

Breaking the Addiction of Busy, Pt. 1

Victory Life Church, Central — Sundays, February 9, 2025

Introduction

Have you ever been speeding while driving where you are supposed to go, but you're not actually late? Or have you received a notification (comment, tag) and you only intended to check that one notification, but you "woke up" half an hour (or 2 hours) later from your phone? What about ending your day, not peacefully laying in bed, but crash-landing in bed, only to be shaken awake by your alarm the next morning, feeling like you got hit by a bus? Have you ended your day, or your workday, feeling like you worked hard all day, but you really don't know what you got done? (House-cleaning with kids, anyone?)

The problem is not a full schedule but a hurried soul.

The problem isn't when you have a lot to do; it's when you have *too much to do*, and the only way to keep up with everything is to hurry.¹

Dallas Willard, when asked, "If you had one word to describe Jesus, what would it be?" His surprising response (after a long silence) was, "Relaxed."²

Matthew 11:28–30 (NLT) 28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and **you will find rest for your souls**. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

I'm sure you have sensed that deep longing for rest, the kind of rest beyond your body's need for sleep. Yet so many of us feel trapped in the quagmire of the modern world of technology overload, success-driven pursuits, and responsibilities of life and family that create a strong undercurrent of hurry and busyness. Hurry is a byproduct of a disordered soul.³

"Hurry is not *of* the devil; it *is* the devil."⁴ ~ Carl Jung

"Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."⁵ ~ Dallas Willard

We cannot address the calendar issues without dealing with the issues of the soul. Before we can solve the problem, we have to understand it more fully.

¹ John Mark Comer. *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*. Crown Publishing Group, 2019.p. 21

² Story told in Alan Fadling. *An Unhurried Life*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013. p. 8

³ John Ortberg. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Zondervan, 2002. p. 79

⁴ Carl Jung. *Quote commonly attributed to Carl Jung*, 20th century.

⁵ Dallas Willard, cited in "Soul Keeping" by John Ortberg, p. 20.

The Problem

What makes us so hurried?

Michael Zigarelli, Professor of Leadership and Strategy at Messiah University, in a five-year study entitled “Distracted from God,” traces the problem within a vicious cycle. He asserts:

“I think the problem may be described as a vicious cycle, prompted by **cultural conformity**. In particular, it may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a **culture of busyness, hurry and overload**, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians’ lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) **more conformity** to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again.”⁶

What causes us to conform to this culture of busyness, hurry, and overload? If we can know the *root causes* of our temptation toward conformity, we may be able to escape the cycle.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)² Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Of the many causes, here are five major ones: **T.I.R.E.D.**

T - Temptation to Escape: The desire to escape from reality, boredom, or emotional pain or trauma through the excessive consumption of entertainment, thereby avoiding the discomfort of being alone with your thoughts and feelings.

I - Instagram Comparison: The pressure from social media to compare your life to the idealized and heavily curated versions of the life that others are presenting, leading to a sense of inadequacy, envy, or the need to constantly perform for an audience.

R - Relentless Hustle: The hustle-culture, where achievement and success are pursued relentlessly and endlessly, usually resulting in workaholism and burnout; a hurried soul always in a rush, never enough time, never being content or settled, always frazzled.

E - Expectations: The weight and burden of meeting other people’s expectations, or worse yet, your own unreasonable expectations for yourself, which can lead to overcommitment and people-pleasing behaviors, sapping your energy and time.

D - Distractions: The habitual addiction to constant stimulation or amusement, leading to a loud and noisy life where quiet moments are scarce, and you feel compelled to always to be moving or doing something.

⁶ Michael Zigarelli. *Distracted from God: A Five-Year, Worldwide Study*. <https://christianity9to5.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/distracted-from-god.pdf>. Accessed February 4, 2025.

Breaking Down the Problem

“Tired” I think captures the general feeling of modern life. We are addicted to being busy and hurrying, which leads to a constant mental and emotional strain and the sense of being overloaded by the things that keep us in the cycle of being hurried and busy.

► **T - Temptation to Escape:**

This describes the desire to escape from reality, boredom, or emotional pain or trauma through excessive entertainment consumption.⁷ Escapist behaviors that we engage in through pursuing pleasurable experiences⁸ (especially ones mediated to us through easy-access technology) lead us to **avoid confronting uncomfortable truths or difficult issues** about ourselves or society and simply avoiding the discomfort of being alone with one's thoughts and feelings.

There is a **vicious and paradoxical cycle** at work in our era. It takes emotional and spiritual maturity to be able to navigate through, learn from, and grow from emotional discomfort and pain. This kind of maturity requires patience and focus over a long period of time with deep thinking and reflection. But because dealing with discomfort and pain is painful and heavy, we would rather ignore or suppress the pain by pursuing escapist behaviors. In our entertainment and technological age, escapist behaviors through entertainment, such as binge-watching TV shows, endlessly scrolling social media, death scrolling YouTube, or playing games, seem omnipresent and easy to be immersed in.

Downward Spiral: Emotional Pain // Escapist Behaviors // Shallow Engagement // Underdeveloped Emotional Maturity // Inability to Handle Emotional Pain

This **constant input of external stimuli** erodes our ability to focus and engage in deep thinking.⁹ Pursuing light entertainment and trivial information is much easier and far more pleasurable than engaging in deep, critical thinking, especially when it includes dealing with pain. Rather than slowing down and processing information deeply and thoughtfully, we get sucked in and trapped into constantly searching for the next source of entertainment. This **desire to escape** the complexities of life through amusement prevents us (sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally) from confronting the deeper, underlying issues in our lives, leaving us in a **constant state of rushing** from one source of distraction to the next.¹⁰ This perpetuates the feeling of **time slipping away** and life moving too quickly, leading to feeling overwhelmed and mentally exhausted, as our brains constantly shift focus from one thing to another without **real rest**. That's the **vicious paradox**: our brains are tired from constant stimulus and shifting focus, but also not developing the mental and emotional capacity through meaningful reflection or deep thinking in order to deal with the pain.

⁷ Wayne Muller. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. Riverhead Books, 1999. p. 70

⁸ The connection between pursuing pleasure and how that is making us easily manipulated and unable to think deeply is explored in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and *Brave New World Revisited* (1958).

⁹ This is asserted in Nicholas Carr's important book, *The Shallows*.

¹⁰ This idea gets developed extensively in Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

► I - Instagram Comparison:

By “Instagram Comparison” I mean the unrelenting pressure and temptation from social media platforms to compare your life to the idealized and heavily curated versions of the life that others are presenting. This temptation to compare usually leads to a sense of inadequacy, envy, or the need to perform and post for an audience constantly.¹¹

Studies have consistently shown a correlation between excessive social media use and increased rates of **anxiety** and **depression**. One large-scale study by the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* (2017)¹² found that individuals who use social media for **more than two hours per day** are more likely to experience **psychological distress**, including symptoms of depression and anxiety. Constant engagement with technology appears to contribute to higher negative emotional states.

This, in its own right, has become its own epidemic. In the research done by Jonathan Haidt in his book “The Anxious Generation,”¹³ all of the research data indicates that the higher the social media and technology use, the higher the levels of anxiety, depression, and (sadly) suicide, especially in our younger generation.¹⁴

Dr. Anna Lembke¹⁵, in her book “Dopamine Nation,” describes how the **"dopamine overstimulation"** caused by constant exposure to digital stimuli leads to **mental exhaustion**, emotional instability, and feelings of **emptiness**. This leads individuals to seek even more immediate gratification, which reinforces the negative cycle of addiction.

Social media that is constantly accessible on our devices has created an environment in which we feel that we must be always available, **always engaged**, and constantly responsive, and therefore constantly observing other people’s lives and comparing ourselves to them. This leads to **chronic distraction** and **emotional exhaustion**, as many of us feel we must keep up with the endless stream of notifications, messages, and updates. This constant engagement with the world easily generates feelings of hurry and busyness in us, even when we are not actively doing anything productive. Even with the phone off, it just being visible is enough to trigger emotional engagement merely at the *potential* for a notification and the subsequent “dopamine hit” in our brain.

► R - Relentless Hustle:

“Relentless Hustle” is a way of describing the modern “hustle-culture,” where achievement and success are pursued relentlessly and endlessly, usually resulting in workaholism and burnout; a hurried soul always in a rush, never enough time, never being content or settled, always

¹¹ See 2 Corinthians 10:12. He calls comparison “ignorant” (NLT), “unwise” (NKJV), “without understanding” (ESV).

¹² Primack, Brian A., et al. "Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-8.

¹³ Jonathan Haidt. *The Anxious Generation*. Penguin Press, 2024.

¹⁴ See the data and evidence here: <https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/research/the-evidence>

¹⁵ Anna Lembke. *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*. Dutton, 2021.

frazzled.¹⁶ Worse yet, this workaholism degrades into measuring your worth by productivity, output, wealth, and acquisition.

Luke 9:23–25 (NLT)²³ Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. ²⁵ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?”

There is beauty in our work. As I stated in the last series, work is an extension of what it means to be made in God’s image. But there is a clear problem culturally with our “hustle-culture” and “workaholism.” For many reasons, we make an idol of our work, find our identity in our work, escape in our work, or are just plain addicted to work (or the success and rewards that come from our work). Hear what I am saying, not what I am not saying. There are times when we must work long hours. There are seasons where working long hours or multiple jobs is necessary to make ends meet. There may be seasons where you have to work while getting an education, taking away all your margins in life for a season. But these should be seasonal and short-term, not a lifestyle. Slavery to our work is life “east of Eden,” where work is not a manifestation of our imaging God, but the result of the curse of the fall¹⁷, when our work is more *toil* than life-giving. (I will develop a “Theology of Work” during the next few Wednesdays in Durant’s Disciple School — February 12 and 19, 2025.) This will also be the subject of next week’s message when discussing the Sabbath.

The widespread influence of technology worsens the issue of “hustle culture.” It fosters a mindset where we feel the need to **constantly work, think, and interact**—even outside of our jobs. The lack of **boundaries** and **blurred lines** between work, leisure, and social life, fueled by technology, continue to intensify the sense of being **busy** and **rushed**. Individuals always feel they must **catch up** or **check in**, which reinforces feelings of **urgency, anxiety, and exhaustion**.

► **E - Expectations:**

The weight and pressure of meeting people’s expectations, or even your own unreasonable expectations, can lead to overcommitment and people-pleasing behaviors, sapping one’s energy and time and filling our lives with **obligations** rather than **choices**.

Galatians 1:10 (NLT)¹⁰ Obviously, I’m not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.

There is a delicate balance between being a “people-pleaser” and being a *servant*. As followers of Jesus, we are not called to shut off relationships and become self-oriented, never sacrificing to help someone in need. What matters is **the internal motivations** that prompt us to make decisions. Are we afraid of people? Afraid of disappointing them or letting them down? Afraid of them overreacting, being petulant, unforgiving, and offended? Are you more concerned about your comforts, your reputation, your feelings? Being manipulated by another person’s negative emotions (or the potential for negative emotions) makes us a people-

¹⁶ See also Proverbs 19:2, “haste makes mistakes.” (NLT)

¹⁷ See Genesis 3:17.

pleaser. Craving approval, needing something from another human being that is supposed to be provided by God, makes us people pleasers.¹⁸

We also may struggle under the weight of our own unreasonable or excessive expectations for ourselves. We may have images of ourselves in our minds that force us to always be available, not have boundaries, and never say “no” because we are living up to some standard we have for ourselves. We are often plagued with a false reality that we never have to rest, never stop, or never take a break, but it is simply an unreasonable expectation you have placed on yourself. This “inner vow” or “false sense of self” makes you busy beyond reason.

► **D - Distraction:**

This describes the habitual addiction to **constant stimulation** or **amusement**, always needing something *external* to amuse ourselves, leading to a loud and noisy life where quiet moments are scarce, and one feels compelled always to be moving or doing something and where quiet or downtime feels uncomfortable or unproductive.

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*¹⁹ (1985), Neil Postman claims that we are distracting ourselves into a “**bland, witless superficiality.**” In the book, he, among many other things, discusses and critiques society's addiction to distraction. He traces the problem to the rise of visual media, particularly television, and the shift away from a print-based society to one dominated by entertainment. This shift slowly transformed our desire to be informed and our ability to learn with critical-thinking skills into a superficial, entertainment-focused level of discourse. Print media, he argues, encouraged deep thinking and analysis, while television emphasized emotional appeal and passive consumption. This shift over time, even more so with the advent of the internet, social media, and smartphones, has diminished the need for critical thinking and fostered a culture of distraction, where visual stimulation takes precedence over thoughtful engagement with ideas, and entertainment is more valuable than truth.

“We are a people on the verge of being reduced to **imbecility** by the images that we see and the soundbites we hear.”²⁰ ~ Neil Postman

Distraction has become **the default mode of life**, where entertainment dominates over everything, making us simple consumers of content. This shift has undermined the importance of critical thinking, logical reasoning, and self-reflection. Because of this, we are losing the ability to engage deeply with one another and with the world around us.

Simple distractions have devolved into the addictive pursuit of entertainment, choosing superficial amusement over meaningful connection. Over time, this leads to an individualistic, fragmented society where people are disconnected from each other, ideas, and the larger purposes of life. Entertainment value trumps truth, connection, or depth of understanding.

¹⁸ See also John 12:42-43. “They loved human praise more than the praise of God.”

¹⁹ Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. New York: Penguins Books, 1985. Updated: 20th Anniversary ed., Penguin Books, 2005.

²⁰ Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. p. 136

And the thing is...this is intentional.

Tristan Harris²¹, a former Google design ethicist who has been described as “the closest thing Silicon Valley has to a conscience,” has raised a powerful clarion call about how tech companies and devices are manipulating human behavior by exploiting brain science and psychology, designing products that specifically trigger **dopamine-driven feedback loops**.²²

Tech platforms use **psychological triggers**—such as intermittent rewards, notifications, and algorithms designed to maximize user engagement—all engineered to keep users addicted to our devices. They intentionally design apps and devices to trigger **dopamine responses**, making users **addicted to the gratification** of likes, comments, and shares, reinforcing behaviors that keep us hooked.

This "**attention economy**" is built on understanding and exploiting human vulnerabilities, like our desire for social validation and instant gratification, which leads to addictive behaviors, not only stealing our time but also shaping our behavior in subtle ways, nudging us toward actions or decisions that serve the platform’s interests, not our own. This manipulation isn't just a design flaw—it's a **deliberate strategy** for profit.

We become more shallow in our engagement, hurried in our souls, anxious in our minds, yet addicted to the source of our maladies. We are stuck in this cycle engineered by those who make a profit from it. We are losing ourselves, and these companies make more money from it.

“If you are not paying for the product, you are the product.”²³

Why Busy and Hurry Are Problematic

In this modern era, where **distractions seem omnipresent**, this constant stimulation creates a (mostly false) **sense of urgency** and **busyness**, as we are pulled from one distraction to the next, rarely taking time to reflect or rest. We often feel like we are constantly doing something: outside of checking into work or email, it often devolves into watching the latest episode of a show (just one more — “Play Next Episode”), “quickly” checking social media, death scrolling YouTube shorts, or simply playing a game. With these kinds of superficial activities we get stuck in, we are rarely engaged in tasks or activities that bring long-term satisfaction.

In time, this actually rewires our brains, reduces our ability to focus, and legitimately causes an **erosion of deep thinking**.²⁴ The compulsive need for quick entertainment feeds a cycle of **shallow engagement** with the world. As more time is spent consuming entertainment, there's

²¹ The place to start with the work of Tristan Harris, co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, is his premier TED talk: *How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds every day*. TED, 2017. https://www.ted.com/talks/tristan_harris_how_a_handful_of_tech_companies_control_billions_of_minds_every_day

²² Anna Lembke. *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*. Dutton, 2021.

²³ Andrew Lewis. "If You Are Not Paying for the Product, You Are the Product." *Quote, commonly attributed to Andrew Lewis*, 2010.

²⁴ Nicholas Carr. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.

less and less room for deeper, more meaningful activities that would allow a person to feel present and unhurried.

This contributes to a sense of being **always hurried**, rushing from one distraction to the next, and feeling that we don't have time to slow down, reflect, or focus on more important, long-term goals. These simple distractions provide immediate gratification and stimulation but simultaneously **prevent us from slowing down**. They can lead to a sense of **being busy** but without true fulfillment. They give the **illusion of busyness** but without any substantial productivity or growth.

“For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.”²⁵ ~ John Ortberg

Our lives are structured in conformity to a culture that develops a sense that we are moving quickly, but in actuality, we are not moving toward anything meaningful; constant activity, but no real progress; pressing the accelerator in neutral; energy expenditure, no forward progress. This is why we are tired.

“We...are distracting ourselves into **spiritual oblivion**. It is not that we have anything against God, depth, and spirit, we would like these, it is just that we are habitually too preoccupied to have any of these show up on our radar screens. We are more *busy* than *bad*, more *distracted* than *non-spiritual*, and more interested in the movie theater, the sports stadium, and the shopping mall and the fantasy life they produce in us than we are in church. **Pathological busyness**, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.”²⁶ ~ Ronald Rolheiser

The Solution (Conclusion)

The solution has never been, “Try harder and do better!” I do not raise the alarm or give this warning from a place of condemnation or even a place of innocence. I am stumbling my way through this quagmire of culture and technology like anyone else, trying to discover the traps I am caught in as a user of these devices and a parent to children being raised in this generation. The solution does not begin with “behavior modification,” as if we change behaviors and our heart changes. That's legalism and dead religion. Before our behaviors will change, we need a change of heart. We need to rely on a different source. This is where we hear Jesus' invitation.

Matthew 11:28-30 (MSG) “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.”

²⁵ John Ortberg. *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Zondervan, 2002. p. 77

²⁶ Ronald Rolheiser. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. Doubleday, 1999. p. 32-33

Recommended Reading

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, by John Mark Comer

An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest, by Alan Fadling

The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People, by John Ortberg

The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality, by Ronald Rolheiser

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, by Neil Postman

The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains, by Nicholas Carr

The Anxious Generation, by Jonathan Haidt

Brave New World Revisited, by Aldous Huxley

Tristan Harris sources:

- Tristan Harris. *How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds every day*. TED, 2017. https://www.ted.com/talks/tristan_harris_how_a_handful_of_tech_companies_control_billions_of_minds_every_day
- *The Social Dilemma* (Documentary). Directed by Jeff Orlowski, Netflix, 2020.
- Tristan Harris. "The Humane Tech Movement." Center for Humane Technology, <https://www.humanetech.com/>.
- Tristan Harris, and Aza Raskin. *Your Undivided Attention*. Center for Humane Technology, <https://www.humanetech.com/podcast>.