

Introduction

McDonalds, Wendy's, Burger King, Taco Bell, KFC, Arby's, Long John Silvers, and Popeye's. What do we call what I just named? That's right - "**fast food**" restaurants. But notice what we don't call them. We don't call them "**good food**" restaurants, although the food really is good. Almost nothing is better than KFC original recipe chicken. We also don't call them "**cheap food**" restaurants, although they are almost always cheaper. We call them "**fast food**" restaurants.

Why is that? It's because that's the thing about them that appeals to us the most. They're fast. With drive-thru windows in fact, we can now order and eat without even exiting our cars. Fast food is America's major contribution to world cuisine, which shows us something about ourselves. We're hurried and need to slow down. We need a "**hand full of rest**" and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Hurry

In verses 4-8, the author of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, identifies four different kinds of people.

One kind, in verse 4, is what we might call "**the highly charged competitor.**" This person drives himself relentlessly to work and achieve. His purpose? It's to outshine his competitors and peers.

Another kind of person is found in verses 7-8, what we might call "**the compulsive moneymaker.**" His craving for money is never-satisfied. And it drives him even more relentlessly than rivalry does the competitor of verse 4. Solomon assesses it bluntly this way, "**There was no end to all his labor.**" He's endlessly busy, in other words. He's so busy in fact that he doesn't bother with relationships of any kind with anybody.

Now, here's what I want you to see. Many of us are like the highly charged competitor of verse 4 and the compulsive moneymaker of verses 7-8. Our motivations may be different (not rivalry or money) but the

consequence is the same. We're hurried. Domino's pizza is the second largest pizza chain in the United States. One of the reasons why is its pledge to deliver its pizza in less than 30 minutes. One CEO explained its success this way. **"We don't sell pizza,"** he said, **"We sell delivery."** It's successful in other words because so many people are in so much of a hurry. Hurry is two things.

First, it's a disordered schedule. Author Meyer Friedman defines it this way. It's **"a continuous struggle and unremitting attempt to accomplish or achieve more and more things or participate in more and more events in less and less time."** That certainly describes many of us doesn't it. We're attempting to achieve, experience, or do more things that we have the time for. Hurry is a disordered schedule.

But that isn't all it is. It's a disordered mind as well. Think about this. We can have leisurely circumstances but a hurried mind. We aren't busy but our thoughts and feelings are in a state of rush.

In younger years, I'd sometimes calculate which was the shortest checkout line in a store. Once I was in it, I then kept track of the persons who would have been me if I had chosen the other lines. If I got through mine and they hadn't, I felt good about it. But if one of them got through his or hers and I hadn't, I felt bothered by it. It had nothing to do with my schedule. It had everything to do with my mind.

So that's what hurry is. It's a disordered schedule and/or mind.

Slow Down

But notice the consequences of it to us. First, in verse 7, it's **"vanity"** and **"striving after wind."** It leaves us empty inside. Second, in the last line of verse 8, it's **"grievous."** It frustrates us.

But there's another consequence that Solomon doesn't address. Hurry is the enemy of our spiritual lives. For Christians in America today, the threat isn't that we'll renounce our faith. It's that we're so hurried that we'll dilute it. We're so rushed with all the things we have to achieve, experience, or do that we settle for a mediocre version of it.

We just skim the surface of spiritual realities, experiences, and truths. We never take the time to dive into the depths of them.

Or to say it in another way, we can't follow Jesus at a nonstop fast paced sprint. When Jill and I take our dogs for a walk, I try to let her lead where we go. But I walk so fast that I'm usually ahead of her. I've learned a lesson from that. We can't go faster than the one we're following. That's just as true with Jesus as it is with Jill. He was and still is never in a hurry. If we are, therefore, we're going faster than He is and can't follow Him.

I once counseled a long established Christian whose problem was this. He'd come to the end of a hectic day and realize he hadn't thought about Jesus even once during it. So, he'd repent and ask His forgiveness. He came to see me when he recognized he was repenting for that almost every night. His hurried mind and life simply didn't have any room for Jesus. Hurry truly is the enemy of our spiritual lives.

That's why we absolutely positively must slow down.

Don't misunderstand what that means though. It doesn't mean we should become sluggards. Verse 5 makes that crystal clear. It pictures a third kind of person, "**the sturdy poor.**" English law attempted to address the needs of the poor. One of those attempts was the 1601 Poor Law. That law prohibited certain groups of poor individuals from being helped. One of those was what it called "**sturdy vagabonds.**" That's what verse 5 is about, "**sturdy**" people who are healthy enough to achieve and work but are too lazy to do so. They sit around and do nothing instead. That in turn consumes their material assets (money and property) and their character (their self-respect, self-control, and concern for others). So to slow down doesn't mean that.

What does it mean then? Living a fast paced life, pastor John Ortberg asked a friend of his, "**What do I need to do to be spiritually healthy?**" To which his friend replied, "**You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.**" That's what it means to slow down. Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives.

Modest Demands

Verse 6, with its fourth kind of person, teaches us how to do that. This verse contains two Hebrew idioms. The first is **“two fists full of labor,”** which means to be compulsively busy. The second idiom is, **“one hand full of rest.”** That beautiful expression holds out a better and happier alternative. As commentator Derek Kidner explains it, **“It manages to convey the twofold thought of modest demands and inward peace.”**

That is precisely what it conveys and I draw your attention to the words **“modest demands.”** That’s how we ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. We address the demands that others or we make on us. We address those demands by doing two things.

First, we live within our emotional limits. We refuse to live beyond them. Most people are concerned about living within their physical limits. A man in his late 40’s told me he’s played in his last pickup basketball game. His knees can’t take it anymore and so he no longer plays. Most of us are careful to know our physical limits and try to live within them. We need to do the same with regard to our emotional limits. Know what they are and live within them.

We do that by repudiating the modern success image of the person **“on the go,”** the person whose workload exceeds what anyone could possibly do. We don’t need the migraines, ulcers, nervous tension, and other symptoms that go along with living like that. We must learn and respect our emotional limits.

I had a friend, Edward, who became an associate in one of Akron’s largest law firms. He was there for seven years before leaving to start his own practice. He did that because he wanted to control his hours. His firm had required 52 billable hours a week, which meant that he had more clients than he could handle. He’d wake up at night, for instance, panicked that he’d missed a statute of limitations or a filing deadline. He was living beyond his emotional limits and finally did something about it.

In a culture where whirl is king, we need to learn what our

emotional limits are and commit ourselves to live within them.

We address the demands made on us by doing a second thing. We order our calendar. We get it under control.

In his book *Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster suggests a practical way of doing that. Keep a record of all of our activities for one month. Then place each in one of the following categories: (1) absolutely essential; (2) important but not essential; (3) helpful but not necessary; and (4) trivial. After that, ruthlessly eliminate all of the last two categories of activities and 20% of the first two.

However we do it, we need to do it. Order our calendar. Get it under control. First, say "no" to activities that are important but that take time and energy away from ones that are more important. And second, say "no" to trivial activities.

The fact that we can order our calendar implies something. We're too busy, if we are, only because we choose to be. Listen to a word of counsel from Dallas Willard. It's worth pondering. **"God never gives anyone too much to do."** He's right and I'd like to personalize it. God never gives you or me too much to do. We do that to ourselves – and sometimes to our children - or allow others to do it to us.

That then is how we eliminate hurry from our lives. We address the demands that others or we make on us. We live within our emotional limits and we order our calendars.

Some Spiritual Disciplines

There's something else we do to eliminate hurry. Practice spiritual disciplines that address the busyness and rush of our lives. If we intend and practice them in order to be like Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in and through them to transform what we are.

The first discipline is slowing. In slowing, we deliberately find ways to wait. When I make hospital calls, for instance, I rush in and after I'm done visiting, I rush out. I also take the stairway instead of the elevator because I don't want to wait for it. So, to eliminate hurry, I sometimes

purposely walk slowly in and out and take the elevator, asking the Holy Spirit to transform me as I do. We can practice slowing in many ways: choose the longest line, don't push the elevator's close button, take 15 chews before swallowing food, don't change channels during commercials, and so on.

The second and third disciplines, which go together, are solitude and silence. We escape from the sights, sounds, activities, and people of everyday life, get alone with God, and do nothing except be with Him. We need periods of this (15 to 60 minutes) on a regular basis, preferably every day. Think about the normal course of day-to-day human interactions we have. They lock us into patterns of thought, feeling, and action that are geared to a hurried world. They make us rushed. Solitude and silence free us from those patterns and that rush. They free us from the stimuli and responses that are normal to us.

Finally, the fourth discipline is Sabbath observance. The Sabbath observance has several specific purposes, one of which is this. It's to make us stop laboring – to make us stop doing anything in the way of work. One reason we're so hurried is that we can't turn loose of the world and the place we think we have in it. Our world or the worlds of our loved ones will fall apart, we think, if we aren't doing this or that. So we stop doing this or that one day of the week and trust God for the outcome. We cast our anxieties on Him who cares for us - and our circumstances. The Sabbath observance enables the Holy Spirit to do something in us – free us from the bondage we're in to our own efforts.

Conclusion

I close with the words of the renowned Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard: **"The press of busyness is like a charm. Its power swells."** Don't succumb to the hurry that charms. Live within your emotional limits, order your schedule, and practice the disciplines of slowing, solitude, silence, and Sabbath. You'll have one hand full of rest, meaning a spirit full of peace, if you do.