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Antidote to Busyness

Abstract

"We complain about our busyness, but I wonder if it's a false complaint ... perhaps more of humble-brag?"

Posting about an appropriate work-life balance from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-antidote-to-busyness/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

The Antidote to Busyness

 [all in allthings.org/the-antidote-to-busyness/](http://allthings.org/the-antidote-to-busyness/)

July 25,
2016

Dave Mulder

My friend Tom and I get together once in a while for lunch to talk about our teaching practices, things we are reading, and life in general. At lunch last fall, perhaps reading the tension in my body English, he sincerely asked how I was doing.

I have a lot of things going on in my life...perhaps you can relate? So when asked, "How are you doing?" my automatic answer came blurring out, "*I'm so busy...*"

Tom smiled, and nodded, and responded thoughtfully: "Dave, *everyone* is busy."

Tom is right. In our culture, being "busy" is a virtue. Perhaps we complain about our busyness, but I wonder if it's a false complaint...perhaps more of humble-brag? Because when I really think about it, I might *act* as though I'm complaining about being so busy, but I really want people to take notice of me, of the things I am doing, and somehow justify myself by my good works. In our culture, being "busy" is held up as something honorable. Maybe, in the broadly evangelical North American culture, busyness is next to godliness?

Tom probed further: "How many of these things that you are busy with are things you *chose* to be involved in?"

Oooo...that is a good/hard question. These are things I chose, things I decided to add to my plate. Can I then—in good conscience—complain about them?

Tom then shared wisdom with me: "Maybe instead of, 'I'm busy,' try saying, 'My life is rich and full.'" I love that: a helpful reminder that I am the one who opted for throwing myself into these many things.

Throughout the months since that lunchtime conversation, when people ask how I am, I catch myself and say, "My life is rich and full." This small shift has prompted some reflectiveness on my part: how full do I want my life to be? Are the things I am choosing *really* enriching my life? And if not, why am I choosing to do them? Obligation? Worry over what people will think? Saying "no" to some things allows me to say "yes" to other things. Saying "no" to some things even allows me to have time to simply rest from the fullness of my life.

I recognize that I do not always take enough time to really rest. Honestly, because my life is rich and full, resting seems like a luxury, rather than a necessity. It's hard to take a break when your normal state is one of efficiency and hurrying from one thing to the next. Resting sometimes feels like a waste of time; an extravagance that I cannot afford.

I don't always do so well with Sabbath-resting. It seems I always have something I could do, maybe even something I feel I *ought* to do. I find it hard to slow down enough to rest; sometimes, I even feel *restless* when I try. Perhaps you can relate to this? However, because it became clear to me that I was running ragged; I decided to take a deliberate Sabbath-rest late this past spring. Not just a Sunday-as-recreation Sabbath, but rather a true *resting* from my work.

In preparation, I worked hard to get my end-of-semester grading done not just on time, but early. The Friday of Commencement came; we had our celebration of graduating students, and afterward I went back to my office, finished marking those last few exams, submitted my grades, and went home. Saturday was a normal get-things-done-around-the-house Saturday. Sunday was a relatively normal one as well: leading worship, home for dinner with my family, a bike ride, playing a game in the evening with my kids. Got a good night of sleep too. And then...

I deliberately planned Monday to be a day in which I would do nothing productive . I would not go to the office. I would not check my email. I would not even get my laptop out of my bag—an all-to-rare occurrence these days!

I got my wife and kids out the door to work and school, and I sat down in my recliner to have a second cup of coffee to figure out what I should do to not-work. I decided to start my day reading a novel, which I hadn't done since starting grad school. I took my dog for a long walk. I enjoyed making a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich for lunch. I took a 17-mile bike ride. I read more of my novel in the backyard with my dog out sniffing for rabbits in the bushes. When my kids came home from school, I supervised the homework routine, and helped cook supper, playing sous chef for my wife. I relaxed on the couch for a while that evening and just enjoyed being with my family.

You know something? I found that deciding to be deliberately unproductive for a day was liberating for me. The world did not stop because Dave Mulder did not come into the office for a day, did not check his email for a day and did not do anything "productive" for a day. In fact, I enjoyed my intentional sabbatical day so much, found it so valuable, I decided I really needed a second one. And so it was: Tuesday too was filled with not-work. I had an extra cup of coffee, finished reading my novel, pedaled another 15 miles, noodled around on my ukulele, and spent extravagant time with my family. After two days of resting, I felt more refreshed than I had in months.

My life truly is rich and full, and I am grateful for the opportunities I have to work, to study, to worship, to spend time with people I love. But perhaps the more full our lives are, the more intentional we need to be about resting? Perhaps resting—*really* resting—is the antidote to the epidemic of "I'm busy" so prevalent in our culture?

What would you do if you took a day of deliberate resting from your work?