



If the Devil Can't Make You **BAD** He'll Make You **BUSY**

By Al Ells, M.C.

The Clergy Wife's Complaint: "He is always doing something. He can't sit still unless he is watching a game on TV. In the car, I drive while he studies or thinks, and for the past five years, he has worked on his book during vacation. I don't think he knows how to relax or slow down. His board has even told him he over-commits and travels too much, yet he complains that he feels overloaded and stressed all the time."

Sound familiar?

You might not write a book on your vacation, but if you are in ministry, it is likely you try to do more in 24 hours than is humanly possible, and then beat yourself up when you fall short. For most people in ministry, life is like running on an endless treadmill: The pace never seems to slow down, and the incline gets steeper. More than 40 percent of pastors and 47 percent of their spouses suffer from burnout, frantic schedules and self-imposed, unrealistic expectations.

The ramifications of this breakneck lifestyle are more serious than we realize. Many of us who have been too busy for too long have know that *busyness is a curse to godliness*. Our prayer lives suffer, our bodies are drained and our relationships with others remain superficial. We lose sight of the joy of Christ, and we face each morning with a sense of dread rather than a hopeful expectancy of what God may do.

Consider the following tips on how to slow down your life and finish strong like Caleb, who at age 85 said, "I am as strong this day as I was on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in." (Joshua 14:11)

Tips To Consider

Understand that busyness is a problem. Your problem.

As with all change, the first step requires admitting that you have a problem. The following are typical characteristics of individuals who overdo it. See how many of them fit you.

- You are constantly in a hurry
- You feel like there is never enough time to get everything done
- You are impatient and irritable, especially with those close to you
- You cannot relax or have fun

- You have trouble saying “no” to others, thus putting more on your plate
- You do not draw a boundary between your work life and home life
- You do too many things at the last minute
- You set unreasonably high expectations for yourself
- You are a perfectionist
- You do not initiate personal friendships

Slow down your pace by planning.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, “The race is not to the swift.” Make a conscious effort to add structure to your schedule. Studies indicate that it is better to live a structured, disciplined and paced life rather than a hectic one. Stress experts suggest going to bed at the same time each night, rising at the same hour each morning and getting at least six, but no more than eight hours’ sleep per night, and eating meals at the same time each day.

Don’t add a new activity to your schedule without eliminating another.

People who are too busy tend to over-commit, adding more and more responsibilities to their schedule without eliminating any. A good rule of thumb to follow is to never add a new responsibility or activity without eliminating another. This prevents the feelings of pressure and inadequacy that occur when your plate is too full. It will also ensure that you are doing a limited number of things well, rather than a multitude of things poorly. If you cannot eliminate anything then do not add anything!

Learn how to say “no” and mean it.

Successful time managers learn to prioritize their commitments and say “no” to anything that conflicts with them. Often the inability to say “no” is motivated by trying to please others. People-pleasing is a snare (Proverbs 29:25) that requires dealing with our fear of disapproval or rejection from others.

Cherish the time you spend with your spouse, children and close friends.

Time is something that can never be reclaimed. Unless you commit to spending time with others you love—“quantity time,” not just “quality time”—you will over-commit to work and busyness. Relationships can bring perspective and balance to someone who tends to overwork. Besides, aren’t people and relationships what the Kingdom is all about?

Set a “time budget” and live within it.

Structure your week so that you live within constraints of specific time budgeted for work, prayer and worship, relationships and fun. Choose one day each week when you approach your activities at a more leisurely pace and do not work. Review your time budget with those who know you best. Listen to their input and trust their insights more than your own feelings.

Maintain boundaries between work and home.

Individuals who overwork and are too busy usually work both at home and at the office. The boundaries between work and home become blurred or nonexistent. The home must remain a place of sanctuary and convivial relationship, not work. If you maintain a home office, use it only during your regular work hours as outlined in your time budget.

Pray, pray, pray!

Prayer will do something for you that nothing else can: It will focus you on what is truly important. The more you pray over your daily, weekly and monthly schedule, the more ordered your life will become, and the more you will achieve. Martin Luther said that when confronted with an extra busy day he spent twice as long in prayer. Invoking God's assistance, one day at a time, will provide you with the needed grace for each day's troubles (Matthew 6:34).

Make yourself accountable.

Asking another person to hold you accountable to your plan for change is always a good idea. An accountability partner or group can help support you when you fail, provide advice when needed and challenge you to keep your commitment (i.e., your time budget) to God and others.

If you are having trouble changing your overcommitted lifestyle, consider counseling.

If you just cannot seem to escape your patterns of busyness, you may be a workaholic. A workaholic is a person who is driven to activity to the point that it becomes bondage. If you are a workaholic, get help. Symptoms of workaholism often mask deeper emotional problems like insecurity, low self-esteem and depression. A knowledgeable counselor can help.

If you feel like you might need counseling to simplify your over-burdened lifestyle, call Leaders That Last to see how we can help. Call 480.325.9350 or info@leadersthatlast.org.