

25 February 2018

I Am So Busy, But Am I Productive? Segment 2

Opening Prayer

Worshipping Our Children

If we believe the popular press, we are in the grip of a child worship epidemic. The headlines can be found in numerous sources. "Parenthood Becomes a Religion In America, The Modern Cult of Child Worship, Do You Worship Your Children? Stop It!, The Worship of Children Brings Only Misery, We've Given In To Baby Worship, Today's Worship of Children Borders On the Perverse" These assessments can be found in various publications including Time, The Guardian, and Family Share.

While suggesting that there is an epidemic of child worship may seem extreme, there is certainly evidence that we have become child worshipers. So what is child worship? **One definition describes it as, excessive attention, devotion, and praise toward our children, just because they are our children. We have developed the idea that each of our children is special, deserves special opportunities and resources, and everything they do is special.** Our children are brilliant. Our children are talented. Our children are gifted. And if it is not obvious it is because they have not had the right opportunities or teachers. And we expect others to see the brilliance and talents of our children.

And so we set out, becoming very busy trying to make sure they have what we think they need to make their specialness shine, often in the process making our lives and the lives of our children less happy.

Might there be some pride in this? Does the child's success or failure reflect on the parent?

Let's dissect it a bit.

We all love our children and want the best for them. Doing things that we believe are good for them will often take some time. We want them to have the opportunities to become their best selves. But much of the being busy comes when we become obsessed with our child become outstanding. It has been called child-obsessed parenting. It has also been called Kindergarchy: rule by children.

What does this look like? A typical week for a family with two children might include taking Child A to soccer practice and Child B to Tai Kwan Do school one evening. On another evening Child A must have his violin lessons, while Child B goes off to dance to compliment his martial arts training. On a third evening, Child A has drama club and Child B has basketball practice. On Saturday morning Child A goes to his tutor for remedial math and Child B goes to a study group for advanced students. Then on Saturday afternoon the whole family goes to the softball game in which both children play. Oh, and then there is church on Sunday morning. Cannot forget that. This might seem like an exaggeration to you, but I assure you it is not in some cases. I've seen it in my own family and in families that I know.

The unfortunate thing about all this being very busy is that it actually makes not much difference in the life outcomes of most children. It does not contribute meaningfully to the successes or failures of the children according to the research. In terms of outcome, **nature** is much more important than **nurture**. DeYoung has said, "DNA does not determine our entire destiny. But then again, neither does (child-obsessed) parenting." It does exhaust the parents. And the children, they would be much happier spending meaningful time with those parents, other family members and friends.

How did we come to assume over the past fifty or so years that our children's failures "will almost certainly be our fault for not doing enough for them?"

How would you grade your parents in the way they raised you? How do you think your children would grade you? What would be one thing they (your children) might wish were different?

Worshiping Social Media

The World Wide Web, the system over which we now share uncountable pieces of information is not yet thirty years old. Some of us can even remember a time before there was a web. Social media, the newest twist in web communications, have been in existence for barely ten years. Yet, they have come to consume the time and lives of billions of people. Facebook alone has over 1.5 billion accounts.

On the surface, one would expect these new technologies to be of benefit to us all, and they can be. But they can also become a great disruptor of meaningful social

intercourse. As the use of digital technologies grows, it can lead to digital dependence, and ultimately digital obsession and addiction. It's complicated.

The risk of addiction is real. It is not hyperbole. Could you not look at Facebook for an entire day? Could you go an entire day without looking at your cell phone, or sending or receiving a text? Could you stop using email for an entire week? How about three days? "The truth is, many of us cannot not click. We cannot step away, even for a few hours, let alone a few days or weeks," says Kevin DeYoung.

In my personal experience, I find it nearly impossible not to check my phone several times a day to see who has texted me or sent some other message. I check my email often throughout the day looking for that very important message that I just have to read. And the Web, I waste hours every day surfing and often doing so for no real business reason. All of this keeps me quite busy, but I don't think about the hours I have wasted each day and how exhausting this can become. I don't often use my Facebook account, but I know people who spend hours on Facebook most days with relatively trivial things, in my estimation. And I am not even addressing the binge watching on Amazon, Netflix, and all the other entertainment sources.

Nicholas Carr has written about how he became dependent on the Net for information and activity. He says that his brain became hungry, demanding for its Internet feed. Even when he was away from his digital devices he yearned to click. DeYoung notes, I have noticed the same thing happening to me for the past few years. "I cannot seem to work for more than fifteen minutes without getting the urge to check my e-mail, glance at a blog, or get caught up on Twitter."

Does this suggest an addiction to you? What can we do?

Describe the technology use in your home. What are the positives about this? Any negatives?

How many hour a day do you spend using digital devices when you don't need to?

Is there evidence of electronic addiction in your life? What is the progression from use to abuse?

Worshipping Self, Success And Money

If we accept that we live in a connected world of unimaginable complexity and previously unheard of opportunities, why do we feel the need to take advantage of it all? Why must we see all the good movies, take regular trips to distant countries, check out Facebook every day, several times a day? Surf the Internet for no particular reason? Mark Longley would tell you that it because of dopamine, that chemical substance in our brains that gives us that good feeling of reward, the same substance that is active in the brain when the drug user takes his drug. Are we so busy because it gives us some self-gratification, a gratification that we need over and over like the drug user? Do we need this type of gratification? And if we do, why did people of past generations not seem to need it?

Being constantly busy is a major problem today. It might be described as a sickness of the mind and spirit that requires healing. We are obsessed with self-gratification and self-importance, with success, and with money. They are intimately connected.

Most of us have to work to earn the resources needed to supply our food, our clothing, our housing, and our operating expenses. That sort of busyness is a necessity of life and it contributes to the good of the community. The being busy that takes us beyond what we need seems to be the source of many difficulties. That kind of busy leads to trusting in ourselves above God, pride, boastfulness, attempts to control others, loss of love, belief that we should be able to do everything, posting lies, obsessive behaviors, exhaustion, and often unhappy individuals and families. We need more space for rest in our lives.

Why do we appear to be so much busier than our ancestors?

Matthew 11:28–30 is the invitation of Jesus to a restful service. What do you think that would be like? Pray right now responding to his invitation and asking him to make restful service a deeper reality in your life.

God Gave Us The Sabbath

The Sabbath was made for humans. This is a paraphrase of the first phrase of *Mark 2:27*. It tells us that God specifically ordered a day of rest for us. Otherwise, we might be forced to work seven days a week. In our modern, very busy world, the idea of the

Sabbath is not discussed much anymore. We see all days as much the same. Pastors seldom stress the importance of the Sabbath anymore. Pastors may actually be the most guilty of not observing it sometimes. In fact, the Sabbath is hardly ever addressed directly. We might offend someone. But the Lord says it is not so. A day each week is to be set aside for rest. God gave it to us.

Now the legalistic way of understanding the Sabbath is not what we need to focus on. We don't need to be caught up in whether it can be only observed on Saturday or Sunday. The important thing is that it should be observed. It may be on Thursday for some of us. And we should not become obsessed with regulations about what is work and what is not. The thing we need to concentrate on is having a day of rest. It can include spiritual development and communing with God or it can be a simple day of rest from the daily life of being very busy. The way that we are made requires rest, and we should take it.

This is a challenge for most of us. I know it is a challenge for me. I tend to work every day of the week, and I tell myself that it is often church work, so it does not count. But it does. I should observe the Sabbath, turn off the computers, put away the tablet and the cell phone and rest in Christ, and maybe go for that walk in the country. For pastors in active congregations this can be difficult. The members don't know you observe a Sabbath, since you probably have not told them. They will call you or text you or show up at the door of your house any time any day. It should not be like this. The pastor needs time to rest in Christ and recharge too. But the congregation has to be told. They will understand.

There have to be times when we all rest. God gave us the Sabbath.

What are some different views about the Sabbath that you have heard? How do you and your family typically observe the Sabbath?

Do you tend to see the Sabbath more as a gift from God or as a test, an opportunity to trust that God works things out? We can let go.

Setting The House In Order

As we conclude these two sessions, the expectation may be that we will end with a formula to make life less hectic, the five-point plan for **stress relief and success**

assurance, and also that this plan will assure us that everything will be fine and all our aspirations will be fulfilled. Unfortunately, there is no such formula to share, at least in human terms. We are assured that God continues to love and care for us even when life is very difficult and we may not be sure which next step to take. A discussion group, no matter how good, cannot repair a damaged life or family.

1. We can make some observations based on what we have discussed in these two sessions.
2. The many things we say we have to do, we really don't. We can let much of it go.
3. We need to check our pride. It leads to many distorted behaviors, including being too busy.
4. We need to set priorities and not have too many. Then, we need to stick to them.
5. We should stop obsessing about our children. They will be okay, and besides the obsessing usually makes little difference.
6. Concentrating less on self, success and money is a healthy thing.
7. God gave us the Sabbath. Take it seriously and enjoy it.

We may take a final lesson from Martha and Mary. They were sisters. We find their story in *Luke 10:38-42 NLT*

"As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, 'Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me.'

But the Lord said to her, 'My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.' "

Who do you relate to more in the Mary and Martha story? Why?

Imagine your life if you were to grow to be more "Mary-like." What new freedom and fruitfulness might you enjoy? What will you do to spend time this week with Jesus through the Word and prayer?

Closing Comments

Closing Prayer