

I'm Fine, Just Busy - Lesson Four
"The Symptoms of Hurry Sickness and its Remedy."
Matt. 11:28-30

Intro:

I remember the first time I saw the movie Aladdin as a young kid. I was amazed at the concept of a genie and often wondered what it would be like to find a magic lamp if it weren't a fairytale. If I had three wishes, what would I choose?

As teens and adults, we often play the same game. If only I had more time in my day, I could do _____. I could be _____. I wouldn't have to be so _____. That said, reality is that's not a solution. It would just exacerbate the problem that we are currently facing: hurry sickness.

One author expressed it this way when discussing what we would do if we got our wish for more time in the day: "The same thing most people would do—fill them up with even more things, and then I would be even more tired and burned out and emotionally frayed and spiritually at risk than I am now."¹

Adding more time is not the solution. It does not fix the "Houston, we have a problem" that we discussed in lesson 1. We can try to avoid the problem by convincing ourselves that we would fill that time with really good things. And we are probably right. The problem is obsession and emphasis on the "good things" of life often comes with a sacrifice of our spiritual health and idolatry, as Pastor Paul reminded us.

Hurry sickness has been so normalized in society that we even have a friendly name for it: anxiety. What is the underlying motivation that creates this sickness?

I want us to consider is the fear of missing out.

Our younger culture has affectionally created several phrases that encompass this with FOMO and YOLO. What is the overarching idea that these communicate? We have to do it all, see it all, enjoy it all, watch it all, read it all, play it all. We do very little, recognizing our own limitations and managing our desires. And what happens when we can't experience these things? We're filled with discontentment. Ultimately, it is revealing if I can't have X, then I can't be satisfied.

¹ Comer, John Mark. The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the ModernWorld (pp. 61-62). PRH Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.

This reveals a far deeper spiritual unbelief: my contentment can't be found in Christ alone. The apostle Paul models this for us in Phil 4. No matter what the situations of life were, no matter what he had or didn't have, he could be content. Why? Because true fulfillment can only be found in Christ.

"Yeah, but what if I can never experience this?" I have Christ. What if I never enjoy this epic vacation I saw someone post? I have Christ. Hurry sickness, at its core, is motivated by seeking to find fulfillment in things, and thus anxiety, stress, discontentment, disillusionment, and depression sink in. We think we must have and experience and when we can't. We are left "empty handed."

To take us back to the history of speed, this is another glimpse of how the culture of materialism has shaped our American mind. You have limitations in your life that will keep you from doing everything. A common one is watching that new show: there are roughly 75,000 hours of content on the major streaming platforms. That is roughly 8.5 years streaming 24/7 nonstop.

What are some common limitations:

- Our bodies - we can only be one place at a time
- Our minds - we only have some much mental capacity
- Our talents - we aren't good at everything, and someone is always better anyway
- Our personalities - we all have our own unique quirks
- Our time of life - life stages often change our capacities

You are going to miss out on temporal things. That's okay. We will always have Christ. We don't have to miss out on Him.

How does the anxiety of hurry sickness progress in our lives?

The anxiety from hurry sickness leaves us feeling overwhelmed and burnout.

You are running the rat race that everyone else seems to do, and you're burning out. You are like me running during PE class, dying from a cramp as you do the presidential fitness test, wishing you could just stop. Again, materialism raises its head. For those who are older, you are no doubt familiar with the phrase "keeping up with the Joneses."

We are working so hard to accomplish what we are convinced must be accomplished that things suffer. Our mental health suffers. Our physical health suffers. Our relationships suffer. Our spiritual health suffers.

One author expressed how hurry sickness impacts our relationships: "'The rush and pressure of modern life' is a 'pervasive form of contemporary violence.' Violence is the perfect word. Hurry kills relationships."²

You don't have time for the relationships that matter and perhaps let them slide, or only give them the margin that we can muster. We feel disconnected from everyone not because of their actions, but our own.

Moving back to our physical health, our culture is only growing more anxious and more embattled with burnout.

In her BuzzFeed article "How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation," Anne Petersen commented that "burnout isn't a place to visit and come back from; it's our permanent residence." What used to be the isolated experience of a New York day trader or emergency room physician is now the reality for most people. Petersen offered an erudite critique of the \$11 billion self-actualization industry and the inability of a spa day to fix our problems with burnout. Yet after a lengthy diagnosis of our generation's ennui, the only attempt at a solution she offered is "democratic socialism and...unions. We are beginning to understand what ails us, and it's not something an oxygen facial or a treadmill desk can fix."³

Friends, the solution to burnout is not more mani-pedis or sweat sessions or government programs or workplace unions. They may have a fraction of help at symptom relief for a time, but the problem only resurfaces again. "I highly doubt they will be any more effective against burnout than essential oils."⁴

We have talked about the anxiety of hurry sickness and its symptoms, but let's get a little more specific.

² Ibid. p. 66

³ Ibid. p. 80

⁴ Ibid. p. 80

Meyer Friedman was the one who originally coined the phrase hurry sickness after noticing that most of his at-risk cardiovascular patients displayed a harrying “sense of time urgency.”⁵He said this in the ‘50s.

Some other common symptoms have been expressed this way: “Rosemary Sword and Philip Zimbardo, authors of *The Time Cure*, offer these symptoms of hurry sickness:

- Moving from one check-out line to another because it looks shorter/faster.
- Counting the cars in front of you and either getting in the lane that has the least or is going the fastest.
- Multi-tasking to the point of forgetting one of the tasks.”⁶

Those hit close to home, right? I have found myself noticeably counting cars now. Our hurry sickness is even in our subconscious!!

I want to provide us 10 helpful symptoms that result from hurry sickness that we should evaluate for in our lives. These are all sourced from the book “*The ruthless elimination of hurry* (pages 48-51).”

1. Irritability—You get mad, frustrated, or just annoyed way too easily. Little, normal things irk you. People have to tiptoe around your ongoing low-grade negativity, if not anger. Word of advice from a fellow eggshell-expert: to self-diagnose, don’t look at how you treat a colleague or neighbor; look at how you treat those closest to you: your spouse, children, roommate, etc. _____
2. Hypersensitivity—All it takes is a minor comment to hurt your feelings, a grumpy email to set you off, or a little turn of events to throw you into an emotional funk and ruin your day. Minor things quickly escalate to major emotional events. Depending on your personality, this might show up as anger or nitpickyness or anxiety or depression or just tiredness. Point is, the ordinary problems of life this side of Eden have a disproportionate effect on your emotional well-being and relational grace. You can’t seem to roll with the punches. _____
3. Restlessness—When you actually do try to slow down and rest, you can’t relax. You give Sabbath a try, and you hate it. You read Scripture but find it boring. You have quiet time with God but can’t focus your mind. You go to bed early but toss and turn with anxiety. You watch TV but simultaneously check your phone,

⁵ Friedman and Rosenman, *Type A*, 42.

⁶ Rosemary K. M. Sword and Philip Zimbardo, “Hurry Sickness: Is Our Quest to Do All and Be All Costing Us Our Health?,” *Psychology Today*, February 9, 2013, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-time-cure/201302/hurry-sickness.

fold laundry, and get into a spat on Twitter (okay, maybe you just answer an email). Your mind and body are hyped up on the drug of speed, and when they don't get the next dopamine fix, they shiver. _____

4. Workaholism (or just nonstop activity)—You just don't know when to stop. Or worse, you can't stop. Another hour, another day, another week. Your drugs of choice are accomplishment and accumulation. These could show up as careerism or just as obsessive housecleaning and errand running. Result: you fall prey to "sunset fatigue," where by day's end you have nothing left to give to your spouse, children, or loved ones. They get the grouchy, curt, overtired you, and it's not pretty. _____
5. Emotional numbness—You just don't have the capacity to feel another's pain. Or your own pain for that matter. Empathy is a rare feeling for you. You just don't have the time for it. You live in this kind of constant fugue. _____
6. Out-of-order priorities—You feel disconnected from your identity and calling. You're always getting sucked into the tyranny of the urgent, not the important. Your life is reactive, not proactive. You're busier than ever before yet still feel like you don't have time for what really matters to you. Months often go by or years—or, God forbid, maybe it's been decades—and you realize you still haven't gotten around to all the things you said were the most important in your life. _____
7. Lack of care for your body—You don't have time for the basics: eight hours of sleep a night; daily exercise; healthy, home-cooked food; minimal stimulants; margin. You gain weight. Get sick multiple times a year. Regularly wake up tired. Don't sleep well. Live off the four horsemen of the industrialized food apocalypse: caffeine, sugar, processed carbs, and alcohol. _____
8. Escapist behaviors—When we're too tired to do what's actually life giving for our souls, we each turn to our distraction of choice: overeating, overdrinking, binge-watching Netflix, browsing social media, surfing the web, looking at porn—name your preferred cultural narcotic. Narcotics are good, healthy even, on an occasional and short-term basis when they shield us from unnecessary pain; but when we abuse them to escape from reality, they eat us alive. You find yourself stuck in the negative feedback loop of socially acceptable addictions. _____
9. Slippage of spiritual disciplines—If you're anything like me, when you get overbusy, the things that are truly life giving for your soul are the first to go

rather than your first go to—such as a quiet time in the morning, Scripture, prayer, Sabbath, worship on Sunday, a meal with your community, and so on. Because in an ironic catch-22, the things that make for rest actually take a bit of emotional energy and self-discipline. When we get overbusy, we get overtired, and when we get overtired, we don't have the energy or discipline to do what we need most for our souls. Repeat. The cycle begins to feed off its own energy.

10. Isolation—You feel disconnected from God, others, and your own soul. On those rare times when you actually stop to pray (and by pray I don't mean ask God for stuff; I mean sit with God in the quiet), you're so stressed and distracted that your mind can't settle down long enough to enjoy the Father's company. Same with your friends: when you're with them, you're also with your phone or a million miles away in your mind, running down the to-do list. And even when you're alone, you come face to face with the void that is your soul and immediately run back to the familiar groove of busyness and digital distraction.
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I don't know about you, but a lot of these hit home for me. The bandaid's been ripped off, and we are left recognizing how unhealthy we have become. How ingrained our hurry sickness has actually become in our lives!

But what is the solution? How do we solve the hurry sickness that spreads through our culture like a plague, infecting everyone to march in time with the dominating rhythm of busyness and materialism?

Let's turn our focus to Matthew 11.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

There are several crucial aspects here for us to pick through.

First, notice who Jesus is calling to himself - those that labour and are heavy-laden.

Another author wrote about this saying: “This is an invitation—for all the tired, the burned out, the stressed, and all those stuck in traffic and behind on their to-do lists, reaching for another cup of coffee just to make it through the day.”⁷

Jesus here is making a call for people to step into His kingdom. To move away from their cultural lifestyles and beliefs, and find true and lasting rest in Him.

Second, we see the source and promise of this invitation.

Come unto me. Jesus is the source of the invitation and the fulfillment at the same time. He is inviting you to a dinner party where you will feast on the bread of life. There is a call of salvation that is boldly clear here.

How do we escape the hopelessness and burnout that this life breeds because nothing it provides satisfies — we go to Christ and we receive Him.

When we receive Him, we gain access to His rest. Of course, when we accept Christ as our Savior, we receive eternal rest. For all eternity, we will enjoy the fullness of life in Him, but beyond that, He also provides rest in this temporal life.

I don’t have to earn my status with Him or my forgiveness. I have already received it. I don’t have to worry about missing out on the things of this life; I have already received the greatest gift ever offered. My identity isn’t what I achieve or not achieve, it is in Christ. The solution to hurry sickness is running to Christ.

Third, take my yoke upon you.

If you are not familiar with a yoke, it is a wooden or leather harness that is used to keep two animals together, moving in unison as they plowed in a field. In an agrarian culture, this illustration was perhaps more impactful as well as confusing. Why?

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

This sounds like intense work. Why would Jesus say you will have rest but then immediately say to take up a yoke? Isn’t he telling them to cast off the oppressive yoke of their own self-righteousness and religious understanding in the first place?

⁷ Comer, John Mark. The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the ModernWorld (p. 79). PRH Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.

“But Jesus realizes that the most restful gift he can give the tired is a new way to carry life, a fresh way to bear responsibilities.... Realism sees that life is a succession of burdens; we cannot get away from them; thus instead of offering escape, Jesus offers equipment. Jesus means that obedience to his Sermon on the Mount [his yoke] will develop in us a balance and a 'way' of carrying life that will give more rest than the way we have been living.”⁸

This is revolutionary for us! Jesus calls us to embark on becoming like Him. Working to develop the same priorities and behaviors that He displayed in His life. That is when we find rest for our souls. We seek to mirror Him. To walk alongside Him, adopting the framework of His kingdom and seeking it first.

Everyone is looking for an escape. Everyone is looking for a solution to solve the rush and dissatisfaction of life in this fallen world. Every escape that this world provides is simply a temporary distraction. It is just covering up the symptoms without a true solution.

Jesus and His lifestyle is the solution. We solve hurry sickness when we change our goals. Our goals are no longer what we can get done, or what we will do, or what we can experience. Our goals become oriented around being with Jesus and becoming like Jesus. It is a radical transformation of outlook and prioritization.

That's why Jesus doesn't offer us an escape. He offers us something far better: “equipment.” He offers his apprentices a whole new way to bear the weight of our humanity with ease. At his side. Like two oxen in a field, tied shoulder to shoulder. With Jesus doing all the heavy lifting. At his pace. Slow, unhurried, present to the moment, full of love and joy and peace.⁹

An easy life isn't an option, an easy yoke is.¹⁰

For homework and discussion this week, I want us to take some time as a group and walk through the list of 10 symptoms of hurry sickness. Talk about where they are evident in your life. How they have affected your life. The anxiety that they are

⁸ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary, Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 538.

⁹ Comer, John Mark. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (p. 88). PRH Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), by John Ortberg

developing in your life. Then, talk about how Christ is the solution, and how living like Him would change those behaviors.