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A DISCIPLESHIP JOURNAL BIBLE • STUDY ON
OVERCOMING OVERLOAD

BEATING BUSYNESS

BY ADAM R. HOLZ

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ISBN 1-57683-155-8

Cover art by Stephanie Garcia

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Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 05 04 03 02 01 00 99

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Sample from *Beating Busyness* / ISBN 1576831558
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Introduction

The Plague of Busyness

Busyness, it seems, has become an endemic problem for many in our culture. Despite technological advances that have increased productivity and enhanced our communication, our to-do lists are as long as ever. Too many believers still feel ruled by what Charles Hummel called “the tyranny of the urgent.”

In fact, with the number of ministry opportunities available to believers, we may be even more susceptible to the plague of busyness. How can we begin to deal with the frenetic pace of our lives?

Over the years, *Discipleship Journal* has published a number of articles addressing busyness. This study compiles some of those articles and combines them with discussion questions and innovative learning activities.

To enable you to tackle this issue head on in your life, this study will address some meaningful questions related to busyness, including the following:

- What does my life really look like?
- Why am I so busy?
- How do I set priorities biblically?
- How can I learn to discern God’s will and hear His voice as I make decisions?
- What is my real mission in life?
- What roles should silence and personal retreat play in my life?

How This Study Guide Works

This *Discipleship Journal* Bible study may look a little different from study guides you have used in the past. In addition to the Scripture that you'll be looking at in each article, we've combed through issues of *Discipleship Journal* magazine and selected some of the best articles on a variety of topics essential to living life as a disciple of Christ in today's world.

This combination of Scripture texts and the sharpened insights of experienced communicators should give you plenty to contemplate as you discover what it means to follow Jesus in your life situation.

We have also put more emphasis on thinking about, praying over, meditating on, and wrestling with the meaning of a few key Scripture passages rather than quickly looking at as many verses as possible. You'll sometimes find multiple questions about a single passage that are intended to help you understand what the passage says, and how it applies to you personally. The idea is to help you to be a "doer" of the Word and not merely a "hearer" (James 1:22, RSV).

Not all questions incorporate specific verses of Scripture, but they all are intended to help you think through what it means to apply biblical truth. Sometimes that will involve changing the way you *think*, and often it will mean changing the way you *act*.

This study guide is designed to be used either individually or in a small group setting. (Your experience will likely be enhanced by the input, perspective, and prayers of other like-minded believers.) Even if you work on this study on your own, we encourage you to share your insights and discoveries with someone who can help "sharpen" you in your walk with God (see Proverbs 27:17).

Our prayer is that God's Word will both challenge and encourage you as you seek to follow Him "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

SESSION

An Easy Yoke?

I rub my eyes and stare down at the legal pad in front of me. What stares back at me is my to-do list. It's not a pretty sight. It's covered with ten or twelve hurriedly drawn boxes, each of which is filled and spilling over with dozens of little scribbles: A phone call to return. A meeting to set up. A note to write. A sermon to prepare. A car to service. I feel overwhelmed.

Been there?

Don't you get the sense that something might be a bit out of kilter for us, driven as we are by our calendars and to-do lists? How do we face the daunting task of fitting together a busy life and career with God's kingdom purposes?

In this article, entitled "**Take a Load Off**" by David Henderson (excerpted from Issue 97), the author explores how we can find rest in the midst of the hectic lives many of us live. As you read each section, underline any portions that especially stand out to you. Then move on to the questions and exercises that follow.

Take a Load Off

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

We know the words well and find some comfort in them. But is this what we experience? An easy yoke? A light burden? Yokes and burdens, yes. But easy and light ones? Rest for the soul? No. Most

of us strain against yokes that are very different, and far heavier, than Jesus intended for us.

So how do we shed our heavy loads and take on some lighter fare? Not easily. Still, it can be done. Notice something when you look back at that verse: two words—yoke and rest—are repeated twice in these three short sentences.

Rest is a word that suggests the stopping of motion—like turning off a car at the end of an eight-hour drive. The spark plugs cease firing, the pistons stop clamoring, and the engine comes to sudden stillness: resting, stopping, ceasing.

But notice that the rest Jesus promises is soul rest, not body rest. His concern is internal, at the level of the heart. He says that He will bring an end to the clamoring in our souls, introducing quiet and contentment in its place. So the image of rest that comes to mind of lounging in the sun on a Maui beach is probably not as accurate as, say, the picture of arriving at your car after you've just finished climbing one of Colorado's fourteen-thousand-foot peaks. Your body is spent, your feet are throbbing, but your soul is refreshed, alive, and quieted. The rest, the peace, is on the inside.

-
1. What is the main reason you're interested in a study focusing on busyness?

 2. How do you feel about your level of busyness at the moment?
 - ☐ It's manageable.
 - ☐ I'm doing as much as I'm able to do.
 - ☐ I'm feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.
 - ☐ I'm frantic. If something doesn't change soon, I'll be on my way to breakdown!
 - ☐ Other:

3. None of us can effectively begin to deal with the issue of busyness until we have a clear picture of what our lives look like. In the space below, write down each of the main activities on your schedule in a typical week, and the number of hours you spend on each. (Include things like work, fitness, sleep, reading, time with family or friends, and so on.)

4. a. The author focuses on a promise that at first seems paradoxical. Read Matthew 11:28-30 again.

b. How would you describe your initial gut reaction to this promise? (For example: *Thank goodness Jesus understands that I'm weary and burdened*; or *Jesus says rest is possible, but I just don't see how*.)

5. Review the passage again and write in the space below the words that grab your attention. Then describe why you think you gravitate toward these words.

6. Jesus gives three specific commands in this passage: “Come to me . . . Take my yoke . . . learn from me.” In your own life, what would you need to do to obey these commands? (For example: *I haven’t been spending time regularly in God’s Word. For me to come to Jesus, I need to spend time understanding what He wants for my life by reading the Bible.*)

7. a. Read how *The Message* translates Matthew 11:28-30:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

- b. The phrase “unforced rhythms of grace” is used in this passage to describe the kind of life Jesus promises. With this in mind, are there certain areas of your life that feel forced right now? If so, what are they?

DJ The word yoke is also an interesting one. I suspect we all know that the word describes one of those big, clunky, wooden contraptions that goes over the shoulders of an ox and attaches to a plow that follows behind. In Jesus’ day, the word yoke was also a synonym for obligations, the sum of all the duties that someone had to shoulder to fulfill a commitment in a certain area.

So rest and yoke are nearly opposites. The unexpected twist was that Jesus brought these two words together to describe what happens when we follow Him. When we take on His yoke, He said, we experience the unexpected: rest.

Rephrasing Jesus’ words, then, we come up with something like this: “Come to Me, all you who are worn out and weighed down by scrambling to meet the demands of others, and I will bring quiet to your spirits. Serve Me, follow Me, and—because I am caring and understanding—I will stop the clamoring in your souls. For what I ask of you is not a burden at all.”

8. a. In the space below, make a quick sketch of an ox cart or wagon. Then go back to the list of commitments you identified in question three, page 9. For each item on your schedule, draw a box on the ox cart. Make the boxes large or small in proportion to the amount of time and emotional energy they require.

- b. Assuming that the yoke attached to this cart rests on your shoulders, how has “loading the cart” by drawing a picture of your obligations changed the way you see the weight of your yoke?

- ☐ My yoke is not as heavy as I’d thought.
- ☐ My yoke is about as heavy as I’d assumed.
- ☐ My yoke is much more burdensome than I’d realized.

9. Jesus doesn't promise to get rid of our yoke altogether. Rather He says He will replace it with a yoke that is easy, or appropriate to our capacity. How do you think an easy yoke would look different from the yoke you're wearing now?

DJ Busy, Busy, Busy

Look what happens to most of us when we come into the kingdom. We enter the kingdom on the sole basis of our having received what God handed to us. But what happens once we're in? We throw ourselves into serving this King of ours, and our schedules begin to get stuffed with important things to do.

Now, let me be clear that there is nothing inherently wrong with hard work or a full schedule. But how and why we busy ourselves is a different story. I think our frantic busyness belies our real convictions about service and ministry. We act as if it is all up to us. As though something were at stake. As though it would not get done if we didn't do it. As though our significance were somehow tied up in it. As though our well-being and God's pleasure—in fact our whole relationship with God—depended upon it.

But it is not all up to us. When we apply Matthew 11:28-30 to our busy lives and schedules, we need to come to grips with this: not only faith but the whole of life and ministry must be understood simply as a response to the initiative of a gracious God. He will lead us into the work and ministry He has for us, and we simply get the adventure of holding on tight to His hand and enjoying the ride.

Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

That means instead of cramming our lives full of things calculated to please God, we can be led into acts of ministry that God has already planned ahead for us, confident of the pleasure God takes in us through Christ. He will lead us into it, He will show us

how to do it, He will provide everything we need to complete it, and He will bring about His desired results through it.

But how do I do that? Let me suggest several steps that might prove helpful as you begin to discover God's lighter load for you.

10. a. Ephesians 2:10 sheds further light on God's intentions for our work and ministry. Spend a few moments thinking about the following three phrases from that verse, then rewrite each one in your own words.

- "For we are God's workmanship, . . ."
- "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, . . ."
- "which God prepared in advance for us to do."

- b. How do these truths encourage or challenge you in your current situation? (For example: *Because God made me, He knows better than I do what my capacity is for ministry activities. I need to spend more time in prayer before saying yes to commitments.*)

DJ Strip Off Your Self-Made Yokes

We need to recognize and lay aside the many things we busy ourselves with that God has not called us to do. Every week there seems to show up on my schedule—and maybe on yours as well—at least one thing I have taken on simply because it gets me something.

How do we recognize the yokes of our own making? Over the years I've discovered some simple questions that can help me begin to recognize those impostors:

- What is the real motivation for what I am doing? Am I doing this to meet some need in myself? To prove something? To gain something? To avoid something?
 - Who am I trying to please— myself? Others? God?
 - Why do I feel compelled to do this? Do I feel as though something is at stake? What would happen if I waited or didn't do it at all?
-

11. Go back to your list of regular commitments from question three, page 9. Choose one thing on your schedule that adds stress to your life and consider it in light of the previous three questions. What conclusions did you reach.

D] Make Yourself Open and Available

Seeking God's kingdom needs to be the highest desire in our lives. Glorifying God, seeking and saving the lost, laying down my life for my brothers and sisters, obeying divine intentions—are those really the things that give shape to my life? Have I really made the things that matter most to God the things that matter most to me?

Jeremiah expressed this attitude in a beautiful way when he wrote, "I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). We are not our own, but His. And His desire is that we would be wholly so.

Therefore, we must come before God on a daily basis and give the whole of our lives to Him. We must lift the specifics of today and our future days before the Lord. We can ask Him to sift through those many options that vie for our time and attention and to show us the handful that are part of His timeless intention for that day. As I've come to understand it, that means making ourselves open for whatever God wants to do in us and making ourselves available for whatever it is that God desires to do through us. Open and available—that is the type of person God uses.

12. Read Mark 1:21. What does this verse reveal about how Jesus made Himself available to God?

13. How does prayer make us open and available to God?

D] Build In Pockets of Time for Reflection

The emptiest lives are those stuffed with motion from morning to night. It is only when we have elbow room built into our days and into our lives that we become still enough for God to speak to us.

It is not a coincidence that the phrases "wait on the Lord" and "be still" are found so often in the Scriptures. Regular time to quiet your spirit before God and ask what God seems to be saying, how He seems to be moving, and where He seems to be leading is crucial. Intentional prayer about the demands of the day, moments of quiet between appointments, and monthly retreats to break from your normal routine—all of these are pauses that put us within reach of God's voice. We should see them as nonnegotiable ways of wetting our finger and holding it up in the air to see which way the wind of God's Spirit is moving around us. How else will we be able to discern which activities are a waste of time and to identify areas not yet considered that should be at the top of our list?

14. According to the author, what are some of the purposes of being still and waiting on the Lord?

- ### **Words Worth Remembering**

—Geoff Gorsuch, from “Journey to Adelpheos,” Issue 14