



# Overcoming “Busyness”

We tend to see ourselves as victims of busyness. Nonetheless, God has not only given us the power to control our lives, but He desires us to. What benefit is there to being so busy that we fail to fully live? Doesn't God want us to devote our time and energy to him? Yes, He is a jealous God. He doesn't want our leftovers. The virtue of prudence calls us to plan and strategize to increase margin in our life.

**Busyness is a myth as well as an addiction!**

## What is Margin?

Margin is a time management concept that comes from Dr. Richard Swenson in which he defines that:

- Power is the totality of resource at our disposal, including energy, skills, time, training, emotional reserve, physical strength, faith, financial resources, and social supports.
- Load is the totality of the demands being made on us, including work, problems, obligations, commitments, expectations you place on yourself, expectations that other have of you, debt, deadlines, and interpersonal conflict.

When those equations return a positive “number” (i.e. – when we have more power than load), we have margin. We have reserves of our resources to dedicate to other areas of life or to deal with the unexpected. When the equation turns negative (when our load is greater than our resource – which happens when we get too busy), the result is overload.

An example of margin would be the amount of energy that you have available to apply to your daily activities. One of the main sources of this energy is your sense of control over your time. That's why busyness is so dangerous. Busyness is a sense that you are out of control, and lack of control drains the energy right out of you. Busyness leads to overload rather than margin.

So, yes, we do have a time crisis. When I say that busyness is a myth I'm not saying that you don't have a problem. But my point is that the crisis is not so much busyness as it is margin.

## Overcoming “Busyness” *(continued)*

Why are our lives too busy and chaotic??

### **Busyness comes from an incomplete definition of progress**

“Never mistake activity for achievement.” --- John Wooden

One of the main reasons for the overload syndrome in our culture that Dr. Swenson identifies is a poor definition of progress. We can see the same idea in Catholic social teaching. For example, *Gaudium et Spes* (called “The Church in the Modern World” in English), a document from the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council (Vatican II), talks about the need for authentic human development. Authentic human development means shaping culture, technology, economics, etc., in ways that help us to grow toward human fulfillment.

Since human beings are both physical and spiritual, authentic human development includes both physical and transcendent (spiritual) improvements. Transcendent improvements would include things like freedom, growth in wisdom, strengthening relationships, seeking the answers to man’s most pressing questions, and to seek God.

Dr. Swenson also points out that the “modern world” defines progress based on technology, finances and education. These things are good, but they are not complete. They speak to our physical needs but not to our transcendent needs.

Our current definition of progress does not lead to authentic human development. Therefore our current definition of progress doesn’t lead to fulfillment and happiness.

### **Busyness comes from a lack of understanding of overload**

Another reason we have an overload epidemic in our culture today is that the concepts of overload and margin are relatively new in human culture. Consider the example of a frontier woman who worked very hard all day long, but who did not experience overload. She was able to keep a sense of margin in her life. Overload is really a product of the industrial revolution. So we lack the historical awareness of the problem. Therefore, on a more personal level, we do not see that our lives are getting overloaded until we run headlong into the wall of burnout or psychological breakdown.



## Overcoming “Busyness” *(continued)*

### **Busyness comes from sociological and psychological influences**

Each of us has a number of factors in our lives that push us to overload. This is a cultural as well as a personal syndrome.

- The need to feel productive & successful
- The sense of commitment to doing all we can for our families, our jobs and our society
- The desire to “have it all” in life, and the feeling that we are somehow behind everyone else
- The fear of being judged a slacker or weak or lazy
- The overemphasis our culture places on youth, giving rise to more severe midlife crises

### **Busyness comes from being driven to overload by authorities**

Because overload is a cultural syndrome, those who have power over us and influence on us also fall prey to the same influences. Then they, in turn, become influences on us. Driven bosses drive employees to give everything they’ve got and beyond to the job. Social leaders tell us that we should be more involved in politics and social change. The media and gurus of various sorts tell us what we’re missing in our quest for “progress” and what we need to do to attain it. We are often driven to overload even by well-intentioned authorities in our lives.

### **Busyness comes from being frivolous consumers of our power**

One of the most common, most easily solved and most often overlooked causes of overload are all of the small, frivolous ways that we waste our own time. I know that I am typical on this score. If I have an hour dedicated to writing, I can easily use half of it aimlessly browsing email, social media sites, and internet sites. I also tend to waste valuable time watching movies and sports.

Sometimes I waste time just figuring out what to do next. Juggling my task list, trying to multitask, and getting stuck in “analysis paralysis” are all frivolous consumers of time and energy. Marketing expert Dean Jackson calls them “reactive activators.”

Consider your own habits. What frivolous consumers of your power take up your:

- Time
- Emotional reserves
- Social support



## Overcoming “Busyness” *(continued)*

### **Busyness comes from accepting overload as the state of rest**

The Law of Entropy states that if left alone, the universe naturally tends toward chaos. This is certainly true of overload as well. Overload is easy. It just happens. If you’re floating – if you’re not planning your time and energy – you will naturally run into overload. Margin takes planning, effort and work.

### **What have we learned...**

Margin helps us overcome overload and our errant perception of “busyness.”

Margin is the difference between our power and our load.

The six reasons we run into trouble are:

- An incomplete definition of progress
- Lack of understanding of the problem
- Sociological and psychological influences
- Being drive to overdo it by authorities
- Frivolous consumers of our power
- Overload as the state of rest

The fact is, life is always going to be active but you are not helpless.

**You can decide not to let it get too busy!**

