

“I don’t have time for that.”

“I’m running late!”

“I didn’t get to the grocery store. Let’s just grab dinner out.”

Do any of these statements sound familiar? Do you feel there’s too much left undone on your to-do list at the end of a typical week? Did you ever even get around to making a to-do list? If not, you’re in good company.

Busyness is an epidemic in America today. In an effort to meet the ever-increasing demands of our families, our employers, and ourselves, we are running at life faster and faster but feeling less productive and more stress. The end result is detrimental to the quality of our physical and mental health, our relationships, and our spiritual life.

Recent surveys indicate a growing number of Americans on medication for such conditions as high blood pressure, anxiety, and depression. While we work longer hours and are more connected – thanks to modern technology – than ever before, our bodies and minds wave the white flag of surrender, begging us to slow down and set some healthy boundaries when it comes to time.

While stress creates issues for both men and women, unfortunately moms are often among those most stressed from the daily grind of life. A 2014 study by the Barna Group seems to underscore this reality:

- 62% of moms with children still at home report being dissatisfied with the balance between work and home.
- 80% of moms report feeling overwhelmed by stress.
- 70% of moms report not getting enough rest.

While these statistics provide a mere glimpse at the undeniable stress in today’s families, Barna found that even with such obvious stressors, the majority of moms described themselves as generally satisfied with their lives at a whole. Somehow that just doesn’t seem possible to me – unless, of course, you accept the fact that being overly busy is the new normal.

Americans’ growing obsession with social media has exacerbated two key issues, especially with women. These are time management and feelings of inferiority. Far too often that sense of being stuck in the computer time warp is paired with envy over online friends’ latest vacations and seemingly perfect photos.

More often than not, it’s not just our families who get our leftovers; God does too. As four late nights begin to take a toll on our bodies, it’s easy to oversleep, which can mean skipping the morning devotional and starting a new day already exhausted *and* running behind schedule.

In his book *Freedom From Busyness*, business and leadership guru Michael Zigarelli writes, “Two thousand years after the Great Physician haled us through the cross, there appears to be an epidemic

affecting His followers. Some call it ‘busyness’ – busyness to the point of overload, busyness to the point of habitual hurry, even busyness that’s led to ignoring the Physician Himself.”

The problem of busyness is, of course, multifaceted. However, Zigarelli contends that “our work hours are now far out of proportion with the other things that God desires for us.”

And finding balance in our lives – as believers – essentially means we must reorganize our priorities around God. So what does that mean exactly, especially for us as busy, well-meaning parents? Here are five things you can do to put life in balance:

**1. Protect the time that’s most important.**

Make sure you schedule time with God, your spouse, and your children. God should be a given every day. But go to the effort to put your spouse’s and children’s names on your calendar. Then if someone needs you during one of your scheduled times, you can honestly tell them you have an appointment. It’s amazing how much more flexible people can become when they know you’re busy too.

**2. Learn to set clear boundaries.**

Saying no to some good things is necessary in order to say yes to some better things. Don’t let poor planning by others upset your own personal and family life. The reality is that you probably *can*, you probably don’t *need* to work a full-time job, teach two classes at church, sing in the choir, serve as your child’s homeroom mom, drive carpool to and from soccer practice, and volunteer at the charity of your choice. We all know people whose schedule makes us cross-eyed. As a counselor, let me assure you that such busy individuals are on the fast-track to burnout – or worse.

**3. Take care of your body.**

Stress is hard on us physically. We often don’t notice the cues that are really alarm bells begging us to slow down. To whatever extent possible, eat healthy foods, drink plenty of water, and carve out 20-30 minutes a day to exercise. Even a short, brisk walk can help us de-stress. If you absolutely must multi-task, I’d encourage you to use that time for prayer too.

**4. Unplug at scheduled intervals.**

I know you need your smart phone. But do you really need all those notifications constantly interrupting you? It’s so important for us to set healthy boundaries with regard to our own use of technology because we are role models for our kids – and they *are* watching us! Resist the temptation to keep your phone by your bed. Charge it in another room, so you won’t be disturbed by incoming information all night long. Most of all, make an effort to turn off your electronic devices and notice the people and things all around you. People often tell me they struggle to hear God’s voice, but it’s usually because there are so many other voices and messages competing for our time and attention.

**5. Take time to breathe.**

Yes, that’s what I said. Just breathe. Most of us live such hurried lives that we don’t even realize the little things we fail to do. Some of my most difficult clients have found relaxation training to be profoundly helpful and energizing. You’ve probably read articles that talk about our decreased rate of blinking while staring at a screen of some sort. Well, we also tend to breathe very shallowly when we’re really busy.

Depending on your schedule and commitments, you may need to begin simplifying your life by just not adding more to your plate while you finish out current obligations. Sometimes, for the sake of physical and emotional health, more immediate action may be warranted.

Perhaps you feel overwhelmed and don’t even know where to begin re-ordering your priorities. If so, let me encourage you to make an appointment (yes, that also takes time) with a respected minister or counselor who can be of help. You may even have someone in your church who can serve as an encourager and mentor to you as you seek to make healthy choices for the sake of a more balanced and satisfying life.

Two keys to finding balance are a willingness to intentionally surrender every day to God and a resolve to taking charge of your time rather than allowing time to take charge of you.

As you begin setting appropriate boundaries, you can expect push-back from some that have benefitted from your “I can do it” mindset. But you can also expect to find surprising freedom in seeing an increase of quality time with those who matter most – especially your family. In the process, you’ll set an example of simplicity for your kids. They very much need to know that it’s okay to say no and set priorities for their own busy lives.

That’s definitely something you can say yes to.

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