

**John
Mark
Comer**

**The
Ruthless
Elimination
of
~~Hurry~~**

**Foreword
by
John
Ortberg**



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Praise for

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

“As someone all too familiar with ‘hurry sickness,’ I desperately needed this book.”

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“John Mark Comer is a hugely talented leader, speaker, and writer. You will find lots of wise advice here.”

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For Dallas Willard—thank you.

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**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.**

**—Jesus in
Matthew 11v28–30**

Foreword

The smartest and best man I have known jotted down some thoughts about hurry; I think they were posted in his kitchen when he died. “Hurry,” he wrote, “involves excessive haste or a state of urgency. It is associated with words such as *hurl*, *hurdle*, *hurly-burly* (meaning “uproar”), and *hurricane*.” He defined it as a “state of frantic effort one falls into in response to inadequacy, fear, and guilt.” The simple essence of hurry is *too much to do*! The good of being delivered from hurry is not simply pleasure but the ability to do calmly and effectively—with strength and joy—that which really matters. “We should take it as our aim,” he wrote, “to live our lives entirely without hurry. We should form a clear intention to live without hurry. One day at a time. Trying today.”

We should form a mental picture of our place in the world before God. This places us in a different context. Psalm 23

does not say “The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I gotta run faster.” Shepherds rarely run. Good ones, anyway. He said to begin to eliminate things you “have” to do. He said it was important to not be afraid of “doing nothing.” He said to plan on such times. He said it would be important to deal with the panic of not being busy. To allow yourself to be in the panic, feeling it roll over you, and not going for the fix.

John Mark Comer has written a prophetic word for our day. He is engaging and honest and learned and fun and humble. He guides us to a great crossroads. To choose to live an unhurried life in our day is somewhat like taking a vow of poverty in earlier centuries; it is scary. It is an act of faith. But there are deeper riches on the other side. To be in the presence of a person where hurry has (like Elvis) “left the building” is to be inspired about the possibility of another kind of Life.

I was struck by the gifts of wisdom studded throughout this book: “All my worst moments . . . are when I’m in a hurry.” “Love, joy, and peace . . . are incompatible with hurry.” “The average iPhone user touches his or her phone 2,617 times a day.” (By way of contrast, the psalmist said, “I have set the LORD always before me” [Psalm 16v8, ESV]. What would my life be like if God touched my mind as frequently as I touch my phone?) Freedom perhaps never comes without great cost. And John Mark is someone who has made choices that involved a price, to pursue the life that is beyond price. He knows both the struggle and the choice, and so can speak to those of us who hunger and thirst.

Twenty centuries ago another wise man said, “[Make] the

best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5v16, ESV). I used to think that meant the days are full of sensuality and fleshly temptation. And of course, they are. But I think it mostly means that the life we were intended to live must be lived in time. And we are so used to spiritually mediocre days—days lived in irritation and fear and self-preoccupation and frenzy—that we throw our lives away in a hurry.

So, in these pages lies the Great Invitation. Take a deep breath. Put your cell phone away. Let your heart slow down. Let God take care of the world.

—John Ortberg

Prologue: Autobiography of an epidemic

It's a Sunday night, 10 p.m. Head up against the glass of an Uber, too tired to even sit up straight. I taught six times today—yes, *six*. The church I pastor just added *another* gathering. That's what you do, right? Make room for people? I made it until about talk number four; I don't remember anything after that. I'm well beyond tired—emotionally, mentally, even spiritually.

When we first went to six, I called up this megachurch pastor in California who'd been doing six for a while.

"How do you do it?" I asked.

"Easy," he said. "It's just like running a marathon once a week."

"Okay, thanks."

Click.

Wait . . . isn't a marathon really hard?

I take up long-distance running.

He has an affair and drops out of church.

That does not bode well for my future.

Home now, late dinner. Can't sleep; that dead-tired-but-wired feeling. Crack open a beer. On the couch, watching an obscure kung fu movie nobody's ever heard of. Chinese, with subtitles. Keanu Reeves is the bad guy.¹ Love Keanu. I sigh; lately, I'm ending most nights this way, on the couch, long after the family has gone to bed. Never been remotely into kung fu before; it makes me nervous. Is this the harbinger of mental illness on the horizon?

"It all started when he got obsessed with indie martial arts movies . . ."

But the thing is, I feel like a ghost. Half alive, half dead. More numb than anything else; flat, one dimensional. Emotionally I live with an undercurrent of a nonstop anxiety that rarely goes away, and a tinge of sadness, but mostly I just feel blaaah spiritually . . . empty. It's like my soul is hollow.

My life is so *fast*. And I like fast. I'm type A. Driven. A get-crap-done kind of guy. But we're well past that now. I work six days a week, early to late, and it's *still* not enough time to get it all done. Worse, I feel *hurried*. Like I'm tearing through

each day, so busy with life that I'm missing out on the moment. And what is life but a series of moments?

Anybody? I can't be the only one . . .

Monday morning. Up early. In a hurry to get to the office. Always in a hurry. Another day of meetings. I freaking hate meetings. I'm introverted and creative, and like most millennials I get bored way too easily. Me in a lot of meetings is a terrible idea for all involved. But our church grew really fast, and that's part of the trouble. I hesitate to say this because, trust me, if anything, it's embarrassing: we grew by over a thousand people a year for seven years straight. I thought this was what I wanted. I mean, a fast-growing church is every pastor's dream. But some lessons are best learned the hard way: turns out, I don't actually *want* to be the CEO/executive director of a nonprofit/HR expert/strategy guru/leader of leaders of leaders, etc.

I got into this thing to teach the way of Jesus.

Is *this* the way of Jesus?

Speaking of Jesus, I have this terrifying thought lurking at the back of my mind. This nagging question of conscience that won't go away.

Who am I becoming?

I just hit thirty (level three!), so I have a little time under my belt. Enough to chart a trajectory to plot the character arc of my life a few decades down the road.

I stop.

Breathe.

Envision myself at forty. Fifty. Sixty.

It's not pretty.

I see a man who is “successful,” but by all the wrong metrics: church size, book sales, speaking invites, social stats, etc., and the new American dream—your own Wikipedia page. In spite of all my talk about Jesus, I see a man who is emotionally unhealthy and spiritually shallow. I'm still in my marriage, but it's duty, not delight. My kids want nothing to do with the church; she was the mistress of choice for Dad, an illicit lover I ran to, to hide from the pain of my wound. I'm basically who I am today but older and worse: stressed out, on edge, quick to snap at the people I love most, unhappy, preaching a way of life that sounds better than it actually is.

Oh, and always in a *hurry*.

Why am I in such a rush to become somebody I don't even like?

It hits me like a freight train: in America you can be a success as a pastor and a failure as an apprentice of Jesus; you can gain a church and lose your soul.

I don't want this to be my life . . .

Fast-forward three months: flying home from London. Spent the week learning from my charismatic Anglican friends about life in the Spirit; it's like a whole other dimension to reality that I've been missing out on. But with each mile east, I'm flying back to a life I dread.

The night before we left, this guy Ken prayed for me in his posh English accent; he had a word for me about coming to a fork in the road. One road was paved and led to a city with lights. Another was a dirt road into a forest; it led into the dark, into the unknown. I'm to take the unpaved road.

I have absolutely no idea what it means. But it means *something*, I know. As he said it, I felt my soul tremor under God. But what is God saying to me?

Catching up on email; planes are good for that. I'm behind, as usual. Bad news again; a number of staff are upset with me. I'm starting to question the whole megachurch thing. Not so much the size of a church but the way of doing church.² Is this really it? A bunch of people coming to listen to a talk and then going back to their overbusy lives? But my questions come off angry and arrogant. I'm so emotionally unhealthy, I'm just leaking chemical waste over our poor staff.

What's that leadership axiom?

"As go the leaders, so goes the church."³

Dang, I sure hope our church doesn't end up like me.

Sitting in aisle seat 21C, musing over how to answer another

tense email, a virgin thought comes to the surface of my mind. Maybe it's the thin atmosphere of thirty thousand feet, but I don't think so. This thought has been trying to break out for months, if not years, but I've not let it. It's too dangerous. Too much of a threat to the status quo. But the time has come for it to be uncaged, let loose in the wild.

Here it is: *What if I changed my life?*

Another three months and a thousand hard conversations later, dragging every pastor and mentor and friend and family member into the vortex of the most important decision I've ever made, I'm sitting in an elder meeting. Dinner is over. It's just me and our core leaders. This is the moment. From here on, my autobiography will fall into the "before" or "after" category.

I say it: "I resign."

Well, not resign per se. I'm not quitting. We're a multisite church. (As if one church isn't more than enough for a guy like me to lead.) Our largest church is in the suburbs; I've spent the last ten years of my life there, but my heart's always been in the city. All the way back to high school, I remember driving my '77 Volkswagen Bus up and down Twenty-Third Street and dreaming of church planting downtown.⁴ Our church in the city is smaller. Much smaller. On way harder ground; urban Portland is a secular wonderland—all the cards are against you down here. But that's where I feel the gravity of the Spirit weighing on me to touch down.

So not resign, more like demote myself. I want to lead one church at a time. Novel concept, right? My dream is to slow down, simplify my life around abiding. Walk to work. I want to reset the metrics for success, I say. I want to focus more on who I am becoming in apprenticeship to Jesus. Can I do that?

They say yes.

(Most likely they are thinking, *Finally.*)

People will talk; they always do: He couldn't hack it (true). Wasn't smart enough (not true). Wasn't tough enough (okay, mostly true). Or here's one I will get for months: He's turning his back on God's call on his life. Wasting his gift in obscurity. Farewell.

Let them talk; I have new metrics now.

I end my ten-year run at the church. My family and I take a sabbatical. It's a sheer act of grace. I spend the first half comatose, but slowly I wake back up to my soul. I come back to a much smaller church. We move into the city; I walk to work. I start therapy. One word: *wow*. Turns out, I need a lot of it. I focus on emotional health. Work fewer hours. Date my wife. Play Star Wars Legos with my kids. (It's for them, really.) Practice Sabbath. Detox from Netflix. Start reading fiction for the first time since high school. Walk the dog before bed. You know, *live*.

Sounds great, right? Utopian even? Hardly. I feel more like a drug addict coming off meth. Who am I without the mega? A

queue of people who want to meet with me? A late-night email flurry? A life of speed isn't easy to walk away from. But in time, I detox. Feel my soul open up. There are no fireworks in the sky. Change is slow, gradual, and intermittent; three steps forward, a step or two back. Some days I nail it; others, I slip back into hurry. But for the first time in years, I'm moving toward maturity, one inch at a time. Becoming more like Jesus. And more like my best self.

Even better: I feel God again.

I feel my own soul.

I'm on the unpaved road with no clue where it leads, but that's okay. I honestly value who I'm becoming over where I end up. And for the first time in years, I'm smiling at the horizon.

My Uber ride home to binge-watch Keanu Reeves was five years and as many lifetimes ago. So much has changed since then. This little book was born out of my short and mostly uneventful autobiography, my journey from a life of hurry to a life of, well, something else.

In a way, I'm the worst person to write about hurry. I'm the guy angling at the stoplight for the lane with two cars instead of three; the guy bragging about being the "first to the office, last to go home"; the fast-walking, fast-talking, chronic-multitasking speed addict (to clarify, not *that* kind of speed addict). Or at least I was. Not anymore. I found an off-ramp

from that life. So maybe I'm the best person to write a book on hurry? You decide.

I don't know your story. The odds are, you aren't a former megachurch pastor who burned out and had a mid-life crisis at age thirty-three. It's more likely that you're a college student at USD or a twentysomething urbanite in Chicago or a full-time mom in Melbourne or a middle-aged insurance broker in Minnesota. Getting started in life or just trying to keep going.

The Korean-born German philosopher Byung-Chul Han ends his book *The Burnout Society* with a haunting observation of most people in the Western world: "They are too alive to die, and too dead to live."⁵

That was me to the proverbial T.

Is it you? Even a little?

We all have our own story of trying to stay sane in the day and age of iPhones and Wi-Fi and the twenty-four-hour news cycle and urbanization and ten-lane freeways with soul-crushing traffic and nonstop noise and a frenetic ninety-miles-per-hour life of go, go, *go* . . .

Think of this book like you and me meeting up for a cup of Portland coffee (my favorite is a good Kenyan from Heart on Twelfth) and me downloading everything I've learned over the last few years about how to navigate the treacherous waters of what French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky calls the "hypermodern" world.⁶

But honestly: everything I have to offer you, I'm stealing from the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, my rabbi, and so much more.

My favorite invitation of Jesus comes to us via Matthew's gospel:

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.⁷

Do you feel “weary”?

What about “burdened”?

Anybody feel a bone-deep tiredness not just in your mind or body but in your *soul*?

If so, you're not alone.

Jesus invites all of us to take up the “easy” yoke. He has—on offer to all—an easy way to shoulder the weight of life with his triumvirate of love, joy, and peace. As Eugene Peterson translated Jesus' iconic line: “to live freely and lightly.”⁸

What if the secret to a happy life—and it is a secret, an open one but a secret nonetheless; how else do so few people know it?—what if the secret isn't “out there” but much closer to home? What if all you had to do was slow down long enough for the merry-go-round blur of life to come into focus?

What if the secret to the life we crave is actually “easy”?

Now, let me clarify a few things before we begin:

First, I’m not you. While glaringly obvious, it needs to be said. I’m guessing this anti-hurry manifesto will grate on some of you; it did on me at first. It exposes the deep ache in all of us for a life that is different from the one we’re currently living. The temptation will be to write me off as unrealistic or out of touch:

He has no idea what’s it’s like to be a single mom working two jobs just trying to pay off debt and make rent each week.

You’re right; I don’t.

He’s woefully out of touch with life as an executive in the social Darwinism of the marketplace.

That might be true.

He doesn’t get what it’s like in my city/nation/generation.

I might not.

I simply ask you to hear me out.

Secondly, I’m not Jesus. Just one of his many apprentices who have been at it for a while. Again, obvious. My agenda for our time together is simple: to pass on some of the best things I’ve learned from sitting at the feet of the master. A man whose closest friends all said he was anointed with the

oil of joy more than any of his companions.⁹ My translation: he was the happiest person alive.

Most of us don't even *think* to look to Jesus for advice on how to be happy. For that we look to the Dalai Lama or our local mindfulness studio or Tal Ben-Shahar's positive psychology class at Harvard. They all have good things to say, and for that I'm grateful. But Jesus is in a class of his own; hold him up against any teacher, tradition, or philosophy—religious or secular, ancient or modern—from Socrates to the Buddha to Nietzsche to your yogi podcaster of choice. For me Jesus remains the most brilliant, most insightful, most thought-provoking teacher to ever walk the earth. And he walked *slowly* (more on that in a bit). So rather than buckle up, settle in.

On that note, finally, let me say it straight up: If you want Fast and Faster, this isn't the book for you. In fact, you don't really have time to read a book; maybe skim the first chapter? Then you'd better get back at it.

If you want a quick fix or a three-step formula in an easy acronym, this book isn't for you either. There's no silver bullet for life. No life hack for the soul. Life is extraordinarily complex. Change is even more so. Anybody who says differently is selling you something.

But . . .

If you're weary . . .

If you're tired of life as you know it . . .

If you have a sneaking suspicion that there might be a better way to be human . . .

That you might be missing the whole point . . .

That the metrics for success our culture handed you might be skewed . . .

That said “success” might turn out to look a lot like failure . . .

Above all, if your time has come and you’re ready to go on a counterintuitive and *very* countercultural journey to explore your soul in the reality of the kingdom . . .

Then enjoy the read. This book isn’t long or hard to understand. But we have secrets to tell . . .

**Part
one:**

**The
problem**



Hurry: the great enemy of spiritual life

Last week I had lunch with my mentor John. Okay, confession: he's not actually my mentor; he's way out of my league, but we regularly have lunch and I ask a barrage of questions about life, notepad open. John is the kind of person you meet and immediately think, *I want to be like that when I grow up*. He's blisteringly smart but more—wise. Yet he never comes off remotely pretentious or stuck up. Instead, he's joyful, easygoing, comfortable in his own skin, a raging success (but not in that annoying celebrity way), kind, curious, present to you and the moment . . . Basically, he's a lot like how I imagine Jesus.¹

John (last name Ortberg) happens to be a pastor and writer in California who was mentored by another hero of mine, Dallas Willard. If you don't know that name, you're welcome.² Willard was a philosopher at the University of Southern

California but is best known outside academia as a teacher of the way of Jesus. More than any teacher outside the library of Scripture, his writings have shaped the way I follow—or as he would say, apprentice under—Jesus.³ All that to say, John was a mentee of Willard for over twenty years, until Willard's death in 2013.

I never got the chance to meet Willard, so the first time John and I sat down in Menlo Park, I immediately started pumping him for stories. We hit gold.

Here's one I just can't stop thinking about:

John calls up Dallas to ask for advice. It's the late '90s, and at the time John was working at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, one of the most influential churches in the world. John himself is a well-known teacher and best-selling author—the kind of guy you figure pretty much has apprenticeship to Jesus *down*. But behind the scenes he felt like he was getting sucked into the vortex of megachurch insanity.

I could relate.

So he calls up Willard and asks, “What do I need to do to become the me I want to be?”⁴

There's a long silence on the other end of the line . . .

According to John, “With Willard there's *a/ways* a long silence on the other end of the line.”

Then: “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

Can we just hit stop for a minute and agree, that’s *brilliant*?

Thanks . . .

John then scribbles that line down in his journal—sadly this was before Twitter; otherwise that would have broken the internet. Then he asks, “Okay, what else?”

Another long silence . . .

Willard: “There is nothing else. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”

End of story.⁵

When I first heard that, I felt a deep resonance with reality. Hurry is the root problem underneath so many of the symptoms of toxicity in our world.

And yet Willard’s reply is not what I would expect. I live in one of the most secular, progressive cities in America, but if you were to ask me, What is the great challenge to your spiritual life in Portland? I’m not sure what I’d say.

Most likely I’d say it’s modernity or postmodernity or liberal theology or the popularization of the prosperity gospel or the redefinition of sexuality and marriage or the erasure of gender or internet porn or the millions of questions people have

about violence in the Old Testament or the fall of celebrity pastors or Donald Trump. I don't know.

How would you answer that question?

I bet very few of us would default to “hurry” as our answer.

But read the Bible: Satan doesn't show up as a demon with a pitchfork and gravelly smoker voice or as Will Ferrell with an electric guitar and fire on *Saturday Night Live*. He's far more intelligent than we give him credit for. Today, you're far more likely to run into the enemy in the form of an alert on your phone while you're reading your Bible or a multiday Netflix binge or a full-on dopamine addiction to Instagram or a Saturday morning at the office or *another* soccer game on a Sunday or commitment after commitment after commitment in a life of speed.

Corrie ten Boom once said that if the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy. There's truth in that. Both sin and busyness have the exact same effect—they cut off your connection to God, to other people, and even to your own soul.

The famous psychologist Carl Jung had this little saying:

Hurry is not *of* the devil; hurry *is* the devil.

Jung, by the way, was the psychologist who developed the framework of the introvert and extrovert personality types and whose work later became the basis for the Myers-Briggs

Type Indicator test. (INTJ, anybody?) Suffice to say: he knew what he was talking about.

Recently I was running the vision of our church by my therapist, who is this Jesus-loving, ubersmart PhD. Our dream was to re-architect our communities around apprenticeship to Jesus. (That feels so odd to write because what else would we be doing as a church?) He loved it but kept saying the same thing: “The number one problem you will face is *time*. People are just too busy to live emotionally healthy and spiritually rich and vibrant lives.”

What do people normally answer when you ask the customary, “How are you?”

“Oh, good—just *busy*.”

Pay attention and you’ll find this answer everywhere—across ethnicity, gender, stage of life, even class. College students are busy. Young parents are busy. Empty nesters living on a golf course are busy. CEOs are busy; so are baristas and part-time nannies. Americans are busy, Kiwis are busy, Germans are busy—we’re *all* busy.

Granted, there is a healthy kind of busyness where your life is full with things that matter, not wasted on empty leisure or trivial pursuits. By that definition Jesus himself was busy. 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 the quota up is to hurry.

That kind of busy is what has us all reeling.

Michael Zigarelli from the Charleston Southern University School of Business conducted the Obstacles to Growth Survey of over twenty thousand Christians across the globe and identified busyness as a major distraction from spiritual life. Listen carefully to his hypothesis:

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

And pastors, by the way, are the worst. He rated busyness in my profession right up there with lawyers and doctors.

I mean, not me, of course. *Other* pastors . . .

As the Finnish proverb so eloquently quips, "God did not create hurry."

This new speed of life isn't Christian; it's anti-Christ. Think about it: What has the highest value in Christ's kingdom economy? Easy: love. Jesus made that crystal clear. He said the greatest command in all of the Torah was to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul . . . and with all your strength," followed only by, "love your

neighbor as yourself.”⁷ But love is painfully time consuming. All parents know this, as do all lovers and most long-term friends.

Hurry and love are incompatible. All my worst moments as a father, a husband, and a pastor, even as a human being, are when I’m in a hurry—late for an appointment, behind on my unrealistic to-do list, trying to cram too much into my day. I ooze anger, tension, a critical nagging—the antitheses of love. If you don’t believe me, next time you’re trying to get your type B wife and three young, easily distracted children out of the house and you’re running late (a subject on which I have a wealth of experience), just pay attention to how you relate to them. Does it look and feel like love? Or is it far more in the vein of agitation, anger, a biting comment, a rough glare? Hurry and love are oil and water: they simply do not mix.

Hence, in the apostle Paul’s definition of *love*, the first descriptor is “patient.”⁸

There’s a reason people talk about “walking” with God, not “running” with God. It’s because God is love.

In his book *Three Mile an Hour God*, the late Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama put this language around it:

God walks “slowly” because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is “slow” yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.⁹

In our culture *slow* is a pejorative. When somebody has a low IQ, we dub him or her slow. When the service at a restaurant is lousy, we call it slow. When a movie is boring, again, we complain that it's slow. Case in point, *Merriam-Webster*: "mentally dull: stupid: naturally inert or sluggish: lacking in readiness, promptness, or willingness."¹⁰

The message is clear: slow is bad; fast is good.

But in the upside-down kingdom, our value system is turned on its head: hurry is of the devil; slow is of Jesus, because Jesus is what love looks like in flesh and blood.

The same is true for joy and peace—two of the other core realities of the kingdom. Love, joy, and peace are the triumvirate at the heart of Jesus's kingdom vision. All three are more than just emotions; they are overall conditions of the heart. They aren't just pleasant feelings; they are the kinds of people we become through our apprenticeship to Jesus, who embodies all three *ad infinitum*.

And all three are incompatible with hurry.

Think of joy. All the spiritual masters from inside and outside the Jesus tradition agree on this one (as do secular psychologists, mindfulness experts, etc.): if there's a secret to happiness, it's simple—presence to the moment. The more present we are to the now, the more joy we tap into.

And peace? Need I even make a case? Think of when you're in a hurry for your next event, running behind: Do you feel the

deep shalom of God in your soul? A grounded, present sense of calm and well-being?

To restate: love, joy, and peace are at the heart of all Jesus is trying to grow in the soil of your life. And all three are incompatible with hurry.

Again, if you don't believe me, next time you're dragging the family (or if you're single, the roommate) out the door, pay attention to your heart. Is it love and joy and peace you feel? Of course not.

At lunch my non-mentor mentor John wisely observed: "I cannot live in the kingdom of God with a hurried soul."

Nobody can.

Not only does hurry keep us from the love, joy, and peace of the kingdom of God—the very core of what all human beings crave—but it also keeps us from *God himself* simply by stealing our attention. And with hurry, we always lose more than we gain.

Here for the win, Walter Adams, the spiritual director to C. S. Lewis:

To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace. Hurry is the death of prayer and only impedes and spoils our work. It never advances it.¹¹

Meaning, very little can be done with hurry that can't be done

better without it. Especially our lives with God. And even our work *for* God.

Here from Ronald Rolheiser, my undisputed favorite Catholic writer of all time, with hurricane force:

Today, a number of historical circumstances are blindly flowing together and accidentally conspiring to produce a climate within which it is difficult not just to think about God or to pray, but simply to have any interior depth whatsoever. . . .

We, for every kind of reason, good and bad, 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 nonspiritual, 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.¹²

I love Rolheiser's turn of phrase: "pathological busyness."

Again, a certain level of busyness is fine or at least unavoidable.

There's even a time and place for hurry—in a 911-caliber emergency, when your wife's water breaks or your toddler runs into the street.

But let's be honest: those moments are few and far between. The pathological busyness that most of us live with as our default setting, the chronic hurry we assume is normal, is far more, well, pathological, as in the technical sort: a pathogen let loose into a mass population, resulting in disease or death.

We hear the refrain "I'm great, just busy" so often we assume pathological busyness is okay. After all, everybody else is busy too. But what if busyness isn't healthy? What if it's an airborne contagion, wreaking havoc on our collective soul?

Lately I've taken to reading poetry, which is new for me. But I love how it forces me to slow down. You simply can't speed-read a good poem. Last night I picked up the Christian savant and literary master T. S. Eliot. A little of it I even understood, like his line about "this twittering world" where people are "distracted from distraction by distraction."¹³ Meaning, a world with just enough distraction to avoid the wound that could lead us to healing and life.

Again: We are "distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion."

As Ortberg has said,

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.¹⁴

Do you see what's at stake here? It's not just our emotional health that's under threat. As if that's not enough. We move

so fast through life that we're stressed out, on edge, quick to snap at our spouses or kids. Sure, that's true. But it's even more terrifying: our spiritual lives hang in the balance.

Could it be that Willard was right? That an overbusy, digitally distracted life of speed is the greatest threat to spiritual life that we face in the modern world?

I can't help but wonder if Jesus would say to our entire generation what he said to Martha: "You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one."¹⁵

The need of the hour is for a slowdown spirituality.¹⁶



Thanks for reading *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*.

A few things about me...

I live and work in Portland, Oregon, with my wife, T, and our three kids.

I'm the pastor for teaching and vision at Bridgetown Church. Our

church is built around the very simple idea of practicing the way of Jesus, together, in Portland.

As for education, I hold a master's degree in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary, and I'm currently at work on a doctorate in spiritual formation through Fuller Seminary and the Dallas Willard Center.

You're welcome to follow my teachings via the Bridgetown Church podcast or *This Cultural Moment*, a podcast I cohost with my friend Mark Sayers on following Jesus in the post-Christian world.

Find more at johnmarkcomer.com.

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