

## Lecture 2 – The Sin of Busyness

### Focus Verse:

“Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up *riches*, And does not know who will gather them.” (Psalm 39:6).

### Introduction:

The Desert Fathers spoke of busyness as "moral laziness." Busyness can also be an addictive drug, which is why its victims are increasingly referred to as "workaholics." Busyness acts to repress our inner fears and personal anxieties, as we scramble to achieve an enviable image to display to others.

In previous retreat we covered the calling to "enter by the narrow gate." "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:13,14) The road to destruction is broad, has many lanes and is well traveled these days. If we stay in the "I'm real busy" lane, there is danger ahead. It is easy to allow ourselves to speed excessively down the broad road that Jesus spoke of, even though we do it at great peril. Busyness and sin are like blindfolds and it is impossible to see where we are going if we are blindfolded. Busyness diverts our minds with things that have no real value. Sin deadens our perception for harm. Busyness crowds our spiritual introspection. Sin distorts reality. Busyness produces fatigue. Sin confuses the facts and makes a lie appear to be the truth.

The good news is that it's not terribly difficult to understand what must be done to beat busyness. The bad news, though, is that most people – even the ones who know what they should do to overcome this obstacle – still find it to be an enormous challenge to actually do something about the busyness of their lives. As a result, they remain over-extended, even to the point where relationship with God and spiritual growth become a low priority.

If busyness appears to be a major stumbling block in your spiritual development, know that you can do something about it. You must make a choice, though. You must choose to simplify your life.

What exactly does that mean? It means that you adopt a lifestyle that allows you the room for the things that matters most in this world: loving God, building relationship with God, and genuinely loving those around you. That may entail choosing to do fewer things in life, choosing to make space for yourself, learning to sometimes say "no."

Some understandably protest at this point: "But I can't just say no to my boss, to my kids, to my spouse, to my pastor, to all those who need me! I have no options here!" That may be true – today. Because of your current responsibilities, you may have very few options for beating busyness at this moment, but you can certainly work toward a lifestyle that is less complex, less crowded, less cumbersome. If your job is the culprit, you can set goals to work fewer hours – or maybe get a different job eventually. If child care responsibilities are the culprit, you can set the goal to get more help with the kids. If your well-intended service to others is the culprit, you might have to back off some of those altruistic activities. For example, you might have to make a decision to do less in your church, as heretical as that might sound at first. Ironically, and tragically, many people have become so busy "doing things" for God that they have all but eliminated the available time to know and love God.

Busyness could be an enemy of God. A life of frenzied activity is likely to lead us to accumulate skills for personal achievement but neglect to cultivate godly character and virtue. We should order our priorities so that we give our best time and effort to what matters most. (Rev. 3: 20, 17). Think on your own life. Are there days when you skip reading the Bible altogether or rush through it to get on to something else? Are you truly worshiping God by not spending any real time with him? Look at Luke 10:38-42:

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me*

*to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!' 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'*

Martha got so busy that she forgot the big picture! She was so worried about doing things that could have been put off that she missed out on listening to Jesus and spending intimate time with Him. Don't let this happen to you!

Fight busyness! Right now, determine your top five priorities. Make two lists: One with what you want your top five priorities to be, and one with what your top five priorities actually are. Then grab a notebook and carry it with you everywhere you go for a week. Write down everything you do in that week. After the week is up, look at your notebook. Notice the difference between which things were urgent and which were important. What things could you have cut out or put off for a little bit? Next, make healthy commitments. Matthew 5:37 says, *'Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.'* After all, 'The quality of your yeses is determined by the quantity of your nos.' It's ok to say no! You don't have to take on everything in this world. Just remember to do what you have set out to do, and do it well! Finally, in fighting busyness, make sure you don't go to the opposite extreme: laziness. The archenemy of spiritual authenticity is busyness, which is closely tied to something the Bible calls worldliness - getting caught up with this society's agenda, objectives and activities to the neglect of walking with God. You don't want to get caught in this. Remember to put God first.

Our problem is not that we take refuge from action in spiritual things, but that we take refuge from spiritual things in action.

## **Lecture 2 – The Sin of Busyness Note taking Guide**

1. Identify what keeps you "busy" and how it takes you away from more important things. Do you think your schedule is too packed? What facts or feeling lead you to that conclusion? (Consider, for instance, how you feel when you wake up and when you go to bed, what others say about your availability, the signals your body sends you, the amount of time you have available for other relationships, etc.)
2. Why is busyness a sin? What does it take us away from? What does it take us toward?
3. Now that you have identified the problem, what do you need to do to overcome it? Think Practically! Think of what you are capable of committing to.

## Lecture 2 – The Sin of Busyness - A HERMIT IN THE GLASS MONASTERY

Abba Boctor, the writer and abbot of the Descendants Monastery, commonly known as the Glass Monastery in the city of Alexandria said : "Listen my beloved brethren and believers of the Lord Jesus, I shall tell you what I saw with my own eyes! At the age of twelve, I greatly desired monasticism and so came to the monastery where I lived with a saintly man who used to write spiritual books. He gave me the best education and teachings and eventually I became a writer too. The Lord enlightened my heart and eyes and I accepted his teaching with great love. Many years after my teacher died, I became the abbot of the monastery, much against my will as I loved to live the life of solitude. When I became abbot, I found it very difficult to find time to write despite people asking me to write many books. As a result they approached the Patriarch and requested that he replace me as abbot so that I may dedicate more time to writing. I loved to write the stories of saints, especially those I met.

One day while I was meditating upon the many wonders of the saints; their struggle and their victory over the devil, I looked out of my cell window and I saw a monk walking hastily towards the monastery. His clothes were very worn out and when he approached the monastery, I viewed him closely. He seemed very tired and leaned against the wall of the monastery to rest a while. I quickly said to one of my disciples, "Go down to the monastery and bring that monk to me!" The monk greeted me and together we sat down. I asked him about his story; where he had come from and where he was going. He answered, "I have lived in the wilderness of Saba for several years now and I want to receive the Holy Communion and see my saintly fathers, before I die. In my sleep last night, I had a vision of someone telling me, "Get up and hurry to the Descendants' Monastery (the Glass Monastery), for you shall see there, the saints whom nobody knows about; see them, receive the Holy Communion and know that after ten days, you will depart from this vanishing world to be with your Heavenly Father in His home. The saintly fathers will pray on you and bury your body..." I got up immediately, seeking this place though I did not know the way, but when I began to walk, I heard the voices of people talking, and so I turned around to see three men dressed in white carrying in their hands censers full of incense. They were praying and giving praise to the Lord and they lifted up their heads towards Heaven hourly one after the other. I was overwhelmed by the beautiful sight and praised God. I approached and asked them to pray for me; so they blessed me. I asked them where they were going and they answered, "We are going to the Descendants' Monastery." I followed closely behind them, and within a short time, we arrived at this monastery. We sat at the door for a moment to rest and I did not even notice anyone opening the monastery door, but when the three elders entered and I followed, they disappeared from my sight. I was very puzzled." Abba Boctor then said to the monk, "I saw you coming forth out of the wilderness, but I did not see anyone with you."

When I Boctor turned towards the saint, I could not look into his face as it resembled the face of an angel, so I glorified God. I then took the saintly father and went into the church as it was time for the Holy Mass. He received the Holy Communion, and later we returned to my cell. When I offered him food to eat, he said, "I have not seen food for many years; my food is the grass of the wilderness and I drink rain water." He then took out some grass and ate from it, "This is sufficient for me for a week." He also gave some of it to me and I ate it. He stayed with me for seven days, telling me the stories of the hermit fathers in the wilderness, of those who eat from the grass of the wilderness. I asked, "My saintly father, I ask you for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ to pray for me so that He may lead me on the path of righteousness and humility so that I will never have need for this earthly food." He smiled saying, "If you would like to come with me, then come along." I found it difficult to walk because I spent most of my life sitting down in order to write holy books, and also because of the weakness of my faith. The hermit father said, "Ask and you will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open to you, for whoever asks will take and whoever seeks will find and whoever knocks it will be open for him" (Luke 11: 9-10). He then said, "I shall go now, but later I will return to you."

In less than three hours he returned and brought with him more of the wilderness grass. I was touched by the purity of this saint's hands and heart and how he pleased the Lord with his simple deeds. I was thinking about what the hermit father had said earlier, about having only ten days left before departing to the Eternal Home. Eight days had already passed. On the ninth day he said to me, "I wish, my saintly brother, that you bury my body when I die tomorrow and bury my bones with my fathers the saints." I asked him, "Please tell me, where are the bones of those saints?" He warmly smiled saying, "Boctor the writer, do you not yet know? Get up and come with me." So I got up immediately and followed him. He walked me to the outside of the monastery and I saw tombs I had never seen before. I saw saintly fathers coming forward to greet him and pray on him. I stood watching from a distance and heard one of them saying to him, "We are waiting for you to come and be with us..." As I heard their beautiful voices, I could not lift up my eyes to look at them or ask anything of them. I then heard voices praising and singing triumphantly, "Holy God, Holy God Lord of host, heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honour!" I turned and lifted up my eyes but could not see them, I found the saintly hermit father had passed away and was lying on the ground. Woe to me from that hour! How can I bury his pure body? How can I make for him a tomb like these other tombs belonging to the saintly fathers? I approached and kissed him and there I saw beside him a grave already dug. I carried him carefully and placed him within, then left wondering about the story of this saint and the many blessings the Lord has bestowed upon him because of his patience, faith and peace. I went back to my cell and told my brethren the monks what I saw. They rejoiced when I told them about the place of the saint's tombs. When I took my fellow brethren to the tombs, so that they could take their blessings, I became disorientated and could not remember nor find the saints' tombs and so I became quite confused.

My eyes were weak from ageing, so I ate from the grass the saint had given me and immediately my sight became stronger and I was able once again to continue writing holy books... I wrote this story so that the believers might know the extent of God granting grace to those who follow His commandments and do His will, without allowing anything of this world to touch their heart, for this world with its deceit and desires can cause some of the chosen to fall. Therefore take care my brethren to please the Lord by being obedient to His will so that you may be found blameless on the day of judgment and thus achieve the kingdom of heaven. Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit one God forever, Amen.