

Unhurry Your Soul

There isn't much you can do about busyness as a ministry leader. It comes with the territory. Much of it is out of your control.

However, do not confuse being busy with being hurried. Busyness is an outer condition. There are many things to do and people to see. Hurry, on the other hand, is an inner condition. It is a soul that can't rest or be fully present. Busyness is about demands placed on you. Hurry is about striving to prove something to others and yourself.

There are lots of time management tools to help you deal with busyness and be a more efficient ministry leader. Take advantage of them; they're useful. But they won't fix your hurry problem.

In his book Soul Keeping, John Ortberg quotes Dallas Willard as saying, "Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

Let's think about this problem of hurry. First of all, what does hurry feel like and look like?

Anxiety about self-worth. Hurried ministry leaders harbor a deep fear about their personal worth. They need to impress people in order to prove to themselves they measure up. "If I am a function of my accomplishments, then I need more and more accomplishments to be truly worthy. How much is enough? Who knows; I just need to keep doing more."

Compulsion to get to the next thing. The fear of not measuring up means not being able to be fully present in the moment. Your mind is restlessly moving on to the next task or person instead of focusing on the one in front of you. "I wonder how many emails are in my inbox? Better go check right now." A hurried soul can't be still.

Fear of missing out. Hurried souls are horrified by the thought that somewhere people are doing things without them. "What if something significant is going on and I'm not present for it? People will know. I'll look bad. I won't get credit." Hurry and worry are close cousins.

Lack of rest. The hurried soul tends to run near empty. It is physically, emotionally, and spiritually depleting to be striving all the time. Yet hurried souls take a warped kind of pride in this. They like to talk about how much they're working, doing, serving, sacrificing, etc. "I was up 'til 2am working on Sunday's sermon" (said the bleary-eyed pastor the next morning to the office staff, looking around to see who's impressed with his work ethic). What he's really saying is, "I'm headed for a major breakdown, but the important thing is that you think I'm awesome."

The quintessential picture of hurry today is the person at a lunch meeting whose eyes dart every few seconds to their phone. When a message comes in or a social media alert shows up, they feel compelled to check it and respond immediately in spite of the person sitting across the table who is

sharing about how their teenager is going off the rails or the scary medical test they're facing. The hurried listener isn't really listening because somewhere out in the world is someone or something else that screams for attention RIGHT NOW. The hurried person is communicating to the lunch companion, "There are more important things in my life right now than you."

How can you keep from being that person? How can you ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life? It will take some practice but consider these steps.

Settle the worth question. I have good news for you, dear brother or sister. The thing that establishes your infinite value – the blood of Christ applied to your account – can never be taken from you. The question of your worth, of how God really feels about you, was settled forever at the cross. Your identity, your personhood, and your importance have been established forever in Jesus. If you start each day with that truth, you will learn through the Spirit to believe it and to take it with you into all of your activities. Ministry will be something you *get* to do because the Lord has given you all his favor, not something you *have* to do in order to earn his (or anyone else's) favor.

Organize your life around tending your soul. I find it surprising how many ministry leaders view tending their souls as something to be done in their spare time. Catch 22! When you're a hurried soul, you don't have any spare time! So make the practices that renew your soul in God – meditating on Scripture, prayer, singing to the Lord, taking a walk, looking at a sunset, writing in a journal, taking a sabbath rest, solitude - the priorities around which you schedule your life. They are more important than anything else you do because they determine the kind of person you are becoming. Prioritize those practices that anchor your life in the grace, goodness, and glory of God.

Find satisfaction in the Lord. When something doesn't go your way, say aloud, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." Why? Because contentment is not about what you get, it's about Who you're with. The Lord of the universe, who redeemed you at great cost, is present with you 24/7. Is that enough for you? If not, then nothing else ever will be. The next time the circumstances of the moment are not what you prefer, take it as an opportunity to be satisfied in Jesus. Develop this as a habit and you'll be amazed how much striving leaves your soul. "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

I will end with another Dallas Willard quote via John Ortberg: "The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it's who you become. That's what you will take into eternity." It's also what you take into your ministry each day and the most important thing people receive from you.

Ministry leader, are you becoming a soul at rest in the Lord Jesus Christ?

No book has had a more profound impact on me in recent months than [Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You](#) by John Ortberg. I commend it to all disciples, especially ministry leaders. I'll be sharing more thoughts from [Soul Keeping](#) in future articles.