

Tyranny of the Urgent
By Pastor Daniel Dennison
Luke 14:15-24
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One thing I have observed in my 39 years of existence is that life seems to only get more complex and busy the older you get. And the interesting thing about that is you almost always feel like life just can't get any busier and if I could just get to the next stage of my life, then things won't be so darn busy and complex.

I remember life as a busy high schooler who was involved in extracurricular activities and taking AP and honors classes. I would think to myself: When I get to college and I'm living on my own and I'm not having to go to all of these rehearsals and practices and concerts and events and I'm not having to live by all of my parents rules... then life will get easier. And then I got to college. And now a 2-3 page paper was a 5 or 10 page paper. And marching band was replaced with multiple student organizations and I wasn't under my parents rule anymore, but I had to stay on top of bills. And so I can remember thinking gosh when I graduate college, things are going to be so much easier!

And then I graduated college and I was working 50 hours a week and the bills and the responsibilities became a lot more and life was definitely more complex. And so I began to think, well gosh if I can just get married then I'll have someone to do life with to help me out with some of this stuff. And so I got married. And thankfully I married Mindy and so everything was much better and I lived happily ever after.

Ok that is only partially true, because life actually got more complex. Because as great as marriage is, it's really hard work! And the level of responsibility both socially and professionally was only getting more hectic. Now I was never crazy enough to think that kids would make life easier, but we had them anyway. And boy did life ever get harder. But I did think, man life will be a lot easier when Ruth isn't a baby anymore. But then she became mobile and life got harder. And then we had more kids and then they started getting older.

And now I laugh at HS me who thought life was so hard. Because as we get older, life gets busier and more complex. Work throws curveball after curveball at you. (**John, start throwing balls**). A kid gets sick. Bills are coming due. Kenna has gymnastics. Brick has baseball practice. That senior pastor boss of yours is a total jerk and makes you work late multiple days a week. Ruthie has swim. The hot water heater is broken, so you need to wait on the plumber. Kenna has gymnastics again because she goes 3 times a week. Taxes are due. Brick has a private hitting lesson. Ruthie has a piano lesson. But I need to cultivate my marriage so I need to take my wife out on a date. Brick needs a new baseball bat. Parents want to see the grandkids, so we need to go see them. But the garage door opener just broke and we have to wait for the repair guy to come. And on and on and on it will go.

How do we find sanity in the midst of such complexity? How do we gain control so we're not just always dropping the ball and completely running ourselves ragged?

We're in a sermon series called EFFECTIVE in which we are looking at how we can make small changes in order to be more effective in life. Whether it's our walks with Jesus, our professional careers, our social lives, or our families, I believe this is something we all desire. And today I want to come at it from how we can be more effective with our time and our priorities. The theme from today's sermon came from the 3rd Chapter of "7 Habits of High Effective People" titled "First things First." It also came from Charles Hummel's booklet called "Tyranny of the Urgent," which coincidentally inspired Covey's 3rd chapter. And hence the title of our sermon "Tyranny of the Urgent."

Listen to what Hummel says about time management and priorities: (SLIDE) **When I say 'I don't have time for this project,' I really mean, 'I don't consider it as important as something else I want or need to do.' For whatever reason, I have decided to use the hours another way, on a task I am pressured to do or on one that I enjoy. It may be planned or impulsive. Either way, the issue is not simply lack of time but a choice I make.**

The scripture in your sermon journal this morning is Luke 14:15-24. It gives us a nice illustration of people who had their priorities out of whack and gave too much attention to that which was urgent instead of that which was important: (SLIDE)

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant^[a] to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you,^[b] none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

The people in our parable had what they believed were more urgent matters which led them to miss out on that which was most important, dinner with the King. I wonder what urgent things in your life are causing you to miss out on important things?

Here's what Stephen Covey says about urgent matters: (SLIDE)**They're typically visible, they press on us and insist on action. They're often popular with others.**

Many times they're even pleasant and fun to do, but so often they are UNIMPORTANT.

Here's what Covey says about matters that are IMPORTANT: (SLIDE) **Important matters almost always contribute to our long-term mission, values, goals, and overall well-being.**

When my car began telling us a few months ago that the key fob battery was low, it was important for me to change that battery. But I didn't. So a few weeks ago when I was trying to get into my car after a lunch appointment and it wouldn't open because the key fob was completely dead, I now had an urgent matter on my hands. See our problem is that we aren't taking care of important things like practicing spiritual disciplines and working out and cultivating our marriages and our families. This then allows urgent things to start popping up like health problems, anxiety, stress, and strained marriages and families.

Covey spends a lot of time in the 3rd chapter talking about his time management matrix (SLIDE). Basically, there are four quadrants that people work from: Quadrant 1 are important and urgent activities. Examples would be a big crisis or a deadline. Quadrant 2 are important but non urgent activities. This is the quadrant we should try to spend most of our time in, but often fail to do so. Examples would be: relationship building, any kind of preventative maintenance and planning. Covey will argue that many things that end up in Quadrant 1 are a result of us NOT spending enough time in Quadrant 2. Quadrant 3 are non-important, but urgent matters. Examples would be: interruptions, some text messages, some emails, some meetings or reports. Quadrant 4 are non-important and non-urgent matters. Examples of these would be most email and texts, any kind of busywork, and social media.

I believe if we were to get to the heart of the matter of why many of us don't spend more time living in quadrant 2 (important, but non-urgent), it's from a combination of bad priorities and bad time management.

The idea behind our sermon series is looking at how can we make small changes in order to be more effective. And so for the rest of our time this morning I want to look at one really big small change that I think all of us need to consider if we are going to quit being tyrannized by the urgent. Let me remind you what Covey said about urgent things: They're typically visible, they press on us and insist on action. They're often popular with others. Many times they're even pleasant and fun to do, but so often they are UNIMPORTANT.

If I were to come up with a definition for phones, technology, and social media I would say they press in on us, they insist on action, they're popular with others, many times they're pleasant and fun, but so often they are UNIMPORTANT. (SLIDE) There's something in most of us, myself included, that doesn't feel very good about the relationship we have with our technological devices. And so I want to be very honest with you all this morning in saying that I am not satisfied in my own life with how much

time I spend on my devices and so this sermon is as much for me as it is for any of you. Let me share with you the irony of all ironies: I was reading this little booklet called “Tyranny of The Urgent” one morning as I prepared for this sermon and my phone buzzed. I immediately put this booklet down. This booklet called “Tyranny of the Urgent,” to look at my phone. So there’s no shame in here today, this isn’t going to be some big guilt trip where I’m going to ask everyone to get rid of their cell phones and go back to a land line and dial up internet. But I do believe the vast majority of us, starting with me, have an unhealthy relationship with our technology and social media that is causing our priorities to become skewed.

So is this the part that I trash technology? Make everyone in here feel bad about being addicted to your phones? No, I am not saying we should ditch technology, there are obvious upsides! Like I don’t miss driving around with paper maps. I don’t miss having to try and find a set of encyclopedias when I needed to look something up. I don’t miss having to drive to blockbuster video if I wanted to watch a movie. Two of the most significant upsides of technology are: Information & Connection.

When I was in elementary school I had a pen pal. And we wrote each other letters. Using paper and pencils. And we mailed them in envelopes with stamps. Nowadays you can keep up with anybody, anywhere, anytime. And that’s a great thing. At any moment, anywhere, anytime any and all information can be accessed with the snap of your fingers. And yet... that’s also part of the problem. Because the endless stream of information that can be tapped into at any moment, has invaded every moment. And because it can be accessed everywhere, it has invaded our lives everywhere. **According to Lookout, the cyber security company, 68% of people do not go more than 30 minutes without checking their phones. 74% of us check our phones while in bed, 36% of people check their phones during a meal with friends or family, 32% while driving.**

And here’s the thing about all of this. This barrage of information, this constant never-ending access to information, has not made us smarter. We have access to more information than ever, but our IQ scores are going down. The average IQ in western nations has dropped 14 points since the Victorian Era. Microsoft did a study on the average attention span of human beings and found that since 2000 the average attention span has gone down 33%, down to only 8 seconds, which is shorter than the attention span of a goldfish. The Nielson company reports that the average American is in front of a screen for over 11 hours a day. When I saw that I couldn’t believe it until I started thinking about my own day in front of a laptop, cell phone, ipad, tv. 11 hours! And it starts to kind of make sense when you begin to reason it out, but we should still ask the question: do I want that to be true of me?

Scientists have documented that the younger generation, starting with people in their 20s and going down into junior high, they have documented that young people have decreased social skills compared to young people the generation before them. Because we’re so used to text based communication where we can gather our thoughts and

precisely plan what we can say. The muscles in our brains that help with spontaneous conversation are getting less exercise, so social skills are declining.

What may be most serious of all is that because of our time with technology, we have a decreased connection to ourselves, because of a decrease in reflection. Laying in bed at night, sitting at a stoplight, taking a walk in the neighborhood. These things used to be moments of solitude and what filled those moments were self-reflection, solitude, conversations with God. Those moments of alone and reflection that we rarely have any more can lead to insights and greater self-awareness. But now we fill every quiet moment. We see feeling alone as a problem to fix. Why do we go to our phone during the day? Do we go for information or for comfort and escape? Our little portals of information have become shields that keep us from having significant interaction with others, that keep us from having silence and reflection, that keep us from communicating with God and thinking about other people.

What I have found to be true for my life and I'm guessing for yours as well is that moments of quiet reflection are completely lost because of this thing. We dive into our phones if we run out of things to say in a conversation. If we feel alone, we go to our phones. We use this as a place to distract ourselves from places of pain, apathy, and isolation. We go to it to meet needs. Ask yourself next time you find yourself reflexively reach for your phone even though it didn't ring or buzz, why am I doing that? What am I trying to get out of this? What did people do 20 years ago in these moments?

The reality is we're often going to this to distract ourselves, but when we allow ourselves to sit and be still in the midst of our pain or loneliness or whatever it is we're feeling, it can bring greater self-awareness. And what you will find is that your soul has a need for connection. And not just the shallow 2-dimensional connection with people's data on a screen, but deep, real connection where you are known. We need the depth of 3-dimensional connection that our online lives cannot give us.

You see just like drugs or pornography or any other kind of addiction, we get these little external pangs of satisfaction when we get a text message or a retweet or whatever it is, but they don't handle our real heart needs and they tend to take away from us more than they give. So what do we do? I want us to consider the biblical metaphor of being in the wilderness. I think all of us need more time in the wilderness.

You see that's God's rhythm. Every time you see God move into someone's life he calls them into the wilderness. Abraham, when God first calls him in Genesis, is in the wilderness. Jacob, God meets with him in the wilderness. Moses, God calls out to meet with him in the wilderness. King David, Hosea, the nation of ISraeel, Jesus. God meets with all of them in the wilderness. Why? Because there's nobody else out there, there's no distractions. It's so God can have a moment with us that's distraction free. It's not deeply spiritual, God says I take them out where the people aren't, so they can think and we can talk. When God calls us, he calls us away from distraction. We need moments to stop and be deep. We need to find time for cultivation in our life. I love that imagery in

the bible of cultivating. It's a farming imagery and farming isn't fast. It's slow! But deep relationships are too.

Jesus' rhythm is a good one for us to try and mimic. He wasn't afraid to enter the intensity. I mean he kept a busy schedule, he was always healing people and casting out demons and preaching and teaching, so he entered into the intensity much like many of us do with our busy work and family schedules. But Jesus also retreated to privacy. In Mark 1 we encounter some of the most intense and demanding times of Jesus' ministry, but look what we see in 1:35, (SLIDE) **"Rising early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.** That was his rhythm: Into the intensity and then out to the wilderness for solitude and prayer. And that needs to be our rhythm too. But instead for many of us, we just run from one urgent thing to the next. Never finding time to just sit and reflect and think. And it's tyrannizing our lives. And I don't think it's a coincidence that while we are living our lives this way, our children and youth (who watch our every move) are experiencing exponentially higher rates of clinical anxiety and depression.

When Jesus was asked what's the greatest commandment, he quoted Deuteronomy by saying: Love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and soul. And Deuteronomy really unpacks for us how we are to do this. Check this out: 6:5-9, (SLIDE) **"5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

Did you hear what he was talking about? He says love the lord with all your might by talking about him and meditating on him. When? Verse 7: When you're sitting, when your walking, when your laying down. And some of you say: But Daniel, that's when I'm on my phone. Right.

We need to find moments and chunks of our day when we will put this thing away and take time to be silent, and to meditate on the Word of God. There is nothing in our lives that feels more urgent than text messages and emails. If we were to modernize the parable we read earlier it would say "I have 15 unread emails to attend to, please have me excused. I haven't refreshed my twitter feed in the last few hours, please have me excused. My phone just buzzed and I should probably look at it, please have me excused."

Find moments in your day when you can be completely untethered from your phone. Maybe your new guidelines are that you won't be on it in bed. Or you won't be on it during certain hours of the day at home. It's going to be different for each of us, but we all need to build in some parameters and the reason for that is so that we can find

moments for quiet and meditation and reflection. Things wouldn't feel so urgent in our life if we all devoted more time to silence and reflection. And nothing destroys that more than technology. We don't have to be a victim to this thing, you can be a master of it.

In Luke 10, Jesus is at Mary and Martha's house and Martha was just running around crazy. Martha thought she was obligated to be this way. Much like many of us do in our day to day lives. Constantly on the go, constantly distracted, never slowing down. And here's what Jesus says (41-42): (SLIDE) ⁴¹ **But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary.^[a] Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."**

Jesus says there's only one thing necessary for you today, tomorrow, and the rest of your life. And it's to sit at the feet of Jesus.

And so that's my prayer for each one of us this year. That we would quit being so consumed by the urgent things in life and we would give more time to the important things in life, like sitting and reflecting and being silent at the feet of Jesus. Because at the feet of Jesus is where you will ultimately find life.