

Busyness/Misplaced Priorities

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[0 : 0 0] Have your Bibles turned with me this morning to Luke chapter 10. This morning we come to the third in this series of sermons on the enemy of prayer. And this morning, if I was giving this enemy a name, I would call it busyness.

Not business, but busyness. Or misplaced priorities. The doctor that I've had for 30 years is a friend of mine, was a neighbor for 11 of those years.

And like most of the doctors I go to, you go to his office, you sit there for 4, 5, 6, 7 minutes, 10 at the most. They call you back. Within another 5 or 6 minutes, he sees you and you're on your way.

But have you ever been to a doctor's office? Because recently we've had this experience in our household. My wife had to see this specialist. And we've been there about 6 times. And you think it might be that way one time, but it's been that way every 6 times.

You go in, they tell you to come 15 minutes early. And you get there and they take care of that in about 2 minutes. So you sit there about 13 minutes waiting for your actual appointment time. And then they let you wait another 45 minutes or an hour.

[1 : 1 1] And then they carry you back to this little room and say the doctor will be right in. Which means he's going to be there in about 40, 45 minutes more. And you spend about 2 1/2, 3 hours at the doctor's office.

Now, I'm not on doctors this morning because that's the exception rather than the rule. But we probably all had that kind of experience at some point in our life. And they'll come out.

If you say anything about it, you know what they're going to tell you. We had some emergencies today. But you've been there five days in a row and every day is an emergency. So after a while, that emergency is not really an emergency.

It's just you're not planning for the emergency, right, that you know is already going to happen. And what really has happened is they've overbooked those appointments. And we all know that, right? That's yes and no.

Yeah, we all get it. We know they've overbooked that. And so it irritates you. But let me just warn you about something. Before you get too hot and bothered with a doctor or that kind of office, whatever it is, it's something we all do.

[2 : 1 0] You do know that, right? We all have a tendency to overbook. And the busier, the more active a lifestyle you have, the more apt you are to overbook.

For instance, at work, how many of you right now have got stuff on your calendar that you just say, I can't possibly get all that done, right? But you go ahead and agree to do it anyway because they ask you to do it.

And so you put it on your calendar of to-do things. Or socially, you accept this invitation. Somebody says, would you do such and such? And you say, oh, I'd love to.

And on the inside, you're going, I can't do that. I don't have time. But you do it anyway, right? And so you overbook that slot. We do it with our families. How many of you are grandparents in this room?

Right, a lot of you. You'll say, I'll be glad to keep the child, right? But you meant like one day out of seven. And they're thinking five days out of seven, right?

[3 : 0 8] And so after a while, you just think, man, I don't have time to do anything. Now, I know because you're so spiritual minded and all that this would never happen here at First Baptist Church Pickens.

But have any of you ever overbooked your church calendar? You ever find yourself saying yes to this committee and yes to that committee? And you teach Sunday school and you're a deacon and you're on this committee and that committee.

And you're singing the choir and you're cutting the grass and you're cleaning the bathroom. And I could just go on and on and on, right? They ask you to serve on the bereavement committee and they ask you to serve on the benevolent committee.

And so you're just doing all these things and you meet yourself going and coming. Have you ever been tempted to think this when a guy stands up here like me and he preaches on prayer?

And you say, preacher, I wish you'd get off my back. I'm going to beat 90 miles an hour. I just don't. You ready for this? Have time to pray. I'd like to pray.

[4 : 10] But when would I get around to that? You got me running, doing all these things for the church. And so, to be honest, I really just don't have time to pray.

Well, I want you to look at this story. Great, great, great story. Luke chapter 10, verse 38. While they were traveling, that's Jesus and his disciples, he entered a village, we know to be Bethany, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

Now, let me give you the inside track. You go back and you read the context of this and you understand Jesus has just come off a missionary campaign. He sent his disciples out.

They've come back. They're dead tired. Another passage tells us Jesus wants to get away. He tells his disciples, let's go to a remote area. They try going to the remote area, but when they get there, as I preached a few weeks ago, there are already people there who have anticipated they're going to this remote location.

So, Jesus doesn't get any rest. Finally, he gets to Bethany. These are three of his dearest social friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

[5 : 20] We read a couple of stories in the scripture about them. On this occasion, Jesus gets to town. Martha sees him apparently and says, Jesus, so good to see. They're tired.

They're exhausted. They've been on the road. Probably hadn't had a good meal in a long, long time. And she says, I want you to come to our house. Well, you've been to people's houses and then you've been to people's houses where they really have the gift of hospitality, right?

And you just are able to let your hair down. You're able to relax. You're able to have a good time.

And it's just a wonderful, wonderful experience. I believe it was this kind of experience for Jesus in Bethany at Martha's house.

He knew her. He was, I think, excited about going to her house. So I want to tell you something.

Martha has done a good thing. Jesus, come home. Now, let's, this is really important.

Ask yourself, what is it she's wanting to do in this moment when she sees Jesus and invites him to her house? Is she thinking, I'm wanting him to go away thinking I am the new Martha Stewart?

[6 : 20] No. Is she thinking, I'm going to impress him because this is going to be like a French restaurant, five-star restaurant? No. Is she thinking, I want to impress him with how well I keep my house?

No. She's got one thing in her mind. I'm doing something good for Jesus. You don't look at his face. He's tired. He's wore out. We're having him in the disciples.

It's going to be a great time. We're going to have a wonderful time just seeing Jesus. That's mostly what she's got in the back of her mind. Doing something good for Jesus. Having a wonderful time.

You've had people like that in your life who just said, look, I want you to come to the house and you get there, have a great time.

A few weeks ago, the Whitworths here in your church invited me and my wife to come over. They had a few of their friends, some family. Have a huge table. Let me tell you something. If you ever get a chance to go to Vic and Sharon Whitworth's home, go.

That gal can put out a spread, right? And they're so hospitable and warm and friendly. We just had a great, wonderful time. So that's what Jesus is looking forward to.

[7 : 25] He's looking forward to going to like the Whitworth's house, okay? Look at next verse, verse 39. She had a sister named Mary who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what he said.

Now here's Mary. Mary, they're flesh and blood brothers and sisters, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. Same gene pool, but she couldn't be any more different than Martha if she tried.

How many of you got people like that in your family? You got two kids, a boy and a girl, two girls, two boys, multiple children. One's an A and the other's a Z, right? I've got a daughter who's a fashionista.

I mean, she loves clothes. I got a boy that owns about three pair of pants. I mean, he goes to barber about once a year if he needs to or not, long hair, beard.

He's outdoorsman, loves to hunt in the woods. That's just who he is. They couldn't be more different. Both have loving hearts, both good people, just different people all together.

[8 : 31] Things he cares about, she don't give a nickel about. Things she cares about, he don't give a nickel about, right? Well, Martha and Mary, or Mary, Martha and Mary, I should have said, are all together different.

Martha is a housekeeper. She's a cook. Mary may do some of these things, but she's really a people person. And so when she sees Jesus, she's equally glad to see Jesus come into the house, but what she does is she just plops down there, as we say in our house.

She plops down there, and she soaks up Jesus like a sponge. Now let me just ask you, who wouldn't? I mean, you've got the son of God in your house.

You've got this guy who's doing miracles and teaching like no one's ever taught. And just, you look at him, you just say there's something special about him. And so she's able to ask him all those questions you've asked your pastor in the past, and he hasn't had an answer for you, right?

You remember coming up to your pastor and said, pastor, I just want to know. And then he looks at you with a deer in the headlight look and says, you're going to have to wait until you get to heaven, right? Because I don't know. And he doesn't know.

[9 : 42] And he's just honest about it. Well, Jesus knows. And you've got him right here in your living room. And so you're asking, bombarding him with questions, and he's answering. And it's just a great time.

And she's just having the ball just soaking up Jesus, right? Well, look at verse 40. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks.

First sign of anything going wrong here. But Martha. In grammar, English grammar, that's considered a conjunction of contrast.

Conjunctions are words that tie two ideas together. Here's idea A, Martha inviting Jesus to the home. Idea B, Mary sitting here soaking him up like sponge.

The writer is tying these two ideas together, but he uses a conjunction, not and, but, but, which means there's a problem. There's some kind of conflict here, right?

[10 : 44] So he says, but Martha was distracted by her many tasks. That word distracted is a good word. It's a strong word.

It paints a picture for us, right? Because every one of us, if you think about it, you know exactly what a distraction is. How many of you are one task at a time people?

Can I see you? A lot of people are multi. I'm a one task at a time person. I mean, especially the older I get, I had better be a one task person, right? Because I can walk from this room to that room and get there, and I don't have a clue what I'm there for, right?

Anything can distract me. I'm as ADD as they come, right? So Martha is trying to get this meal ready, set the table, put everything out there, got the roast in the oven.

She's got her pie made. She's got to set the table, get the dishes on the table, and the forks in place, and the napkins, and the tea poured, and everything's going to be ready to go, and not to mention a hundred other things that she wishes were in place.

[11 : 46] Well, she gets distracted because every time she walks through, guess what she sees? There's Mary. Mary is not helping. Mary is sitting listening to Jesus.

I wish somebody would let me listen to Jesus. I've got to do all this stuff while you sit there listening to Jesus. And so she's distracted by her many, many tasks.

Now, I want to just warn you, people who have a lot of tasks who are doers, you have a bigger problem than this than people who know how to relax. I'm in that Martha category.

I always got a lot going on. I always got a lot to do. I'm scurrying about. And I'll just tell you something about those of us who scurry about. When we scurry about, if we're honest about it, we want everybody else scurrying around with us, don't we?

You ever seen that? I mean, you're getting this meal on the table. Have you ever walked by and seen your husband just sitting there with his hands behind his head, laid back, watching the ball game in the recliner? You don't want to say, hey, jerkwad, get up and come in and help me, right?

[12 : 56] I mean, you don't have feet. Especially when you walk by and they say, hey, if you get a chance, could you give me a glass of tea? You know? I'll get you a glass of tea.

Right? And so Martha is distracted because she's got so many things going on. Look at verse 40, the middle of the verse.

And she came up and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Can you see Martha? Man, I can. I've been Martha before.

I try to conceal it better than Martha, I think, did here. But I've been Martha before. Where you're just running around like a chicken with your head cut off and you look around and others in the room who you thought would be helping you aren't helping you and you keep dropping hands. I could use a hand here, you know? Boy, I'll get the meal on the table as soon as I can. And they're just not taking the hint.

[14:03] And so after a while, she comes up and says, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me alone to serve? She's mad with Mary.

But I want to let you in on something if you haven't ever thought about this before. Seems sacrilegious to say, but it's true. She's mad with Jesus too. Because Jesus is occupying Mary and Mary is listening to Jesus and she in her mind thinks, why don't you tell her to come help me? Do you not care? Do you not see? I'm just busy as a beaver and I'm doing all these things and Mary just keeps sitting there. Do you not care?

Well, look at the very next part of that verse, verse 40c. So tell her to give me a hand. Now here's Ralph Carter's translation of that, right?

You won't find this in the Greek, but this is Ralph Carter. You know what she's saying? Tell her to get off her backside and come help me. When she says give a hand, what she's wanting her to do is to get up and get moving and come to her aid and assist her in preparing for this meal.

[15:18] So she's thinking to herself, Jesus, she'd listen to you. You can fix this. All you gotta do is give the word, hey, Mary, Martha's really busy here and if you'd go help her, it'd help her out.

But notice Jesus' response, verse 41. The Lord answered her with just two words, ready? Martha, Martha. Now, I can picture my mom saying that to me.

I don't know about you. And I gotta figure, and I know exactly how Jesus said it. He said it probably like my mom would have said it. He turns around. He's involved in a great spiritual conversation with Mary.

They're having a great time of it. And he hears Martha, and she's taking off the gloves. Why don't you tell her to come give me a hand? And he turns and he looks at her and probably folds his arms the way my mama used to.

And he says, Martha, Martha. Right? When they say your name twice, that's not a good thing. You remember what that was like at home?

[16:23] If they say it one time, okay, they want your attention. But when they put it together twice, not a good thing. Martha, Martha. In other words, Martha, you are a piece of work.

And then he says, you are worried and upset about many things. In other words, you're in a tizzy over so many things.

And busy people see lots of things to do, don't they? Have you ever noticed how when you invite somebody over, it starts, remember what we said about Martha in the beginning?

What she wanna do? She wants to have Jesus come to her house and just show him a good time. But this has turned into something else. It's taken on a life of its own.

Have you ever done that? Ever had a good intention about somebody in your home? You're just gonna have a good meal. You're just gonna have a good time. But somebody needs to polish the furniture. Somebody needs to vacuum the floor.

[17:19] Somebody needs to wax the floor. Somebody needs to wash the windows. Somebody needs to change the sheets in there in the bedroom. You think, they're not gonna go lay down on that bed. You know? But we need to do those things.

We need to clean the toilet back there. Right? We need to do all those. Cut the grass. Get the weeds out of the flowers. And folk are like that. You see lots and lots and lots of things to do. Here's the sad part. Martha lost sight of her initial priorities. She wanted to show Jesus kindness. Get this now. But now she's insulting him.

And what was important became secondary. And what wasn't even on the radar has become primary.

You get where I'm going with this? In our spiritual lives, a lot of times, we get to hurrying about and so busy and doing things that those things that at one time we didn't even know were on the radar,

they become primary.

[18 : 25] And those things that at one time were primary to us, they become secondary and even further removed than that. I want you to think back to the day that you invited Christ into your heart and life.

When you first established a relationship with God, did committee work have anything to do with that at all? Was that on your agenda?

Did you think about being elected to this office or that office? Did you think about how good the choir at First Baptist Pickens sang? Or how good the sermon was?

When you first got right with Christ, I'm going to tell you something. Everybody in this room who's had that experience, you know the only thing that really mattered was your relationship with God. You just wanted to be right with God.

Period. You just wanted to hear from God and know God's will for your life and to be able to communicate with God. And that was primary and that was so clear you could see it every day.

[19 : 29] But then as time passed, things kind of got cluttered because this came into your life and that came into your life and this came into your life. And after a while, you're running like a chicken with your head cut off and you don't have time even to pray.

We spend way too much time rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic. Do you understand what I'm saying by that? That ship's hit the iceberg.

It's going down. Matter of minutes. We're still trying feverishly to get those chairs in the right place. I was on the personnel committee for a Baptist association many, many years ago when I first went in ministry.

I was the young guy on the committee and we met at the associational office. We were going to evaluate the employees, talk about how they're doing in their job performance.

So we get with the DOM, the director of missions, and we say to him, tell us about your work. Tell us what has happened in the last year. Now, I was excited about it.

[20 : 34] First year on the personnel committee, young preacher. I think he's going to tell us about mission efforts. He's going to tell us about people he's witnessed to, people he's brought into the church. He's going to tell us about pastors who he's helped who are having difficult times, maybe their marriage is in trouble, and he's helped rescue them.

Or he's going to tell us about churches that are having problems and how he's intervened and giving them solutions and answers and suggestions, and those congregations are stronger today. You know what he did?

You're not going to believe what I'm going to tell you. I hope you won't believe what I'm going to tell you. But this is exactly what he did. Now, I've changed the numbers because I can't remember the numbers, but the categories are exactly as he said them.

He pulls out his long sheet of paper from his desk, and this is what he said. Well, it's kind of like this. This year, I was involved in 15,846 phone calls.

2,139 pieces of mail were received into our office. 1,282 pieces of mail were sent out by our office. We had 139 meetings here in this building at our office.

[21 : 39] I had 57 meetings, personal encounters with pastors across the association, and that was his report. And you know what I thought when I sat there as a 28, 29-year-old guy?

Who has the time to count how many times you answer the phone? Who keeps a list of that? Who says, well, today, that's six more pieces of mail.

Who says, every time they go to meet a pastor, okay, I mail that pastor. Put that one down. You see what had happened? The little things, the meaningless things had become the primary thing, and the primary thing was lost.

And I'm fearful in our spiritual lives. That's what many of us do as well. Look at verse 42, and I close. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.

Here's what Jesus is saying. No, Martha, I won't ask Mary to stop what she's doing to come help you, because what could be more important than what Mary is doing right here?

[22 : 55] She's sitting, she's having conversation with me, she's given me a wonderful opportunity to share with her the things of the kingdom. We're having fellowship. It's just great.

And what Mary is doing is going to pay lasting benefits. She's creating memories that are going to last her a lifetime, and she would.

Can you imagine any of us in this room, you have a chance to sit and personally talk with Jesus. He's going to be crucified later on, arise, return to heaven, and you're going to have that memory in your mind and heart.

I talked with Jesus. We spoke about this and this and this and this. Five years later, somebody says, you remember when Jesus came to Bethany? Uh-huh.

What was it Martha cooked that day? I mean, do you remember that pie we had? No. Do you remember how clean the house was?

[23 : 58] Uh-uh. But I remember that conversation I had with Jesus. I remember that thing he said. And that made all the difference in the world.

Let me ask you, in all the stuff you're doing in your spiritual life, so-called spiritual life, how much of it is communion actually with God?

And how much of it is church work versus the work of the church? Because I hope you know there's a difference in those two things.

You're looking at somebody who was in ministry, has been in ministry, now 50 years. And somewhere along the way, I recognized a good while back, there's a huge difference in church work and the work of the church.

The work of the church will run you down, and church work will invigorate you, or the work of the church will invigorate you. But church work, it's pretty tiring, it's pretty boring.

[25 : 09] It's draining. It doesn't charge your battery. My mom died June the 1st, 2014.

We were real tight. She was 80 years old. Those last three or four years, I'd go to her house. I'd go about once a week to see her. My dad's still living. I'd go see my dad's Energizer money. He was up, he could get around. But my mom had become less and less mobile.

Now she could walk, she could get around, we could go places. But she'd just gotten to that point in life where she preferred to sit rather than go and do. I've always been a person who didn't know how to relax and just always wanted to be on the go.

And so I'd go to her house and I'd think, it'd be good for her if I could get her up out of the house.

And I'd say, Mama, we all called her Ma, my kids and all. And I said, Ma, why don't we go do such and such?

[26 : 15] I heard about this thing going over there in Pumpkin Town or I heard about this thing over in Greenwood. Why don't we get in the car and I'll run you over there and we'll see you and we'll have a big time. And we would have had a big time. And about 95% of the time, here's what she'd say, son, that sounds like it'd be a lot of fun.

But you know what I really like to do? No, Mom, what's that? I always knew what she was going to say. Why don't we just sit and talk? I'm sorry.

I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm so emotional.

She, about six months before she died, she got multiple myeloma. She went down real quick.

And I'd see her several times a week and we'd just sit and we'd just talk. Well, you know, I'm not a singer like Georgia and Jimmy, Brian. But a couple times I'd say, Mom, why don't me and you sing?

[27 : 34] And we'd sing his eyes on a sparrow. We'd just have a good time. We went a lot of places in our lifetime and I want to tell you something.

Those conversations are the thing that I remember that last six months talking with her, sitting there having fellowship with her. And I just wondered so many times as a preacher and a pastor, we come to church and we want a huge crowd and it's good to have a big crowd and all, but I just wonder at times if God says, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, talk to me. Just talk to me. Choir's good, but would you talk to me? Preaching's okay, but would you talk to me?

Hey, you there around that conference table having that meeting, how about talk to me? How about talk to me? Let's bow in prayer.

Don't leave church today without talking to God. I'm not even going to ask you to stand. I want it to be more personal than that. If you want to come and kneel here at the altar, you do that. I welcome you to come.

[28 : 58] Ryan's going to sing the hymn of invitation, but whether you come or whether you sit there in the pew, talk to him. Right now, just talk to him.

Just have a conversation with him. Would you do that while he sings?