Believe: The Discipline of Time
Ephesians 5:15-17

We are looking at what it means to practice life the way that Jesus practiced life. As we practice doing those things that Jesus did, our hope is that we will train our bodies and our spirits to become like Jesus in every way possible. Thus far we have looked at the practices of prayer, worship, Bible-study, single-mindedness, total surrender, Christian community, and service. This morning, we will examine what it means to practice the use of our time in a way that is consistent with the way Jesus practiced the use of His time.

I will address this subject under three subheadings: 1) the toxic consequence of a hurried life; 2) living your life on purpose; 3) practical next steps for redeeming our calendars.

1. The Toxic Consequence of a Hurried Life
To begin this part of my message, I must acknowledge the ironic conditions in which this message was written! This past Tuesday, the day set aside for sermon writing, I began with an international call to Kenya with our mission elder and our Missions Director. Once that call was over, I returned home to a short time of fellowship with dear friends who had been staying with us followed by an emotional send off. As such, my time for study began at 10:30 a.m., as opposed to 7:30 or 8 a.m. as I had hoped. After one hour, I was needed to take my son to a rehearsal, that cost an additional 40 minutes of drive time. On the way to drop off my son, my dear friend Chris called from South Carolina, and I found myself complaining that “I had no time to prepare my message on the faithful stewardship of time!” He literally laughed at me and insisted that I tell you that story! I must admit that the irony is laughable.

Most of us know that our lives are a bit out of control when it comes to time. For those who work and have kids at home, there is no question about it…we are often stressed and anxious about many things, and we know Jesus commanded us “to be anxious about nothing.” So, please know that I am in the boat with all those who struggle with time management, and in no way is this message intended to communicate that I have this all figured out, or that you should have this all figured out. That being said, the fact that we all struggle with the faithful stewardship of time is not an excuse for nothing to change in that department. There are real consequences that come about in our lives and those around us when we live in a constant state of “hurry.”

Did you know that “hurry sickness” is actually a thing? Meyer Friedman defines hurry sickness this way: “Above all, it is 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, frequently in the face of opposition, real or imagined, from other persons.” How do you know if you have hurry sickness?

You might have hurry sickness if you are constantly trying to speed up everything you do. You talk faster, you nod faster, you are constantly encouraging people to get to the point faster. My hurry sickness becomes very evident when I’m supposedly relaxing with friends and family over a board game or playing cards. It takes exactly 1/1000th of a second for me to say, “It’s your turn.” And then maybe one or two whole seconds later I will repeat myself just to ensure the point hasn’t been missed, “It’s still your turn!”
You might have hurry sickness if you are counting the cars in the right and left lane in the event that the traffic light turns yellow (God forbid) so that you might squeak through, or at worse, get stuck waiting in the lane with one less car. That is, of course, depending on the make and model of the car and your anticipation of how fast the driver of that car might travel given what you know of people who drive certain models of cars! Because you actually do this and believe that it is the way all people should drive, you likely have hurry sickness.

You might have hurry sickness if you have a working formula in your head for how long you will have to wait in line at the grocery store that takes into account 1) the age and experience of the checkout worker; 2) the number of people in each line; times 3) the number of items in each cart. None of which matters if you happen to have your kids with you, because then you send a kid into as many lines as possible as a place holder so that you are guaranteed to get the fastest service possible whenever a cashier becomes available!

You might have hurry sickness if you feel like the person who is travelling close to or slightly above the speed limit in the left lane is intentionally trying to make you late for your meeting by not moving over to the right lane so that you can travel 10 or more miles over the speed limit as God intended.

You might have hurry sickness if you intentionally try to convince your child that the skinny books with fewer words and lots of pictures are the very best kinds of books to read at bedtime! You DEFINITELY have hurry sickness when you intentionally turn two pages at a time of said skinny books, hoping that your child doesn’t notice so that you can hurry up and be done!

I am horrified to admit that all of these tactics have been employed by your Pastor, so I am confessing to you my own battle with “hurry sickness.” I’m also confessing to you that this sickness has real consequences.


First is the reality of clutter, both material and otherwise. When we are always in a hurry, lots of things get left undone. Lots of things get misplaced. Our lack of margin means that we have made more commitments than we can honor. Ortberg says it this way: Life is cluttered when we are weighed down by the burden of all the things we have failed to say no to. Then comes the clutter of forgetting important dates, of missing appointments, and of not following through.

Next is the consequence of “superficiality.” In our obsession with quantity, we sacrifice quality…in every dimension of our lives. We may have reams of information, but we lack wisdom. We may have myriads of acquaintances, but we lack one true friend. We are talking all the time, but our conversations and interactions remain superficial…as do most of our relationships. Quality relationships, quality friendships, quality conversations, require quality time. When we suffer from hurry sickness, we give very little quality time to anything or anybody…we have believed the lie that our value comes from doing more, when in fact the quality of our time investment is actually in chronic decline.
The third consequence is “an inability to love.” Ortberg writes, “The most serious sign of hurry sickness is a diminished capacity to love. Love and hurry are fundamentally incompatible. Love always takes time, and time is one thing hurried people don’t have.”

One expert in the field, Lewis Grant, describes our inability to love as “Sunset Fatigue.” He writes:
“...Sunset fatigue is when we are just too tired, or too drained, or too preoccupied, to love the people to whom we have made the deepest promises.” Sunset fatigue has set in, says Grant, when

- you find yourself rushing even when there’s no reason to;
- there is an underlying tension that causes sharp words or quarrels;
- you set up mock races that are really about your own need to get through the task (let’s see who can get their teeth brushed first!);
- you sense a loss of gratitude or wonder
- you indulge in self-destructive escapes from fatigue: abusing alcohol, watching too much TV, and a myriad of other things because “you need a little down time…” a little “me time”…at the expense of those you are supposed to be loving.

I don’t know about you, but I have seen all of those consequences in my own life and my relationships with my family. Hurry sickness is a real thing, and it has real consequences. I can tell you right now that for most of us, the most important goal we could establish for our lives in a very practical sense would be this: to ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. I can guarantee you that your family, your co-workers, and your own body would be very grateful if you took that goal seriously. Hurry is not helping...Hurry is hurting. The question remains: what are we going to do about it?

II. Living Life on Purpose

When we study the life of Jesus, there is no doubt that Jesus was productive with His time. He traveled a good bit, he was in high demand, he had practical obligations that demanded his attention, he had a family who was eager to see him, and he had significant friendships that he nurtured. Jesus had every reason to be a “hurried man,” yet we never get the sense that Jesus was in a hurry. Wherever we find him, Jesus is living on purpose.

Even before the break of day, Jesus intentionally got up early to spend time alone in prayer. Given the demands of his life and ministry, Jesus found it necessary to spend time in solitude, listening for the Father’s direction even as he cultivated his relationship with the Father.

When Jesus went to work, He purposefully cultivated relationships with others throughout His day. Hurried people tend to become increasingly isolated; Jesus lived in such a way that he developed deep, abiding friendships. Jesus prioritized people over productivity.

Jesus had the grace to be willingly interrupted. In fact, if you think about it, many of the stories we have of Jesus in the NT are stories where Jesus was interrupted. From the lepers who called
out to him, to the blind man, to Zacchaeus, to the bleeding woman who touched his garment…Jesus never allowed the “it” to trump the “thou.” In other words, whatever his practical agenda was for the day, no matter the setting, He did not allow whatever IT was that he was intending to do to be so important that He dismissed the importance of seeing and serving the people that God placed on His path.

Jesus never wasted an opportunity to redirect people toward deeper, eternal conversations. Though Jesus was busy, and sometimes exhausted, He had a way of skillfully redirecting people to consider their spiritual condition and the need to repent. Who could forget the way He spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4, taking the every-day task of drawing water as an opportunity to minister to her deepest needs. Jesus was always on mission.

What we find when we study Jesus is a life that was submitted to the will of the Father in all circumstances…and Jesus practiced living that way, every day, on purpose.

One of the reasons Rick Warren’s book, The Purpose Driven Life, was so successful many years ago was due to his insistence that all people should live their lives on purpose. If you recall, Pastor Rick taught that God wove 5 purposes into every human life: worship, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship. If you study the life of Jesus, as well as the Apostle Paul and other key figures of the New Testament, these purposes ring true. Whatever they were doing, wherever they were travelling, whoever they were with, Jesus and His followers were always living on purpose to worship God, to serve others in the ministry of the Gospel, to share the hope and offer of salvation through the Gospel; to cultivate meaningful relationships because of the Gospel; and to teach people to obey Jesus and to follow Jesus in a purpose-filled life as we find in the Gospel.

Such is why when it comes to the stewardship of time, Jesus and His followers modeled for us a perfectly faithful and healthy rhythm of life. It is a rhythm of life that is available to all who will follow Jesus, emulate His practices, and commit themselves to live on purpose.

III. Now…let’s consider some practical steps for how we might redeem our calendars and live our lives on purpose.

1) Practice solitude. One of the reasons that we struggle with hurry sickness is because we are at the whims of so many voices in our heads. Our attention is required from our spouses, our kids, their teachers, their coaches, our parents, our friends, our clients, our co-workers, our bosses, our neighbors, and the list goes on and on. By virtue of that phone in your pocket, thousands of people have access to your attention every waking moment through a call, a text, or an email. But listen: nobody in history had more people calling for his time and attention than Jesus did. Thousands of people followed Him wherever He went, and they all wanted his time and his touch. So, to avoid hurry sickness and to center His spirit, Jesus practiced times of solitude. In Mark 1:35 we read, “And rising very early in the morning, while it was till dark, he departed and went to a desolate place, and there He prayed.”

When we practice solitude like Jesus did, we are reminded that we actually have an audience of ONE! God is God, and we answer to Him. Our Father trumps every other voice, and His voice is ultimately the only voice that should have authority in our lives. If we are submitted
to God and committed to His agenda for our day, everybody else in our relational world will be best served. However, if we are trying to please 20 different agendas, we will live a manic lifestyle riddled with hurry sickness. If you really study Jesus, you will find that He only cared about what His Father said and what His Father thought. In John 5 Jesus says, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me.” That singular point of reference informed everything that Jesus said and did. Jesus used times in solitude in the morning to get honed in on His Father’s will. He then used the rest of the day to accomplish His Father’s will. We would do well to practice that same kind of rhythm in our lives.

2) Above all other disciplines, nothing will remove the hurry and the anxiety of our lives like the discipline of prayer. But we must PRAY FIRST, and we must learn to pray all day. Hear what Paul says to us as the church in Phil. 4:5-6: The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. The peace of God is our goal, and prayer is the path to find it.

On days that I get up early before the rest of my family, when I can be alone and practice the discipline of prayer in the morning, it is amazing to me how my hurry sickness goes away. No matter how busy I am, as I pray, I can see God’s hand and His provision in everything that is going on around me. I can be thankful for my next appointment instead of stressed out. I can be thankful that I get to spend time with my family instead of resenting having to “play taxi driver”. As I engage in a conscious, on-going conversation with God, every hour of my calendar is redeemed, no matter what I happen to be doing. Prayer is my best defense against the superficial, love-killing behaviors associated with hurry sickness. Dallas Willard writes: Prayer as a discipline has its greatest force in strengthening the spiritual life only as we learn to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). We can train ourselves to invoke God’s presence in every action we perform. This is an experiential fact that has been proven in the lives of many disciples of Jesus, ancient and modern. God will meet us in love, and love will keep our minds directed toward him as the magnet pulls the needle of the compass. Habit will be confirmed in gracious interaction, and our whole lives will be bathed in the presence of God. Constant prayer will only “burden” us as wings burden the bird in flight

3) Learn how to say “no.” As we study the life of Jesus, we find that Jesus had no problem saying “no” to those requests or offers that did not align with His mission. I would remind you how Jesus specifically said “no” to Satan’s temptations in the wilderness. In fact, I want us to briefly examine the second temptation as a case study. Let’s pick up the story in Luke 4:5, “And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’”

Does that language sound familiar to anyone? It should! Satan is presenting Jesus with the temptation of “promotion.” This is the Satanic offer of “more.” More power, more money, more influence, more financial security, more prestige, more respect, more “freedom” to do what you want, more glory and more recognition. Sure, there is a cost, but it’s going to be worth it when
we get MORE! Many of us are suffering from hurry sickness because, knowingly or unknowingly, we said “yes” to the temptation of “more.” When that promotion was dangled in front of us…when we walked into the store and we saw the promotion for that new product…when the opportunity came along to make more money even though we had to bend a few rules…we chose to set our faith, our family, and our friends on the back burner, and in so doing we agreed to worship…give ultimate worth…to the god of MORE, rather than the LORD our GOD. Let me tell you something: God will never bless your worship of MORE. If your hurry sickness is due to your obsession with “more,” the cure will most certainly involve saying “NO” to the god of MORE. Here’s how Jesus responded to that temptation: “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”

Three times Jesus was tempted, and three times He responded with, “It is written…” What would happen if we began to filter every request for our time, every advertisement, every potential purchase, every promotion, through the Word of God? I suspect it would give us the perspective and the power to say “no” to so many things that clutter our calendar and our lives.

4) Prioritize what matters most. I know many of us are stressed, and we constantly talk about how busy we are and how little margin we have in our lives…and we talk about that as though it’s a badge of honor. We spend countless hours chasing those things we think we need, and we are exhausted most of the time. But Jesus said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will be given to you.” In case you missed it, Jesus just said, “Prioritize your time around God’s agenda.” So as you leave here today, how will you use your time?

I want to leave you with a sobering thought. Every person on the planet gets 168 hours every week…with no exceptions, and every single hour that we get is a gift. We didn’t earn that hour, we can’t determine whether we get more or less hours…and we’re not guaranteed any more hours. Every hour of life is God’s gift to us; what we do with the hours we are given is our gift of worship to God. So how do you think our Lord and Creator would have us spend the hours that He has gifted to us? Do you think you are spending the gift of your hours in a way that honors God and brings hope to the world? If Jesus dropped by your house tonight, how might He command you to rearrange your life?

Let me give you some sobering numbers. According to some basic internet research, the average American spends 4 hours a day, 28 hours a week (1/4th of his waking hours) watching television. The average Americans spends 11 hours a day, 77 hours a week (69% of his waking hours) watching, reading, listening to, or simply interacting with media. The average American adult spends over 3.5 hours a day, 24.5 hours a week just looking at his phone. Our kids aged from 8-18 spend an average of 7 hours a day, 49 hours a week staring at screens, which is just less than 50% of their waking hours.

Now…according to Barna, the average Christian spends 1 minute in prayer each day…1 minute. Think about that: we spend 3.5 hours looking at our phones, and one minute praying. We spend, at best, 20 minutes in conversation with our spouses and even less time talking to our children. But we spend 11 hour each day interacting with media sources. Are we really that busy? Or are
we wasting the precious gift of time God has entrusted to us on those things that are not important at the expense of those we deem the most important?

If we are going to redeem our calendar, it will require us to reorganize our time by prioritizing what is most important. We must ruthlessly eliminate time-sucking habits that detract from our quality of relationships both with God and with others.

I know that hurt your feelings, but we need to agree that there is a problem before we’ll be motivated to address the problem. Let me leave you with this profound word from the Apostle Paul. Listen carefully and take these words to heart:

“Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness…Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time…”

If we are going to grow into the likeness of Christ, we will need to practice the faithful stewardship of time. To get started, let us ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives. Let us live on purpose. Let us prioritize our time around the people and the mission that matters most. And let us begin with prayer. Let’s pray.