is to jump out of bed early in the morning, energized by the jam-packed schedule. A hard swallow of a caffeinated beverage gives me the boost to suit up and dive out the door and tackle the day’s demands—an unceasing, ever-increasing list of busy-busy-busy. Then, realizing that haven’t prayed, meditated, or even so much as thought about God’s Word, I try to muster up a few pseudo-sanctified thoughts as I clamber inside the car to rush off to my first destination.

The pastor, or any Christian for that matter, is too busy when devotion becomes relegated to a position of lesser importance in his life.

What to Do When You’re Too Busy

The fact that we are busy is obvious. The realization that such busyness is wrong is also fairly straightforward. But what to do about it introduces a Pandora’s Box of complications. Any enumerated list of “ways not to be busy,” or “how to get more done,” is usually unsatisfactory, simplistic, and unrealistic. Rather than a list of more “dos,” here are a few pointers.

1. **Saying “no” is powerful.** Competent leaders are those who know how to say “no.” There is nothing wrong with saying “no” to things—even good things, even things that may seem to provide more ministry opportunity. “No” is a weapon of defense against the encroachment of a vigor-sapping busyness. Say it. Do it.
2. **Delegation is even more powerful.** In addition to the power technique of “no,” you can employ the power technique of delegation. Obviously, you want to avoid transferring your busyness to someone else in the name of delegation, but you can and should share responsibilities among others. You may be one of those leaders who thinks that “If I don’t do it, it won’t get done.” Or you may think, “If it’s going to get done right, I have to do it.” If you operate on this assumption, first you are being very prideful. Second, you are being very selfish by refusing to give other people the opportunity to learn and grow. Be brave and delegate.
3. **Don’t think of it as escaping from difficulty; think of it as the stewardship of excusing yourself.** Often we tend toward a flawed assumption in the discussion of busyness. We somehow think that if we try to rid ourselves of busyness, we are simply trying to escape a difficult situation. And, as this thinking goes, “escapism” is cowardly,

shameful, and weak. Regardless of what others think, you should adopt the stewardship mentality. Rather than “escaping” from pressure, you are excusing yourself from certain things because of the stewardship principle. You must be a good steward of your soul, of your family, of your health, and of your ministry. Excusing yourself from the busyness is simply good stewardship.

4. **Be brutal to your schedule, not to people.** When we realize that we’re too busy, one of the first things that we naturally do is look at our schedules to see what we can ax. Usually, we come up with nothing. So, we dive back into the busyness, burning ourselves out once more. In order to reduce your busyness, brutality to your schedule is necessary. Some things just need to go. On the other hand, be gentle with people. It is unwise to just up and leave a crisis counseling situation because you’re too busy. In these cases, gentleness is advised, and delegation is encouraged. When it comes to the point where people must be dismissed from your schedule, it should never be your family. Keep your family at the top of your priority list.
5. **Just stick to the basics.** Ministry gets complicated and messy, but some things never change. Love God. Love people. Make disciples. Preach the Word. Be faithful. The basics of the ministry are still the basics, and you ought never to get away from these core fundamentals. It is refreshing to gain a perspective of ministry that cuts away at tradition, entertainment, hype, and pride.
6. **Pray.** Do not underestimate the power of prayer. Philippians 4:6 tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Bring your concerns, worries, anxiety and even your busyness to God. No matter how busy you are, make time to pray.

Sometimes it’s not so much the busyness that is the problem, but our response to that busyness. Recognize God’s sovereignty in every aspect of life. Sometimes, we will face the inescapable fact of a busy season of life. In such situations, submit to God’s sovereignty, and maintain the mindset that devotion to Jesus is of utmost importance.