

*Are We Too Busy?*

A mother asked her teenage daughter what she wanted for her birthday. Much to her mother's surprise the girl said, "A hug." Her mother was incredulous, "What do you mean a hug?" The daughter explained, "You and Dad are always at work, and even when you're home you're busy. You've given me every material thing that I need. But what I really want is your time, your affection, your love." The mother angrily responded that she and her husband had to work hard to put a roof over their heads and food on their table, but at a deeper level she knew there was some truth in what her daughter said. They lived comfortably but they had sacrificed family life in pursuit of financial security.

I wish I could say that things changed in that household after that exchange, but they didn't. Sadly, the girl grew up and had a troubled adult life, never being able to hold a steady job or commit to a lasting relationship. We could debate whether her mother and father's lifestyle and style of parenting caused her situation, or not, and I admit I have a lot more sympathy for the parents' dilemma now than I did when I was teenage friend of the girl in my story. Still, I think we would all agree that a big problem in our modern world is that we are pulled in so many different directions, often by genuinely worthwhile pursuits, such as our careers, that we sometimes do neglect our families and other important relationships.

It has been said many times that no one, while they were dying, has ever said, "Gee, I wish I had spent more time at the office." But many people's

last thought have been that they wasted too much time working when they could have spent that time with the people they loved. Sometimes it seems as if a job has us rather we have a job. The reality of death has a way of putting our priorities, such as family and career, in proper perspective. In addition to neglecting family time, another victim of the busy modern world and all its pressure is our time with God. We frequently neglect our church family as well as our biological family. We often fail to spend adequate time in prayer, scripture reading, and worship, and we feel that deficit acutely when the end of life draws near. We often have failed to nourish and deepen our relationship with our Lord and His church while we could.

An experience that made a lasting impression on me early in my ministry was being called to the bedside of a dying man. He had once been an active Christian but had stopped attending church for many years for no particular good reason. He didn't like the new pastor or the new hymns or some such thing. But when confronted with the big existential questions that one faces as life ebbs away, he wanted to receive Holy Communion and have me pray with him. He confessed to me, "What a fool I've been." Having been restored to fellowship with Christ, he died a happy man. Nothing is more important than cultivating our relationship with God.

There really is a force at work in the world -- call it evil, call it the devil, call it sin, or call it whatever you like -- and that force desires to lead us away from our fellowship with Christ and the faith of the church. And what is so insidious is that the means this force uses are not readily recognizable as evil. In fact, the things that tempt us away from God usually look to be themselves good and right and holy. Sunday brunch, the Sunday newspaper,

our jobs, our sports and hobbies, and so on are good things for the most part. They only become problems for us when they get in the way of worship. They turn into issues when our “busy-ness” with them gets in the way of our quality time with God.

Moreover, and even more insidious, is that when we succeed at something, and become wealthier, or more popular, or whatever our measure of success is, we may be tempted into think that we are fulfilling God’s will for us, when, in fact, we are doing the exact opposite. Even worse, we may come to think that our success is all our own doing and come to believe that we have no use for God anymore. We come to feel like we’ve out grown the need for God in our lives.

The truth, of course, is that we are absolutely dependent on God all the time for everything. If you haven’t noticed that lately, take a break and consider it. What do you have that God didn’t give you? When we recognize God as our first priority, and have faith in him to provide for us, rather than having faith in our own abilities and capacity to earn, and when we radically follow his commandments, our lives will be changed.

I heard the true story of a man who was asked by his employer to do something the man thought was immoral and un-Christian. Being a steadfast Christian believer, he refused to follow his boss’ order. The boss gave him an ultimatum, “Do what I say or find another job.” Well, the man chose to quit his job rather than compromise his Christian morals. He was unemployed for a long time and his family suffered many hardships. Certainly all of us would have understood and forgiven him had he merely

did as he was told to save his family the problems they would face because he stuck to his beliefs. But instead he was heroic in his faith, and he stands as someone we can admire and emulate. Today his situation is improving, but being faithful to Christ and his ways is always going to be a struggle. It's not easy to withstand the pressures that come from the world, but, with God's help, all things are possible.

Jesus' told a parable about people who had worldly pursuits that they thought were greater than the invitation they received to the king's banquet. One had a new piece of property to attend to, one had just bought a wife and another had married a cow (or *vice versa*). Anyway, they missed out on a great dinner. The host, not satisfied to keep the dinner all to himself, wanted his house full of happy partiers. So he invited others to attend, and they came and enjoyed. Looking at the parable allegorically, we can see God as the benevolent host. The dinner itself is the Kingdom of God in its ultimate reality, but the dinner may also symbolize the church's worship, which is a foretaste of the feast to come.

The parable leaves us with a choice: will we accept God's invitation to the to the all-time greatest party ever, or will we miss it because we are too busy? We don't earn an invitation the party; that is God's free gift. But God respects us enough to honor our free will. He wants to party with us. If we reject him, he'll not be happy, but he'll abide by our wishes, even if it's not the smartest decision we could make.

Being here today, you have chosen the better part. Being here today is good for you, it's good for your family, and it's good for your relationship with

God. Most importantly it's what God calls us to do. We are being obedient and faithful, and we are being blessed. That blessing may just give us new perspectives on what we really should be busy with: busy with our families, busy with worship, busy with sharing our faith with others. Those are the important things in life

Are we too busy to take time for God? Let's answer "No!" and pray for His guidance. By His power, we can make time with God a healthy habit.

Amen.