

Busyness and Loose Definitions: Blocking God's Love

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Day One

We live measuring time: minutes, hours, days. We count just about everything that we do in time. We use time to mark special occasions, like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Some of us make lists of what we are doing with our time, and almost everyone has a digital calendar with the advent of the smartphone. We talk about how we fill our time, as if there is a vessel to be filled. The problem is we keep filling the vessel until it simply overflows and cannot hold anything else!

We talk a lot about how we fill our time. In fact, it is common to ask, what does your schedule look like this week? Do you have time for ____? Can you squeeze in ____?

Think about your calendar for a moment. I want you to visualize this for me. Each day has 24 hours that can be scheduled whether you use a paper or a digital calendar. Most mark the time in 30-minute increments. How much of your calendar is full or colored in? Family, work, social commitments, but what about God commitments? You have heard this before: if the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy. Attributed to Corrie ten Boom, this phrase sums up why I want to highlight our culture of busyness and how this inhibits us from showing God's love.

You and I are running quickly and filling our calendars with everything but God. And, if we are not filling our time seeking God's presence, other things that can be bad more readily can creep in. How can we expect to experience God's love or show others God's love if we make no time for this?

We will consider some of the ways our work culture creates more busyness—inhibiting us from showing God's love if we don't consciously make time to fill our moments, thinking about this most important command, to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind* (Matthew 22:37) and to *love your neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:39).

Day Two

How are you filling your calendar each day? These days, it is harder to be disconnected and unseen. Even through the lens of work, digital connection and the importance of social media can fill our moments more than we realize. Most companies have an entire marketing and social media strategy, but now we live in a time where personal branding and social media strategies are noted as important for our careers.

Gone are the simple days of a resume, and if you are in a job search, it can feel overwhelming. The traditional outplacement or career coach has taken on a new role that focuses on image, connection, and perhaps even developing a website. While the first use of the term personal brand dates back to 1997 in an article in Fast Company Magazine, the notion of personal brands as a strategic career asset is relatively recent. While created in 2003, LinkedIn has exploded in the recent years alongside other platforms.

You may be thinking, Lauren, what does this have to do with how I show God's love?! My answer—simply, if we don't pay enough attention to the need for our own attention, it is easy to keep the focus

on ourselves and not on others. Now, I am not suggesting a personal brand is bad, but I do want us to think about the time it takes. What are you doing in your spare moments to create your personal brand? If you are in a job search this may be a greater amount of time, but if you are working full-time, this easily creeps into spare moments and evenings. How much time are you spending focused on yourself? And if you are focused on your personal brand, how can you first spend that all important time with God? And how can you show God's love if you are constantly consumed with the social and digital aspects of this personal brand culture?

Have you ever paused to consider what the Lord wants for our self-promotion? How would God want us to get noticed? How is God part of your personal brand?

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:5-6).

First, as we balance showing our faith at work, we need to consider our intentions always. Are our intentions genuine, or are we trying to be seen? Second, invite God into this practice through prayer. How can he guide how you present yourself? Finally, pause and make sure you are looking at the needs of your neighbors. Don't spend so much time consumed with your digital brand that you forget the importance of connecting with others. Maybe they are struggling with some of the same things. How can you invite God and others into this new era of busyness that can easily cause too much self-focus?

Day Three

A culture of busyness can keep us from showing God's love. How loosely do we hold this word? Like our notions about time, we also confuse love. A large part of our problem is we love everything and everyone. So, when you pause to think about how to show God's love to others or to explain to them what God's love feels like, maybe it gets lost in the emptiness we often attribute to this word.

We all love. When thinking about using the word love, my mind is filled with red and pink hearts, flowers, candies, and other visual or physical ways we see or experience love. I also think about how many times I have used the word love in the prior weeks. I love having coffee with my friends. I love the flowers I buy from a local farmstand. I love my husband. I love my dogs. I proclaim how much I love a friend's dress. I love pizza. I loved our zoom gathering this month. I think you see my point.

We fly loosely with the word love, and if we are too busy to reflect on how special God's love for us is, it will be very hard to show it to others. While everything I noted already can help us show God's love to others, we need to go deeper into the meaning of what God wants us to show others.

God's love is described as steadfast and enduring, sacrificial, unconditional, personal, and transformative. Perhaps you have heard the word *Hesed*. This is the deep conventional love in action that God gives to us as a promise.

There is nothing we can do to change God's love for us. It never fades. We feel God's sacrificial love in John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

We see his steadfast and enduring love for those that, even though they wander like Israel, God still loves them.

We see his transformational love in Jesus' abundant healing ministry.

How can we show others this type of love? Not the pizza and coffee love. Not the "I love my dog" love. Not the "I love the way the color looks on you" love. I mean the "I want to share life with you" love—the proverbial "I would give to someone even if it hurt" love. The love that weeps with those who weep and rejoices when others rejoice.

When we are too busy, it is easy to give the glossy heart and flowers love. It is harder to focus on and think about how God wants us to show his love to others.

Day Four

Have you set some goals lately: personal or professional? How are they impacting how you show God's love? Goals are important: personally and professionally. In the context of work, goals help us understand our part in a larger vision or project that impact our organization. Outside of work, goals can help us focus on achieving in other aspects of our life like health or finance.

I would argue any good goal can go bad, especially when it takes us away from what is most important to God. Again, Scripture tells us God wants us to love him and love others as we love ourselves.

How full is your goal set both at work and personally? Is this filling your time so much that you are not able to love God or love others? We live in a metric-based, title-hungry culture. When we set goals, how are we being measured, and what is the reward?

When the measurement and reward become more important than God, we start walking down that slippery slope.

Are you in sales? Perhaps you take an extra lead or two that will help win a trip or sweeten a bonus, but this causes a colleague to miss their goal by a margin. Or maybe you end up staying late to get more done and skip a church commitment.

Are you working a lot of overtime to make your metrics look better than others at work and miss time connecting with a friend in prayer?

Perhaps you feel like you are pulling a lot of weight on a project and complain about a colleague, not knowing they are suffering a personal hardship.

Personally, have you set goals that compromise your time spent in God's Word, or are you doing activities you enjoy but keep you away from showing love to your family?

Measurement and reward: They are not bad but can become bad when they are not balanced with our thoughts about God and our love for others.

We are already winning in the eyes of God if we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior. How can we show this to others? Maybe you pass those sales leads along, help balance the workload to make your team look better or ask questions when a colleague is falling behind on a project. We are called to walk differently. Our reward is much greater than any trip or title we could ever achieve here on earth!

Day Five

Has someone ever asked you if you live to work or work to live? Did you know this question is one asked on some assessments to evaluate whether a candidate is a fit for a company culture? I will admit, I was a live to work woman for a long time. Over the years I have shifted more to a work to live mentality, but I know God calls us to strike a balance. After all, he created us for work!

Living to work means you get up each day with work as your number 1! Working to live feels more like, I cannot wait for my day to end so I can be doing life. If you were hiring someone, how would you want them to answer this question? While I think we likely have seen a shift in how many would answer this question, I wonder how this sits for a prospective employer. If you are a manager or business owner, you want to hire people who are motivated to come to work and do a good job! But I would argue you also want employees who have a good balance of loving their life!

As employees, God calls us to do good work as we are his representatives every day, but we need to be mindful we don't get too focused on the live to work mentality! It can be so tempting to pour time into our work, especially if we enjoy our colleagues and our work. The more we live to work, the easier it is for that busyness to be all consuming!

Jesus cautions us of the live to work mentality. We see this contrast between Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. Martha is busy and distracted with serving and Mary is sitting at Jesus feet listening to his teaching.

Jesus tells Martha she is *anxious and troubled* about many things but one thing is necessary.

One thing is necessary, and that is coming to the feet of Jesus. If you and I are anxious and distracted by living to work, we will clearly miss opportunities to both experience God's love and show God's love to others.

Striking a balance, making God first and loving others a close second, is where we need to rest.